

## Post - Independence Cypriot Dramaturgy (1960 Onwards)

Andri H. Constantinou\*

### RÉSUMÉ

Comment évolue l'écriture théâtrale pendant la période de l'indépendance (depuis 1960)? Il n'existe pas d'études systématiques sur ce sujet. Dans cet article sont analysées des œuvres de quelques auteurs dramatiques les plus représentatifs (Rina Katselli, Michalis Pitsillidis, Panos Ioannidis, Michalis Pasiardis et Yiorgos Neophytou) et sont résumées les lignes directrices de leur œuvre. Bien que les auteurs de la décennie 1960 continuent de créer en suivant la tradition du théâtre ethnographique (théâtre de mœurs), on assiste à des efforts plus audacieux, qui tendent à une écriture théâtrale plus contemporaine.

### ABSTRACT

How did playwriting evolve in Cyprus since independence (1960 and afterwards)? There is a systematic absence of studies on the subject. The author of this article analyzes the work of some of the most important playwrights of the period (Rina Katselli, Michalis Pitsillidis, Panos Ioannidis, Michalis Pasiardis and Yiorgos Neophytou) and describes their main characteristics. Even though the writers of the 1960s continue to write in the naturalistic mode, others courageously follow more contemporary trends.

### Introduction

Theatrical activity in Cyprus pursued either by local playwrights or by permanent residents on the island established a solid presence and began acquiring professional characteristics around the mid-twentieth century. The declaration of Independence in 1960 provided the milestone for ample improvement of theatrical activity parameters on the island.

In this essay we will attempt to revisit Cypriot dramaturgy from 1960 onwards, always with relation to theatrical activity: the picture of a period's dramaturgic production is interlinked with the entire development of theatrical activity in a geographically and linguistically determined space. At

\* University of Cyprus

this point it should be clarified that our research field is limited to Greek speaking texts and the corresponding theatrical activity.<sup>1</sup>

The first plays in contemporary Cyprus can be traced back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century's last decades. They are mostly patriotic and romantic dramas with historical and mythological themes, influenced to a great extent by plays written in Greece during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The first Cypriot dramas are acted out by the island's amateurs in gatherings of ethnic disposition whereas some are not but philological endeavors. The first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century also sees plays with realistic dialogues in terms of style and social speculation in terms of content, as well as some poetic dramas. The works of this first period are initially written in the *katharevousa* (the "purified" Greek) and later on in the Modern Greek vernacular<sup>2</sup>.

In the meantime, since 1918 and henceforth the theatrical genre of *revue* (musical variety theatre) is successfully received on the Cypriot stage, which up until 1940 possesses an amateurish character. Initially, the Cypriot revue imitates the respective Greek genre that made its debut in Athens in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. It gradually begins to form innate characteristics and delves into matters of local current affairs, satirizing persons and situations in the Cypriot society. Acts are written either in the Greek vernacular or the Cypriot dialect, depending on their subject.

## Ethography

The largest part of theatrical production, written by Greek Cypriots during the period between 1940-1980 is comprised of plays in the Cypriot dialect inspired by life in the countryside, for which the term *ethography* (Greek: *ethographia*) has prevailed. The 1960s are marked by an explosion in the writing and staging of such plays.

Ethography, both as a genre and a term was created in Greece and includes a category of early 20<sup>th</sup> century plays that sometimes put emphasis on the *couleur locale*, with dialectal elements (Gregorios Xenopoulos) and other times look into Athens' popular strata, with elements from the idiolect of social groups (Pantelis Horn)<sup>3</sup>. In Greece, ethography in the theatre comprised a relatively short and prolific phase in the evolution of playwriting. In contrast, the Cypriot version of theatrical ethography presents an impressive resilience throughout the years. This phenomenon helped bring to a halt the expansion of playwriting horizons at both the thematic and stylistic level.

Plays in this category are often comedies with elements of farce and more

rarely dramas, always drawing on subjects from Cypriot life, mostly in the villages: love-affairs stumbling on hindrances, confrontations that are sometimes related to life's modifications and the resistance of traditional populations to change<sup>4</sup>. Cypriot ethnography often contains music and songs, more or less organically incorporated into the action while sometimes the show includes traditional dances<sup>5</sup>. Revue sketches with a Cypriot subject written in the idiom contributed to the development of Cypriot ethnography, just as the Greek komeidyllio (music comedy with idyllic themes) and mainly the operetta (Greek but also Viennese) which were crowned with exceptional success in Cyprus since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The public became familiar with the operetta through the tours of companies on the island, mostly Greek ones.

Despite rapid changes in the Cypriot society experienced since the mid-twentieth century onwards (movement from the rural to the urban centers, a rise in the cultural level, the transformation of everyday life with the improvement of living conditions and the introduction of technology, political changes etc.) the genre's stereotypes were kept unchanged. It is obvious that even today the wider public – both the elder who formed their theatrical expertise in the 1960s or the younger ones, more familiar with the television and the radio rather than the theatre – identifies the term *Cypriot play* with these works: written in the Cypriot dialect, with subjects from the gone rural life in Cyprus and finally, with an idyllic inclination and a nostalgic mood for a forsaken reality that appears graphic today<sup>6</sup>.

### C. Theatrical Plays after Independence and their Onstage Reception

The unquestionable heyday of theatrical activity in the 1960s onwards was not hindered by the impending transitions, political unrest and the troupes' financial problems. In contrast, it led stage performances to a more mature phase, accompanied by successful appearances of the State Theatre in both Greece and other countries.<sup>7</sup> This heyday does not have an equivalent in playwriting. Even though there are some commendable playwrights, tracing their own productive course, we cannot talk of great pieces.<sup>8</sup>

Nonetheless, in the period under investigation hundreds of theatrical works had been written. Many of them were published by the playwrights themselves.<sup>9</sup> The majority of pieces reaching the public, as we shall see further below, belong to the category of ethnographic comedy. Applying the criterion of performability, we shall follow the Cypriot playwrights whose plays came full circle after having been judged worthy of being put to the

staging test. There are however some rare cases of plays that were not acted out, owing to the fact that they could not be grasped in their time.

Large production in terms of quantity may be linked on the one hand to the dynamics of Independence itself. On the other, the writing of many plays that more or less fall within the ethnographic genre is also linked to the fact that the Cyprus Broadcasting Corporation (RIK) used to regularly proclaim playwriting contests, with the possibility of staging the winning plays for television and radio. This policy favored the by then established dialectal pieces of ethnographic content. The majority of radio pieces belong to the *Kypriotiko Sketch* category [short ethnographic radio or TV plays].<sup>10</sup>

Playwriting contests were launched throughout the years by various organizations while over recent years, they are being held on a regular basis by the Cyprus Theatre Organization (THOC), setting more ambitious targets in terms of the texts' thematological and stylistic spectrum.

The period immediately after the Independence of the island sees plays that refer to the recent struggle against the British colonial rule: the first playwriting contest proclaimed in 1962, by the then State-subsidized Cyprus Organization for the Development of Theatre (OTHAC), sought plays drawing on the 1955-1959 struggle for liberation. This first contest was won by the promising *Anaxios* [Unworthy] by Rina Katselli (staged by OTHAC, 1962). In addition, historic dramas drawing on the history of Cyprus, such as *Djuana* by Pavlos Xioutas (Neo Theatro, 1961) and plays by Kypros Chrysanthis can also be traced.

However, as already stated, the greater volume of plays is made up of dramatic ethnographies and to a larger extent, musical ethnographic comedies. The best representatives of the ethnographic genre, providing it with new impetus is Michalis Pitsillides and Michalis Pashardis with whom plays contained within this tradition are enriched with social speculations or invested with poetic dimension, leading the pursuit of the country's tradition well beyond folklore. The two playwrights will be visited more closely further below. Popular poet Pavlos Liasides (1901-1985) comprises a special case. Liasides wrote among others the metrical ethnographic dramas *I agapi nikitis* [Love wins] (staged for the first time by amateurs in 1935 and at the Neo Theatro in 1983); *O Alavrostoisiotis* [The Shadow-Whisperer] (initially acted out for the RIK radio and produced by THOC in 2002); and *O monogios* [The only-son] (acted out for RIK TV), all inoculated with his individual poetic signature.

From the Independence of Cyprus until the foundation of THOC in 1971, numerous names appear in the field of the purely entertaining scene:

ethographic comedy, music comedy, revue and political satire. Markos Georgiou, Achilleas Lymbourides, Sotos Oreitis, Anthos Rodinis, Savvas Savvides, Michalis Kyriakides, Dimitris Papadimitris, Andreas Potamitis are just a few of the playwrights of that period. Among them, some lay claim to a remarkably lengthy production: at least six of the plays by Markos Georgiou were staged during the 1960s whereas between 1960-1974, in an offhand listing we can find thirty (!) titles by Sotos Oreitis performed by professional companies (in some cases, the plays are co-written with other playwrights).

Pieces of an experimental nature, dramas with contemporary themes and comedies that reach beyond ethnography or dare the satire of contemporary life without being limited to the revue's ephemeral nature have not been endowed with an equivalent acme. Nonetheless, some playwrights try their luck in different forms and topics, reaching wider horizons. Panos Ioannides and Irena Ioannidou-Adamidou, trying their hand at experimentalism, are two of them.

In 1971, when the State theatre of Cyprus, THOC, is founded following persistent requests by the intellectual and artistic circles as well as many fermentations, one of the objectives set from the start is to provide support to Cypriot plays. Two years later, led by its president Socrates Karantinos, the new organization takes action toward this direction. As a result, forty plays by Cypriot playwrights were submitted that year to THOC. 1973 saw the first Cypriot play to be produced by THOC, *Theano*, an ethnographic drama by Michalis Pitsillides and the previously written *Omiroi* [Hostages] by Loukis Akritas, centering on the Greek resistance during Nazi occupation and stylistically reminiscent of poetic drama and ancient tragedy. In March 1974, Michalis Pashardis'<sup>11</sup> *To neron tou Dropi* (The snake's water) is staged.

In the years after the 1974 coup and invasion, many plays are written about the shock, the traumas and the differentiations, both explicit and implicit, brought upon Cypriot society by this political turning point. Among them are Panos Ioannides' *Ta xadelfia* [The cousins], *Dry Martini* and *I valitsa* [The suitcase]; Giorgos Neophytou's *Manolis* and *Full Meze*; Rina Katsellis' *Endoskopisi* [Introspection] (or *Galazia Falaina* – The Blue Whale); Maria Avraamidou's *Skliros Angelos* [Tough Angel]; Andreas Koukkides' *Ledras kai Rigainis* [Ledras and Rigainis corner]; Michalis Pashardis *To gatanin* [The maypole]. The stylistics of this particular crop follows on the constants of realistic structure and dialogue, with different undertones: the undertone of satire by Neophytou, the will for abstraction by Pashardis, the emphasis on soliloquy and sometimes of the symbolic

dimension by Katselli. Moreover, the interest in older topics of Cypriot history, both ancient and more recent, is being rekindled: Panos Ioannides' *Onisillos* and *Petros Aã*, Rina Katselli's *Xeniteia* [Estrangement], Christakis Georgiou's *Kalogeroi* [Monks], Michalis Pitsillides' *Aikaterini Kornaro*, Andros Pavlides' *Ioannikios* and *O Leontokardos stin Kypro* [The Lion-Heart in Cyprus], Giorgos Neophytou's *Stis Kyprou to vasilieio* [In the kingdom of Cyprus] – the two latter with a mood for satire and correlation with the island's contemporary politics and social reality.

In the era that followed July 1974, the plays of numerous playwrights were staged by THOC, on average one per theatrical season. As a whole in its 36 years of activities, the State theatre company produced 40 plays, among which 21 by Cypriot playwrights. THOC also presented a synthesis made up of texts from the history of revue in Cyprus entitled *Heirokrotimata* [Applause] (2000).

At the same time, Cypriot playwrights find their way to the stage through independent, subsidized companies, to a larger extent over the past years, following the implementation of an additional subsidization program for each Cypriot play production. The Satiriko Theatro has produced, among others, five plays by Andreas Koukkides (a combination of ethnography and satire, in some cases with a tendency toward political deliberating); ETHAL (Limassol Theatrical Development Company) has staged one play by Koukkides. Six plays by Nearchos Ioannou (plays which attempt a daring satire of everyday life in Cyprus but base their success on the embrace of prurient material and scurrility) have been staged at Theatro Ena, ETHAL and Theatro Anemona. Over the past few years, many more, mostly younger, playwrights have seen their plays acted out on Cypriot stages. Evridiki Pericleous-Papadopoulou is an interesting case, having provided poetic plays of an existential and metaphysical dimension. Her plays have been produced by Theatro Ena (*Feggari min klais*, 1996 – Don't cry, moon) and THOC (*To allo miso tou ouranou*, 2003 – The other half of heaven).

#### D. Most Important Playwrights

We shall now attempt to present the most important playwrights applying as basic criteria their contribution to the development of Cypriot dramaturgy, the formulation of a personal style and their plays' onstage presentation. They are quoted in terms of the date on which they made their professional theatre debut.

*Rina Katselli*<sup>12</sup>

Born in 1938 in Keryneia, Rina Katselli lived there until 1974. She published her first play *O exadelphos* [The cousin] at a very young age, using her paternal surname, Haralambidou. Since then, she has been using her husband's surname, Katselli. As early as in her youth she has been dynamic and active. She is the first woman to have been elected a Member of Parliament in 1981, with the Democratic Party (DIKO). Displacement and the loss of her birthplace, Keryneia, molded Rina Katselli as a writer. Place of birth is a source of inspiration in her work and an object of study in terms of its history, tradition and people. Katselli has written novels, numerous studies on the city of Keryneia and around thirty plays: full-length, one-acts and short plays for the television and the radio.

Katselli's work is daring, showcasing a critical mood against contemporary Cypriot society. In her first plays she tends to use the Modern Greek vernacular though she doesn't avoid words from the Cypriot dialect. However, in her later works, she leans more often toward the dialect; in fact, a convincing Cypriot dialect. She draws her topics from contemporary Cypriot reality. Her trademark is the steadfastness of her protagonists, both male and female: strong-willed characters, non-conventional and unyielding to social norms.

In 1962 her play *O Anaxios* [The Unworthy] is awarded a prize, as already noted, by the Department of Intellectual and Cultural Development of the Greek Communal Assembly (then charged with Education Ministry tasks) and is staged by OTHAC in the same year. The play toured in London and Rhodes in September 1963. *O Anaxios* deals with the 1955-59 Cypriot struggle for liberation featuring as hero a young man initially considered incapable of anything serious, until the day he is awakened and joins the struggle. In 1969, Katselli published the sum total of her work, in seven typed small volumes.

Her next play to be staged in professional theatre is *Endoskopisi* [Introspection] (THOC 1980). Both the play's and the preceding novel's (1978) initial title is *Galazia Falaina* [Blue Whale]. In *Endoskopisi*, the name of the protagonist is in fact his status: Uprooted Greek Cypriot. The play was written a few years after the invasion, when the traumas of displacement were still raw. The central character strives to survive as a refugee with his family while at the same time treading an inner path: from anger to giving up and finally to self-reformation. Even though its structure is not always functional at the level of dramaturgy, the play contains and may evoke genuine emotion.

The play *Giati efyen I Valou* [Why Valou left] is chronologically placed after the invasion, centering on a family getting adjusted and becoming rich while the central character, a saucy, unyielding peasant woman remains loyal to the principles of a purer era. *Treli giagia* [The mad grandmother] also ponders over post-war eudemonism. *Xeniteia* [Estrangement] refers to older times, owing to the playwright's interest in Orthodox monachism. Tooulis, the central hero, is another sinful but unconventional being. With the more recent *Pamen kala*, 1994 [We are doing well] and *Pano Geitonia*, 2005 [Upper Neighborhood] she turns to the satire of contemporary reality, whereas *Arkastos* written in 2001 in the framework of a drama workshop and staged in Italy, presents an unexpectedly archaic inclination, sharp-cut heroes and primitive passions. One of the play's driving forces is the lack of water motif, recurrent in Cypriot dramaturgy (see Mihalis. Pashardis' *To neron tou Dropi* and M. Pitsillides' *Gia pion na vrexei*, further below).

### *Michalis Pitsillides*<sup>13</sup>

Playwright Michalis Pitsillides was born in Limassol in 1920. He began working from a young age while at the same time attending night school. In his youth he took up poetry and commentary writing. He has written approximately twenty full-length plays and more than a hundred one-acts and radio plays. The majority of his plays are written in the Cypriot dialect.

He first appeared in the theatre at quite a mature age: he wrote his first plays in his forties, during the 1960s. The drama *Gia pion na vrexei* [For whom it'd rain?] marked his debut in professional theatre. An award-winning play, it was staged by OTHAC in 1963 and centers on a rural community suffering from drought, an allegory of divine punishment for the injustices committed in the village.

Pitsillides is the scriptwriter of the first RIK TV series, *Katobkion tis Madaris* [Underneath Madari] (1960-1970). There is also the TV hit *Na kopiaseis kyrie Maki* [Welcome, Mr Makis], represented on stage too. Many of his plays were produced by professional companies in Cyprus and by THOC, while some were presented in Cypriot communities abroad.

A prolific popular writer, Pitsillides is blessed with the gift of creating vivid characters and the flair to set up juicy comic scenes, which are not devoid of farcical elements, such as the comedy *Ospollate arkontynamen* [Thank God we got rich]. The play has been also staged with the title *O sympetheros o Athanasis* [Athanasias, the father-in-law] apparently upon demand by



comedian Nicos Pantelides who played Athanasios (Thiasos Geliou [Laughter Troupe], 1969), while in the summer of 2006 it was produced by THOC in honor of the playwright. Three comedies staged by Vladimiro Kaskarides and the Musical Theatre Organization in 1969 (*Gyron-gyron tis Madaris, Eipen to nai I Andrianou* [Round and round Madari, Andrianou said she will] – published with the title *Vourate n'armasoumen tin Andrianou* [Hurry up – we'll wed Andrianou] and *Vourate n'armasoumen ton Firfirin* [Hurry up – we'll wed Firfiris]). These plays adopt a recipe for success with patterns and stereotypical situations.

In 1970 Pitsillides returns to drama with *Touti I gi einai diki mas* [This land is ours], which focuses on the inhabitants of a village, obliged to abandon their land on account of uncontrolled development. Three years later, Cyprus' official theatre, THOC, stages his award-winning play *Theano*. The main subject is the division of a fishing village with relation to the use of dynamite for fishing, subsequent confrontations and moral dilemmas. The play is written in mixed language, closer to the Modern Greek vernacular rather than the Cypriot dialect.

Many of Pitsillides' plays would be staged in the following years by THOC and other professional theatre groups. In 1990, THOC stages *Klironomoi* [The Inheritors], a play with quite a didactic intent. His next two plays to be represented by THOC come out of Cypriot history: the drama *Sta engata tis gis* [In the depths of the earth] (1984) is based on the miners' 1948 strike, attempting a venture into the field of social and political drama. *Aikaterini Kornaro* (1994) is inspired by the real-life historic figure of Kornaro. Finally, making the best of the success with which Pitsillides' plays are received by the wider public, in June 2007 THOC staged the drama *Gia pion na vrexei*, bringing the number of productions of his plays represented by THOC to six, more than any other playwright's. The Satirikon Theatro produced the comedy *Tofalos o Klonaritis*, a light satire of the social and political life in Cyprus after 1974 in two different versions (1990 and 1998).

Almost in its entirety, Pitsillides' work belongs to the wider sector of ethnography, enriched with elements of social speculation. Delivering plays that have always been well-received by the public, the playwright mainly observes aspects of the island that belong to the near past and have helped formulate the country's current reality. The homeland is placed in the center of interest: the historical fate of Cyprus and its people. Pitsillides' plays are not completely devoid of melodramatic traces while they also contain a didactic tone.

*Michalis Pashardis*<sup>14</sup>

Michalis Pashardis was born in the Nicosia village of Tseri in 1941. He had worked at RIK for many years and still cooperates with the Corporation. He is mostly known as a poet, laying claim to numerous collections and State awards.

His plays are characterized by a particular lyricism of effortless inspiration, where the theatrical dimension is interlinked with the poetic. His work possesses a singular coloration deriving from the playwright's close contact with popular tradition and his deep knowledge of the local culture. In terms of his subject-matter, he draws his material from the Cypriot tradition and the daily life of people, utilizing his knowledge and sensitivity. One could ascribe to him a sound understanding of theatrical codes and flair in the creation of dramatic intensity. However, his work lacks evolution in terms of contemporary subjects and forms. Pashardis is a master in the use of the Cypriot dialect, aware of its wealth and its layers throughout time. Only one of his plays is written in the Modern Greek vernacular.

He made his theatrical debut at a young age with *Yiallourou* [The Blue-Eyed Girl], in a 1968 Neo Theatro performance. The play had already been presented on the RIK radio in 1965 and is inspired by the poem "I Yialloura" by dialectal poet Dimitis Lipertis, almost wholly contained in the play. It is in fact a pastoral idyll, wherein naïve charm becomes a virtue.

In 1974, *To neron tou Dropi* [The water of the snake] becomes the second Cypriot play to be staged by THOC, with great success. Another version of the play was presented in 1968 by the RIK radio. Its structure could be characterized symmetrical as well as cinematographic: many-member scenes in internal spaces are interchanged with brief few-member street scenes which operate as interstices, enhancing the play's dynamics. Two intervening personae, the Narrator and the Singer introduce the events and comment on them, while the latter invests them with an elegiac tone. The play possesses an evocative ambiance and takes place in wintertime, when the abundant light of the Cypriot countryside is absent. The play's theme is based on the pattern of water rarity, the management of which provokes a dispute in the village, victimizing by chance the most innocent human being in the community. Finally, the conflict between good and evil in a traditional society is chronicled. The play contains sound stage economy and interesting characters but does not manage to avoid schematization in specific characters.

THOC also presents Pashardis' *Sta homata tis Mesarkas* [In the soil of Mesaoria] (1979), *To gatanin* [The maypole] (1985) and *T'alonias mas stous pano mahallaes* [Our threshing floors in the upper neighborhood] (1994).

Quite a few of his plays have been presented by the RIK television and radio. Perhaps the most important among them is the compartmented play *To gatanin*, made up of nine autonomous scenes which still contain internal cohesion in terms of themes and patterns. The play is held together by an internal thread which derives from the playwright's deep knowledge and understanding of the Cypriot people. It is characterized by stage and discourse economy bordering on minimalism: well-timed words and movements of the dramatis personae create vivid and well-built characters. The play's last two incidents connect the old Cypriot world (with its tenets, inescapable poverty, its dependence on social inflexibilities such as the dowry, virginity, the subordinate position of women, miserable marriages that cannot be resolved etc.) with the unexpected and completely subversive events of the 1974 coup and invasion. The characters are suffering from poverty and life's blows as they are caught in dilemmas between their wishes and social constants, while men who yield are also presented.

### *Panos Ioannides*<sup>15</sup>

Panos Ioannides was born in 1935 in Famagusta by parents of Asia-Minor origin. Having studied in the USA and Canada, he had worked in RIK for many years and was eventually promoted to Television Programs Director. Part of his work has been translated in many languages while some of his plays have been staged abroad.

In Ioannides' plays, written in the Greek vernacular, the history of Cyprus makes up both an object of observation and the pretext to talk about today in an implicit manner. He draws his topics from both the ancient history and the Middle Ages (*Onisillos*, THOC 1981, *Petros o A'* [Peter I], THOC, 1990) as well as from recent history as in *Gregory* (a realistic drama with moral dilemmas on the 1955-1959 struggle, Teatro RIK, 1970, *Dry martini*, *Tà Xadelfia* [The cousins], *I valitsa* [The suitcase] (featuring an *enclaved* couple [among the few thousand Greek Cypriots that after the 1974 Turkish invasion refused to leave their homes in the Turkish-occupied area] required to abandon their village, RIK television, 1984 and *Satiriko Teatro*, 1989). Within the same spirit, *Sy pou skototheis gia to fós* [You, who got killed for the light] can also be placed. This historically notable synthesis of Cypriot literary texts dramatizes a sequence of Cypriot history highlights (staged in 1963). Also, the heroic *Photeinos* (broadcasted in 1969 by the RIK radio) draws on the example of Prometheus and may be interpreted as an allegory of the historic misadventures of contemporary Cyprus. These are also the writer's most poetic pieces.

The elements of irony and satire which he skillfully employs in his novels, are utilized in some of his theatrical pieces such as *To mbanio* [The bath] (THOC, 1978) with the central hero's obsessions, the enviable social status and promiscuous lifestyle he is trying to wash off and the unstaged *Leontios kai Smyrna* [Leontios and Smyrna] (2005), an extremely sarcastic play, with the shrewd mistress and corrupted heroes liberating their depravity, putting on another era's corruption. Ioannides observes contemporary Cypriot reality under the skewed perspective of parable and allegory. He is one of the few Cypriot writers to experiment with form; well beyond realistic conception and dialogue, he even introduces absurdist elements, quite discernable in the youth play *O anthropos apo ti Salina* [The man from Salina] (1962), *Oi Eggastrimythoi* [The Ventriloquists], (Peiramatiki Skini, 1974) and to a lesser extent in the *Mpanio* [The Bath], whereas the comedy *Pygmalion kai Galateia* (ETHOS Theatre, 1965) contains surrealist elements. As a rule, Panos Ioannides writes in the Modern Greek vernacular. In *Oi Eggastrimythoi* the language is peculiar, as one of the characters is a Turk speaking broken Greek.

### *Giorgos Neophytou*

Giorgos Neophytou was born in Nicosia in 1946. He studied veterinary medicine in Leipzig and is currently employed in the Department of Veterinary Services, where he has served as a director. He had also been appointed chairman of THOC's Executive Board (2003-2006). His first play, *Ena kyriakatiko sketch* [A Sunday sketch] was presented by the RIK television in 1984 making a very positive impression<sup>16</sup>. The play commented on the post-1974 Cypriot reality in a sincere manner. The plot unfolds in a Nursing Home, where the old women and a maid working at a bourgeois house express different views on the country's current situation. The title is an implicit comment on the presentation of Cypriot ethnographic plays on the radio, established in the 1950s and carried on to nowadays, repeating the same topics and codes.

Neophytou's next play *Mia aeropeirateia* [A hijacking] is linked to the *Kyriakatiko Sketch* by way of its thematology but also through a recurring character. The second play uses the codes of comedy, in fact, of a rather bitter comedy, and through caricatural exaggeration it exposes indifference about the country and the elitism of a social class that gained its wealth from the displacement of refugees. The play's concept pivots around the high-class wedding of a young daughter. The wedding is on the verge of postponement

as the extravagant wedding gown, ordered from Paris, is on its way on a plane that falls to the hands of hijackers. This event provides the pretext for exposing the dubious morality and priorities of this segment of Cypriot society. A similar topic also runs through *Full meze* (THOC, 1989) in which three friends, standing by the Nicosia dividing line, discuss buying and selling real estate; each of them reacts in a different manner when a soldier is shot a few meters away from them. All three plays are one-acts.

In 1987, the playwright's unique full-length play *Stis Kyprou to vasileio* [In the kingdom of Cyprus] was presented during the Nicosia Festival. A historically invested satire of Cypriot society, the play was staged by THOC a second time in 1992.

Finally, Giorgos Neophytou contributed a small gem to the Cypriot theatre, the soliloquy *Manolis...!* The protagonist is an elder woman recounting her personal drama, addressing the only being that keeps her company, her cat. Her only son was killed in the 1974 coup and the culprits remain unpunished. This one-act was initially staged by the London Cypriot community stage, Theatro Tehnis, in 1987. It was performed for the first time in Cyprus for the RIK television in 1988 and subsequently at THOC in 1990. It is one of the few Cypriot plays (mostly together with Panos Ioannides' plays) that tried their luck outside Cyprus, too: a translation of the play was presented by German radio stations while, adapted to a chamber opera (music by Vasos Argyrides) it was presented in various German cities. The one-act *Manolis...!* was also staged in Athens where both the text and the performance by Despina Bebedeli received flattering reviews<sup>17</sup>.

## Epilogue

Katselli, Pitsillides, Pashardis and Ioannides belong to the generation that made its debut in the 1960s and Neophytou to the post-1974 generation. In the years that followed, no other playwright has established a similarly substantial presence in terms of the power and volume of his/ her work.

As a whole, since the 1960s onwards, production of plays has been indeed quantitatively large but in its greater part it is made up of ethnographic pieces, among which some are true landmarks, having contributed to the enrichment and evolution of playwriting. Cypriot dramaturgy is taking timid steps; sometimes it regresses but throughout this large production remarkable plays have been dispersed, characterized by personal writing and

delving into bolder, contemporary topics.

The year 1974 became the milestone for about two decades, with the thematology of plays drawing almost exclusively on the historic events that marked Cyprus and their consequences. Over the last years, some of the plays that surface appear to ponder over the 21<sup>st</sup> century reality, with existential and diachronic topics, whereas experimentation in terms of form seems to be making a comeback. In fact, Cyprus' (Greek speaking) theatrical writing is in search of a new distinct signature.

### NOTES

1. This limitation does not stem from a qualitative classification; rather, it stems from methodological grounds due to the author's lack of access to Turkish bibliography and its corresponding primary sources.
2. For theatre in Cyprus before the Independence (playwrights and theatrical activity) see mostly Yiannis Katsouris' massive work, *To Theatro stin Kypro* [Theatre in Cyprus] (volume A' : 1860-1939, volume B' : 1940-1959), Nicosia 2005, wherein relevant bibliography.
3. The term is under investigation with regards to the Hellenic area's dramaturgy, too. For more on the relevant deliberations, see Efi Vafeiadi, "Eisagogi" [Introduction] to the publication *To Fhintanaki* by Pantelis Horn, Dodoni (Athens – Yiannina 1992): 9-21 and Walter Puchner, "O ethographismos" [Ethographism] in his *Anthologia Neoellinikis Dramaturgias, tomos B̄. Apo tin epanastasi tou 1821 os ti Mikrasiatiki katastrophi, Book 2* [Anthology of Modern Greek Dramaturgy. From the 1821 revolution to the Asia Minor Catastrophe], The Ethniki Bank Cultural Institution (Athens 2007): 615-620 and 627-635.
4. One of the first specimens of ethography is Kyriakos Akathiotis' *I agapi tis Marikkous* [The love of Marikkou] (1938), repeatedly performed by professional and amateur companies. The play was staged by THOC in the summer of 2004.
5. The first specimen of musical ethographic comedy is *To oneiro tou Tzypris tou Lefkariti* [The dream of Tzypris from Lefkara] by Costas Harakis, adapted by the composer Ahilleas Lymbourides. It is with this play that the "Kypriako Theatro" company embarked on its course (1951-1961).
6. I quote the questioning of the critic Nona Moleski on the staging of Michalis Pitsillides' *Oi Klironomoi* [The inheritors] by THOC: "I am a foreigner in Cyprus and sometimes when it comes to the appreciation of certain artistic events, I have the feeling that I am the only one who does not carry the magic

eyeglasses of nostalgia, emotion, condescension, that judging by the public's reaction must transform the play, invest it with an emotional aura, reinforce it with joint sweet memories". (*Empros* daily, June 17, 1990).

7. For the era's theatrical life, see Andri H. Constantinou, *To teatro stin Kypro (1960-1964). Oi thiasoi, I kratiki politiki kai ta prota hronia tou Theatricou Organismou Kyprou* [Theatre in Cyprus (1960-1964). Theatre companies, State policy and the first years of the Cyprus Theatre Organization], Athens: Kastaniotis, 2007) wherein relevant bibliography.
8. Scientific bibliography on the era's dramaturgy is limited. Yiannis Katsouris makes a first registration in his text "Ta hronia tis Kypriakis Demokratias" [The years of the Cypriot Democracy], in the *Anthologia Kypriakis Logotehnikias, tomos 9 (Theatro C)* [Anthology of Cypriot Literature, volume 9, Theatre C] (Nicosia: Chr. Andreou, 1986) 968-976.
9. Katsouris (see above, pages 968-969) estimates that during 1960-1986, approximately 140 one-acts and full length plays were written, whereas numerous publications printed by means of a hectograph also circulated. Also, many plays were published in periodicals.
10. The broadcasting of "kypriotika sketch" began in 1953, with the birth of radio broadcasting in Cyprus. As early as 1960, Kypros Chrysanthis talks of a decay of the genre ("To Kypriotiko Sketch", *Pnevmatiki Kypros* [Intellectual Cyprus], issue 3, December 1960, p. 151). A few years later, the same columnist will note that these pieces were written offhand, due to the big demand for immediate presentation ("To "kypriotiko sketch" sto "Tris sinantisis kritikis tou periodikou Pnevmatiki Kypros", ["The Cyprian Sketch" in "Three critical meetings of Pnevmatiki Kypros journal], issues 92-93, May-June 1968, p. 240). In the context of the same publication, Andreas Fantides mentions that "many rural houses bought a radio for the sake of the Cyprian sketch" and that this specific genre "bore playwrights" (pp. 243-244).
11. In a note included in the performance bill, Andreas Christophides points out that the existence of THOC provides for the first time the possibility of investment in Cypriot plays. "Since we do not have at our disposal pieces preserved by our tradition and standing out as generally commendable, the presentation of Cypriot plays cannot but equal the presentation of the contemporary Cypriot play" which owing to the fact that it has not been tried on stage, will suffer from imperfections and weaknesses.
12. The playwright herself provides valuable information on her work in the typed edition *Parakatathesi 50* [Deposit 50], (Nicosia: Chrysopolitissa, 1986). This edition also includes a study on Katselli's life and work by Despo Yiannakides-Pantzarides. See also Nayia Roussou, Rina Katselli, Cyprus PEN Publications, Literary profiles, Nicosia 1995.

13. Sources are limited: Yiannis Katsouris, “Michalis G. Pitsillides”, preface in the publication of plays *Ospollate arkontynamen, To damalin tou ypermahou, Exiskopistiken o Athanasis*, (Nicosia: THOC Library, 2001) pages 5-6, Michalis Pitsillides, *Ospollate arkontynamen*, THOC 2005 (performance bill, research – selection of texts: Andri H. Constantinou).
14. Pashardis plays remain unpublished, with the exception of *Sta homata tis Mesarkas* [In the lands of Mesaoria] which is included in the *Anthologia kypriakis logotehnias* [Anthology of Cypriot Literature], volume 10 (Theatre D’), (Nicosia: Chr. Andreou, 1986) pages 1265-1301. We have not traced any bibliography on his theatrical work, other than critical notes on his plays’ performance bills. For the writer’s poetic personality, see Lefteris Papaleontiou, “O Piitis Michalis Pashardis” [The poet Michalis Pashiardis] *Nea Epochi* review, issue 286, autumn 2005, pages 39-48.
15. A comparably rich bibliography on the writer is available: George K. Ioannides, *Panos Ioannides*, Cyprus PEN Publications, Literary Profiles, Nicosia, 1995, Hara Bakonikola-Georgopoulou, “Gregory by Panos Ioannides” in *Kanones kai exaireseis. Keimena gia to neoelliniko teatro*. [Rules and exceptions. Texts on Modern Greek theatre] (Athens: Ellinika Grammata, 2000) pages. 94-96, Yiannis Katsouris, “To theatrico ergo tou Panou Ioannide: Mia syntomi theorisi” [Panos Ioannides’ theatrical work: A brief overview] *Nea Epochi* review, issue 267, 2001, pages 16-22, Xenia Georgopoulou, “Exousia kai diafthora sto teatro tou Panou Ioannide” [Authority and corruption in Panos Ioannides’ theatre] *Nea Epochi* review, issue 292, Spring 2007, pages 53-65 and Andreas Chrysostomou, “To theatrico ergo tou Panou Ioannide” [Panos Ioannides’ theatrical work] [2003] (graduate thesis, University of Athens, Theatre Studies Department, Library).
16. The playwright’s debut was favorably commented on by acclaimed columnists: Maria Doriti, “Tomi stin kypriaki pragmatikotita: *Ena kyriakatiko sketch*” [An incision through Cypriot reality: *A Sunday sketch*], *Apogevmatini* daily, 3/11/1984, Niki Marangou, “*Ena kyriakatiko sketch toso apla... alithino*” [A Sunday Sketch... simply real], *O Filelepttheros* daily, 30/10/1984, L[azaros] M[avros], “Kritiki sto *Ena kyriakatiko sketch* tis tileorasis: Otan I alitheia prokalei anakatosoura” [A review of *A Sunday sketch*: When the truth becomes meddlesome] *Kirykas*, 28/10/1984.
17. Costas Georgousopoulos characterized the soliloquy “stirring”. “Using a mature, simple, realistic language, taking off only in the form of mourning for the loss of life’s most essential, Giorgos Neophytou delivered a beautiful role, that requires a charismatic actress”. (“Penthos kai chara ek Kyprou” [Mourning and joy from Cyprus] *Ta Nea* [Athens] daily, 4/4/1990.