

The Short Story in Cyprus from the End of the 19th Century until 1920

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RÉSUMÉ

Pendant les premières années de l'occupation britannique, parallèlement à la mise en circulation des premiers journaux locaux, certains jeunes écrivains commencent à cultiver le court récit en suivant la tradition éthographique (éthologique) développée en Grèce pendant la décennie 1880. De façon graduelle on publie des nouvelles avec plus d'exigences, dans lesquelles la thématique cède sa place à des représentations plus réalistes des aspects de la vie chypriote.

ABSTRACT

During the first years of the British occupation, parallel to the publishing of the first local newspapers, some young writers start to cultivate the ethographic (naturalistic?) novel as it was shaped in Greece during the 1880s. Gradually, we witness the emergence of more sophisticated novels dealing with more realistic themes drawn from the various aspects of Cypriot life

The first short stories in Cyprus appear in local newspapers, that have been in print since 1878, in other words when the island passed from the long Turkish occupation into British administration. Until 1920 very few collections of short stories had circulated, while most short stories during this period are scattered in newspapers or other periodical publications.¹ Certainly the Cypriot short story of this period has an experimental character. There are no systematic storytellers. Only a very few new writers attempt to write short narratives (chronicles, travel sketches, impressions from everyday life and brief snapshots), that tend to take the form of short stories. These ambitious writers (that are studying to become or are working as journalists, lawyers, teachers, doctors) seem to be informed about the evolution and maturing of the Modern Greek short story during the end of the 19th century and sometimes come into immediate contact with international storytelling, or attempt to translate samples from it.²

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The development of the so-called ethographic (convention-based) short story in Greece, guides the young Cypriot storytellers into writing similar narratives inspired by the Cypriot countryside. Already in the first storytelling attempts, the writers tend to adopt basic characteristics of the ethographic or ethnographic custom-based short story. In the anonymous, unfinished narrative “The great-grandfather and the great-granddaughter”, that appears to belong to Stylianos Chourmouzos, the new mores about fashion, marriage, dancing, entertainment, family relationships etc., are satirized, as they have developed in the city, in contrast to the traditional way of life of people in the countryside, which is confronted with a nostalgic disposition. The writer uses a mixed language, combined with several Cypriot idioms and elements of the spoken word. A second, more compact and meticulous narrative is attributed to the same writer, with the title “Confessions of a father”, where the viewpoint is projected that education influences youth in a negative way, since it distances them from the agricultural professions.³

In 1895 the term “moral-based” is used to define the short stories of Menelaos D. Frangoudis “How marriages are created. The gossip of people” “Theatre speeches”.⁴ In reading these short stories it is clearly discernible that the term is used with the meaning of gossip, the comical caricature of peoples’ behaviour, that are related here to matchmaking and dowries or the viewing of a theatrical play. It is basically about the recording of observations of the writer about snapshots from life, without demanding myth-creating procedures (with the creation of a myth or action or fully fledged heroes), assigning, at first, a totally superficial, flat meaning to the term.

In a similar vein are several other short stories of this period. The writers mainly draw inspiration from the people of the countryside (while the world of the city is not completely absent) and attempt to present mores, customs, traditions, and insights into the life of its inhabitants. In several cases they approach through an idyllic and idealised optical angle, in many others, however, they use a relatively realistic approach and a more developed critical eye. It is obvious that folkloric science is served during this period by the ethographic short story. In an attempt to prove the Greek identity of the Cypriot people literature is recruited, which is called upon to assist in its way the scientific, political and ideological argument for ‘enosis’(union) of Cyprus with Greece.

The first attempt in the direction of realistic ethographic storytelling is made by Ioannis Kipiadis with his short story “The complaint of Anthoulla”,

one of three short stories in his mixed volume entitled *Fine Lines* (1894). Despite the romantic elements that exist here, there is enough ground to critically present the subjects of marriage, widowhood, superstition and poverty, that, in conjunction with his demotic language, differentiate it radically from the other two short stories in the volume.

An essential boost, however, to realistic ethnographic storytelling, is given by Demosthenis Stavrínides in 1898, with his ten *Cypriot short stories*. Indicative of the intentions of the young writer are the words that precede his book: His short stories “do not aim at adding something to Greek literature. They were written simply to depict the nature of life in my most Greek homeland, and no less than any other subjugated island that has been studied”. D. Stavrínides seems to be aware of the evolution of the Modern Greek short story, and to have been influenced by it, since he had been studying in Athens since 1896. One of the stories in his collection (“All around the fire”) is dedicated to the eminent critic of the time, Emmanuel Roidis, who had advised him before the publication of his short stories.⁵ In a few of the stories romantic exaggeration, daydreaming and unfulfilled young love are evident, while over-elaborate perceptions become obvious in one short story. A leading role, however, is played by the scenes from rural and urban social life in Cyprus, that extend to a variety of subjects. The use of first-person narrative, the deliberate detail and the exposing eye at the life of the heroes and of everyday Cypriot life, constitute gauges in the writer’s attempt to depict matters with a realistic disposition. Several social problems parade in his short stories, such as the story of the village madwoman, the drama of the poor girl that works day and night to create her dowry and reinstate herself, the tragedy of the poor woman who sells all her household wares to pay off the debts of her husband, the marriage of two insignificant beings, miserliness, superstitions and others, enriched by mores, traditions and customs. The writer uses simple narrative techniques. In his subsequent short story “The confession of a monk”, that was praised at a contest by the Panionian Association (with critical committee members N.G. Politis, G. Drosinis and C. Palamas), the attempt of the storyteller to depict the mentality of the central hero is more distinctive. In the direction of realistic ethnographic storytelling are also three of the ten short stories contained in the *Collection of short stories* (1899) by Xenophon Pharmakides, while others are published in newspapers and magazines (*Alithia, Patris, Elikon*) and others in *Cypriot Mansions* (*Κυπριακά Σκηνογραφήματα*) (1922). Most of these are filled with romantic exaggerations or unbearable moral preaching.

Usually the writer is limited to sketching, with extremely rough brushstrokes, episodes from different periods in Cypriot history, without attempting to reconstruct the historical material or to present any significant action. However, in at least three short stories he draws inspiration from his contemporary Cypriot life and succeeds in overcoming many of the others' shortcomings. We refer to the short stories "The shylocks", "The card player" and "A victim", in which he stigmatises the harshness and cruelty of the shylocks of his time, the social scourge of card playing, which ruins consciences and leads people to squalor and the negative implications of mimicry and the trend towards unnecessary luxuries.

The *Philosophical short stories* (1905) by Kyriakos P. Rossides do not add anything new; two of three texts of the volume are rather a backward step towards the "death-persuader" world of romanticism. A certain value can be assigned to the third short story "The eye", which is based on Cypriot tradition.

As we have seen above, during the last decade of the 19th century, there are some primitive attempts aimed at making the most of Cypriot linguistic idiom in the short story. Stylianos Chourmouzos and to a lesser extent Ioannis Kipiades incorporate several Cypriot idioms, mainly during the dialogues of their texts, and also in the speech of the narrator. During the same period, Georgios S. Frangoudes (first with his short story "From Lemesos to the City (Lefkosia) on foot" and three years later with the short story "The Avowed") gives a more authoritative signal for the exploitation of the local dialect in the writing of short stories, in which there is an emphasis in the depiction of scenes from the life, the mores, the customs and the traditions of people in the Cypriot countryside. This explains the fact that Nikos Hadjigavriel dedicates, some time later, the first of four short stories to G.S. Frangoudes. In these interesting short stories, N. Hadjigavriel manages to convey with an idyllic disposition and humour, the mores, the traditions, the everydayness, the joys, the sorrows and the drama of people in the countryside, using a luscious idiomatic language, in combination with the naivety, the simplicity and the density of folkloric storytelling.⁶

In three of his short stories, Yiangos Lanitis takes advantage of the linguistic idioms of Patmos (where he was temporarily residing) to present comical stories from the people and the traditions of the island. Similar comical and ethnographic episodes (not in Patmos) are described in other short stories, that are published mainly in the *Salpinx* newspaper (1897-1898, 1907), using a simplified Katharevousa language which comes close to

the demotic language of the time. In general, however, we can say that idioms are not in widespread use during the specific period. In fact, where they are used, this is restricted to spoken dialogues or is used sporadically in the body of the narrative, itself being expressed either in Demotic (conventional Modern) Greek or in a simple Katharevousa language.

The establishment of the trend towards realistic ethnographic storytelling seems to be accomplished by the six “Cypriot short stories” that were published anonymously in the magazine *Avgi* (Lefkosia, 1910-1911) and are accredited to its editor and publisher, Constantinos G. Eleftheriades.⁷ In his texts, this prematurely departed journalist, is not limited to the simple presentation of the viewpoint and situations of Cypriot life, whether these take place in a rural or urban environment, if we can characterise the environment of Cypriot towns in this way at the beginning of the 20th century. With the rhetorical means that at certain times remind us of the storytelling works of Papadiamantis (detailed, meticulous outlining of the scenery that the action of the characters takes place, method of introducing characters, monikers and nicknames of heroes, manner of developing and ending the myth, longwinded articulation of the narrative speech, disruption of the simple Katharevousa language of the narrator by idiomatic words, use of idiomatic phrases in the relatively limited dialogues), the writer stares directly and with a critical disposition at the viewpoints and problems of Cypriot life. Themes such as poverty, the exploitation of the poor by the wealthy, usury, the destitution of man, fortune-hunting, the undignified position of women, nouveau richness, pedantic use of the katharevousa (logiotatismos), superstition, of peasants are recorded, satirised, reduced and criticized. Thus K.G. Eleftheriades transcends by a long way the idyllic description or the simple recording of Cypriot scenes that we come across in many previous short stories.

Yiannis Stavrinos Economides continues this realistic style originated by K.G. Eleftheriades, with three short stories (“Carmen or Love of the Englishwoman”, “Simos Leventis”, “Tinensis”) of his prolusory collection *First short stories* (1915) and three other short stories that he publishes in newspapers a while later. The three stories are written in a mixed language, with the demotic predominating and some breaks into Katharevousa, enriched by words from the Cypriot dialect. In the dialogues between villagers the local idiom is used, while the words of other characters are conveyed accordingly; for example the words of the Englishwoman are broken, ungrammatical Greek. The texts are quite extensive and approach

the category of a novel, if we take into account the multitude of episodes, the abolition of the unity of space and time etc. Despite their weaknesses (chatter, literary references and narrative self-commentary at the expense of the narration), the writer manages to describe complete human characters and to stigmatise social problems such as ignorance, superstition, social injustice, the foreign status quo etc. He crosses beyond the borders of the Cypriot region and situates the action of his heroes in great urban centres abroad, such as Athens, Alexandria, London, Smyrna, Constantinople, imparting a certain cosmopolitan character to his short stories. The stories “The rifle a saviour”, “So it must” and “It cannot be insured” that were published in newspapers.⁸ In these texts he presents with psychographic intensity and realistic detail and a sarcastic disposition, topics such as financial difficulties that prevent a young man from studying, the inability of money to cure an illness or to avert death, the dilemma of voluntary enlistment in the Greek army, and others. It is obvious that with his short stories, G.S. Economides has at least contributed to the broadening of the themes, the establishment of realistic moral-based storytelling and the infusion of a cosmopolitan character to the Cypriot short story, elements that have made him an authority of this style, always in conjunction with the facts and the capabilities of his time.

In the same direction moves the prolusory short story “Demetris” by Melis P. Nicolaidis, even though his other short stories from this period are written in an entirely different style. This short story touches “bold” issues such as dishonesty, adultery, prostitution, alcoholism, degradation, the snatching of a Christian woman by a Muslim. All these constitute a dispiriting scene, in which any hint of an idyllic message is ruled out.⁹

Isolated and rather flat ethnographic short stories were published during this period by Georgios Th. Stavrinides, Neophytos P. Ioannides, Alekos N. Zenon, I. Christodoulides and others; their short stories have nothing new to add to the previous ones.

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On broad terms, it could be said that the short story is constantly evolving during the thirty year period that concerns us, and tends to crystallise more and more realistic characteristics. This particular trend holds a dominant position in the entire production of short stories during this period. However, this is not the only direction, since other short stories appear, others with more and others with less obvious elements of differentiation.

Specifically, during the decade of 1890 or the first years of the 20th century,

emerge certain other short-storytellers, that operate in a different style. Evgenios Zenon, for example, during the period of 1894-1905, publishes about ten short stories in newspapers, several of which are quite extensive and take place in large Greek urban centres, such as Athens and Constantinople. Their themes are taken from the life of these cities, mainly from Athens, where the writer studied. In these texts predominant are the erotic element (with romantic undertones), family and interpersonal relationships and scenes from military life, that are probably personal memories, since the writer enlisted voluntarily during the Greek-Turkish war of 1897. We come across snapshots from Athenian life, combined with philosophical contemplation, in all twelve short stories of the collection *Like life and like a fairy tale* (1907) by Kimon Michaelides.

Evangelos Hadjiioannou published in Cypriot newspapers (1898-1903) short stories inspired almost exclusively by the struggles of occupied Greek areas for emancipation from the Turks (particularly during the years 1896-1897), in which he took part as a volunteer. The short stories are permeated by over-idealism¹⁰ and a beautification of the facts on the battlefield. In certain situations they are presented as personal experiences and tend towards military journalism. The very few short stories of Ioannis Pegasios have a similar character, during the period 1914-1916, in which he describes his experiences and memories from the struggle for the liberation of Epirus (1913-1914) in which he took part as a volunteer.

During his studies in Athens, Aristides N. Zenon published in the Lemesos newspaper *Alithia* (1898-1905) ten short stories, most of which are lightweight sketches from Athenian life. They have several similarities to the narratives of Kimon Michaelides, with the difference that the former's texts are filled with hope and optimism.

From the cases that we have mentioned it is evident that several Cypriot short story writers of this period (and certainly those who are studying in Athens) are living inside the literary fermentation that is brewing in Greece around 1900 and are receiving the new messages. At any rate, during the decade of 1910 (and after the beginning of World War I) it is obvious that idyllic ethnographic writing has given way to realism, without the absence of suggestions from other literary trends, such as symbolism and aestheticism. During this time the short stories of Georgios I. Kitropoulos, Persephone Papadopoulou, Georgia Lofitis, Charitini Kouppas, Xanthos Lyssiotis, Christakis Peristianides, Theocharis Theocharides, Leonidas Pavlides, Savvas Christis, and others, are published

G. Kitropoulos (who lived in Alexandria) gathered the short stories of his youth in his first volume (*The first*, 1911), in which he exploits with a philosophical and melancholic disposition the erotic element and general themes of intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships. Persephone Papadopoulou seems to be inspired by the aestheticism principles; in the few pieces of prose that she published, she praises the beauty of nature and provides examples for the superior behaviour of women, thus serving her cause of uplifting women. Charitini Kouppas in her five short stories published in 1914-1915, aims at giving positive examples and moral lessons for women, without resorting to beauty-worship like P. Papadopoulou. Conversely, one can observe signs of linguistic sensuality and beauty-worship in the first and limited attempts at short stories by Xanthos Lyssiotis, Christakis Peristianides and Pavlos Valdaserides, that are published in various newspapers of the time in the demotic tongue. It should be noted that all of the above experiment also with poetry.

Georgia Lofitis, that publishes short stories towards the end of the decade of 1910, seems to be influenced mainly by the poetry of symbolism. In almost all of her short stories, written in the demotic language, the principal characters are women lost in endless reverie, deep introspection, detached from everydayness, which they watch from a window or a mirror flowing slowly and prosaically. These short narratives usually take place during a fading autumn environment, that finally leads them (the women) to melancholy and decline, like the heroes in *Autumn* (1917) by K. Chatzopoulos.

In any case, Leonidas Pavlides and Savvas Christis to a lesser extent, in some very isolated short stories, written in a cultivated demotic filled with obsession about beauty and word hunts (lexitheria), reveal another trend, that is connected to the superman and Nietzscheanism that however does not have a continuation.

Two comprehensive short stories are published during 1918-1919 by Theocharis Theocharides, who was residing in Khartoum. One of them ("The pity") takes place in London and has the characteristics of a police story. The other ("The return") refers to two lovers, that are separated by their belief in different religious dogmas. These short stories bring something new to the themes of the Cypriot short story.

In general we can say that the fermentations that are brewing during this first phase of the Cypriot short story follow (at a smaller or greater distance) the developments in the Modern Greek short story of the same period. In

other words, from the romantic, melodramatic and idealised ethnographic depictions we move into the more down-to-earth, realistic and critical treatment of the viewpoints of daily life. These experimental attempts of young Cypriots encompass new possibilities that are registered more distinctly in Cypriot short story writing during the years between the Wars, and at the same time affirm that spiritual and literary pursuits never operate single-dimensionally and univocally.¹¹

NOTES

1. I have collected many of the short stories of this period, and it is expected that they will be contained in a volume to be published shortly by the Centre for Scientific Research(Cyprus).
2. In this article, many observations from the “Introduction” by Lefteris Papaleontiou are used, in the publication *Anthology of the Cypriot short story*, volume A', Nicosia, Cultural Services of the Ministry of Education and Culture, 2006, pp. 13-36.
3. Both short stories were published in the Lemesos newspaper *Salpinx*; the first in 20 parts, from 7 Oct. 1889 until 21 Mar. 1892; the second in 4 parts, on 10,17 Sept. and 1,8 Oct. 1894.
4. Published in the newspapers *Alithia*, Lemesos, 6 Oct. 1895 and *Salpinx*, 1 Jan. 1897 respectively.
5. See Costas Nicolaidis, “The ‘presence’ of Roidis in the *Cypriot short stories* of Demosthenes Stavriniades”, *Akti* 1 (1989) 49-64.
6. These short stories were published in the newspaper *Alithia* during the years 1902-1908 and collected under the editorship of Chr. Hadjiathanasiou in the *Microphilologika Tetrada*, no. 2, Nicosia 2003 (a supplement of the magazine *Microphilologika*).
7. For this topic see L. Papaleontiou, “Two Cypriot short story writers: Nikos Hadjigavriel-K.G. Eleftheriades”, *Akti* 13 (1992) 65-90, where the relevant bibliography can be found.
8. The first in *Alithia*, 28 Oct. 1916 and the other two in *Eleftheria*, 30 Mar., 6 Apr. 1918 and 20, 27 Jul. 1918. A previous one, “The pole” (*Kitian Diary of 1913*, pp. 98-109), is based on popular superstition about the existence of ghosts.

9. Published in the newspaper. *Echo of Cyprus*, 20 Jan. 1916 and later.
10. See mainly the short story “The real Greek girl”, newspaper *Alithia*, 8 Jan. 1898.
11. The most significant case of Nicos Nicolaides is not included here, who published his short stories in literature of the broader Greek region during the decade of 1910, and published three collections in the 1920’s. There is testimony that one of his short stories, “The servants”, was published in the long lost magazine *Melissa* of Nicosia (1919).