

Modern Tragedy | Michael Cacoyannis' Early Films



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All film stills in this thesis – from *Stella* (Michael Cacoyannis, 1955), *A Girl in Black* (Michael Cacoyannis, 1956), *A Matter of Dignity* (Michael Cacoyannis, 1958), *L'Avventura* (Michelangelo Antonioni, 1960), *Stromboli* (Roberto Rossellini, 1950), *Cleo from 5 to 7* (Agnès Varda, 1962), and *The Music Room* (Satyajit Ray, 1958) – are used under the Fair Dealing policy for the purpose of criticism. All copyrights belong to their respective owners, studios and/or directors.

To Anat Pick,
Reidar Due

“Art/Science/labor/philosophy first” (Weil, *Oeuvres* 424).

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Short Abstract

This thesis is an interpretation of three films by the Greek Cypriot director Michael Cacoyannis: *Στέλλα* (*Stella*, 1955), *Το κορίτσι με τα μαύρα* (*To koritsi me ta mavra/A Girl in Black*, 1956) and *Το τελευταίο ψέμα* (*To teleftaio psema/A Matter of Dignity*, 1958). These films appear early in Cacoyannis' career and very little has been written on them. My thesis seeks to show that they are accomplished and complex films, which merit close attention, both in virtue of their dramatic form and because of the ethical questions they raise regarding individual autonomy and the force of archaic ethical norms.

The aim of this thesis is to interpret these films by examining the evolving motivations of their protagonists. The thesis seeks to show that the dramatic form of the films renders the agency of the protagonist partly intransparent.

In order to show this, my thesis examines, on the one hand, how characterisation, perspective, character relationships and the development of the drama provide an internal context for agency in each film. On the other hand, the interpretation seeks to tease out the ethical implications and stakes of the dramatic action in each film. These implications, I argue, are structured by a thematic ambivalence running through these films between modernity, understood as subjective freedom, and archaic ethical norms, implying a limit to subjective freedom.

In the approach to the films' dramatic form and their ethical implications, I am indebted to Hegel's aesthetic and ethical theory. I use the Hegelian term 'modern tragedy' to characterise both the dramatic form of these films and the ethical situation of their protagonists. I also situate these films within international *auteur* cinema of the 1950s and early 1960s.

The thesis aims, thus, to contribute to scholarship on European *auteur* cinema of the mid-20th century. It also aims to be a contribution to the study of agency and ethics in film in general.

Long Abstract

This thesis presents an interpretation of three early films by the Greek Cypriot director Michael Cacoyannis: *Stella* (1955), *To koritsi me ta mavra* (*A Girl in Black*, 1956) and *To teleftaio psema* (*A Matter of Dignity*, 1958). This interpretation takes its starting point in questions arising for the viewer regarding the motivations and agency of the protagonist in each film. The thesis pursues these questions within a framework of genre. The term ‘modern tragedy’ is used to describe these films both in terms of their dramatic form and in terms of the ethical problems that my interpretation identifies at their core. In my thesis, the genre term ‘modern tragedy’ directly carries ethical implications. It designates the dramatisation of a specific kind of agency taking place within a specific ethical context. As the term ‘modern tragedy’ itself indicates, this ethical context involves a notion of what it is to be modern. In the modern tragedies of Cacoyannis, we witness protagonists who are modern to the extent that they exercise a freedom of choice, of doubt and reflection. But the sequence of the drama will, in each film, involve a problematisation and limitation of this freedom, both in the eyes of the viewer and, I argue, in the eyes of the protagonists themselves. The interpretation will show that, in these films, the plot involves a change in self-perception on the part of the protagonist. It is at the moments when such changes are the most evident that the films pose the most pressing and interesting questions concerning agency.

My thesis is, in the first instance, a contribution to scholarship on Cacoyannis. He is seen both within a national and an international context. Specific locations are very significant to the plot and dramatic development in each of these films. Their scenes are partly filmed on location and, thus, inscribe into the fabric of the films a photographic reference to specific places in Greece. These locations are also significant

for the coherence of the plot: Each of the stories appears to grow particularly out of a specific place. *Stella* is the story of a singer in a *bouzouki* bar, and the film revolves around the bar in which she performs, called Paradeisos (Paradise). *A Girl in Black* tells of an encounter between a well-to-do, affable Athenian young man and a girl living on the island of Hydra, which is a short boat ride away from Athens but a society all to itself. *A Matter of Dignity* is set in an affluent Athenian suburb and tells of the status anxieties of a family on the verge of economic ruin. These locations are also treated self-consciously by Cacoyannis. At times, he toys with the notion that these places – and what they are associated with – are cultural *clichés*. In each case, he uses these clearly identifiable social and geographical settings as a spring-board for accentuating a set of dilemmas that the protagonist has to face.

In the thesis, these films are also situated in an international context. Cacoyannis is a European *auteur*. He is clearly aware of the choices that he makes regarding tone, realism and genre. He, himself, uses the term ‘poetic realism’ to distinguish his work from Italian neo-realism, and this itself is significant. He deliberately seeks to align himself with a cinema that is poetic, rather than socially descriptive, and, in doing so, he sees his own work as taking place on a map much larger than that of Greece. To do justice to this international dimension of his work, I compare each of the films to one or two other films, which are not Greek. *Stella*, which is a film about a performer, I compare to Agnès Varda’s *Cléo de 5 à 7*, from 1962. I use this comparison to contrast the existential, dramatic perspective upon the singer-protagonist in Varda’s film to the very different dramatic perspective presented on the heroine in *Stella*. *A Girl in Black* is a film about an island. I compare it to two second generation Italian neo-realist films, which are also island films: *Stromboli* (1950) by Roberto Rossellini and *L’Avventura* (1960) by Michelangelo Antonioni. I use this comparison to emphasise that the island in

Cacoyannis is not entirely exotic or Other, and that the dramatic development of tensions within the island community in *A Girl in Black* is very different from the kind of allegorical opposition between nature and modernity that we find in Rossellini and Antonioni. *A Matter of Dignity* is a film about a family in decline. I compare it to another decline narrative: Satyajit Ray's *Jalsaghar* (*The Music Room*), from 1958. Both films use certain melodramatic devices within a dramatic form that is not melodramatic. Ray's film, I argue, is an example of film tragedy. The comparison serves to highlight the difference between tragedy and modern tragedy.

Throughout these comparisons, certain formal features regarding the dramatic form in the early films by Cacoyannis are brought to light: dramatic perspective, the difference between tragedy and modern tragedy, the difference between modern tragedy and melodrama. The method used, in this thesis, to analyse genre and dramatic form is rooted in a tradition of aesthetics that begins with G.W.F. Hegel. In his *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, Hegel draws a broad distinction between ancient and modern tragedy. For my thesis, what has been significant about this distinction has been not only its content but the way in which it is made: his criteria for separating these two kinds of drama. Hegel views drama as the presentation of a certain type of action within a specific ethical context. Ancient Greek tragedy and *Antigone*, in particular, present conflicts between individuals who each identify wholeheartedly with an ethical norm that they have not themselves created and which is, in no way, relative to their own personality. Modern tragedy (Hegel's main example is Shakespeare's *King Lear*) presents the internal subjective drama of a psyche battling with itself. External norms are merely food for this process of internal laceration. I use the term 'modern tragedy' in a slightly different way from Hegel in that I take it to mean not a psychological drama but a drama in which we witness an ambivalence between ancient norms of

actions and a modern situation, in which the subject is open to doubt about what to do, and in which agency is presented as highly problematic. With this notion of ambivalence, which is a very striking feature of the Cacoyannis films, I still aim to remain faithful to Hegel's ethical criteria of genre definition. In the theoretical chapter of the thesis, Chapter 2, I discuss the ethical definition of genre with reference to two other thinkers inspired by Hegel: Georg Lukács and Georges Bataille. Throughout the interpretation of the films, I also develop this notion of ambivalence with the aid of concepts taken from the literary scholar Peter Brooks. In his book, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess*, Brooks develops a theory of an ambivalent modernity.

While my thesis is, first of all, a contribution to scholarship on Cacoyannis, it also aims to contribute to scholarship on ethics and agency in film. An important source of inspiration for this thesis has been Robert Pippin, whose work, *Fatalism in American Film Noir: Some Cinematic Philosophy*, shows how film can problematise the notion we have of characters in film having agency, that is, having reasons to do what they are doing. My own contribution to this field stems from the Hegelian dramatic conception of film form that the interpretation adheres to. This is a conception that emphasises the process of characterisation, relationships between characters, dramatic perspective – whether it is aligned or not with the point of view of the heroine – incremental developments in the plot and rapid plot reversals. I will show that this dramatic analysis fits the style of these films well, as Cacoyannis uses continuity editing and narrative point of view, but he imposes, on these conventional techniques, a rhythm that emphasises static situations of inaction and brusque transitions. I refer to the effect of this narrative rhythm as 'stasis.' The impact of this rhythm on characterisation is to render the heroine, to some extent, psychologically opaque. I refer to this formal feature

of Cacoyannis' films as their 'theatrical aesthetic': It is theatrical because we are presented with the carnal presence and facial surface of the character, in her poses and performative actions, but we are not always given an insight into her motivations.

At the horizon of this enquiry into dramatic form and problematic agency, there are intractable paradoxes concerning actions performed in the context of a self-limiting subject, actions that appear permeated by constraint or passivity. At the end of each interpretation and in the Conclusion, I have sought to spell out these philosophical implications of the films. This is the level at which their ethical significance is most evident and becomes independent of a specific national culture and context of filmmaking.

Introduction

“To grasp (in each thing) that there is a limit and that without supernatural help that limit cannot be passed – or only by very little and at the price of a terrible fall afterwards” (Weil, *Gravity* 8).

Part 1.

In this thesis, I examine three early films by the Greek Cypriot filmmaker Michael Cacoyannis: *Stella* (1955), *A Girl in Black* (1956) and *A Matter of Dignity* (1958). The career of Cacoyannis spans five decades and ends with the Anton Chekhov adaptation, *The Cherry Orchard*, from 1999. He is mostly known for his mid-career films, such as *Ηλέκτρα* (*Electra*, 1962) and *Ιφιγένεια* (*Iphigenia*, 1977), both of which are adaptations of ancient Greek tragedies. Cacoyannis became internationally famous with *Αλέξης Ζορμπάς* (*Alexis Zorbas/Zorba the Greek*, 1964), based on a novel by Nikos Kazantzakis. I have chosen to limit myself to his early films. These films, which are less well-known, show the director searching for a style and a manner of narration, all the while incorporating a number of clearly recognisable locations and social situations. These films pose challenging problems of interpretation precisely because they do not exhibit or conform to one clearly delineated genre or school of filmmaking, such as melodrama or neo-realism. Cacoyannis himself refers to these films as ‘poetic realism,’ and I will come back to what this term can be taken to mean.

My thesis is the first scholarly work devoted to the early career of Michael Cacoyannis. The director enjoys an ambiguous status of fame, abroad and at home, but also of obscurity. Only few scholarly articles and monographs¹ have been devoted to his films, whether in Greek or in other languages. Whereas his acknowledged place, as a significant European *auteur*, would put him in the company of contemporaries like Ingmar Bergman – a director with whom he has much in common given their shared preoccupation with theatre – his films do not occupy a stable place within international

¹ At the time of writing, only three monographs on Cacoyannis exist, two of which are prepared by Cacoyannis himself, see Cacoyannis, Siafkos. The third is an anthology published by the Festival Kinetografou Thessalonikis.

film history.

The three films that I study in this thesis, *Stella*, *A Girl in Black* and *A Matter of Dignity*, precede his later adaptations of Greek tragedy, and they were, at the time, either seen as Greek melodramas or as works with ties to the Greek «ηθογραφία» (*ithografia*) movement,² that is, portraits of the life and values of people in the Greek city and countryside – I will return to this later. *A Girl in Black* also features social themes that could make the film appear as a neo-realist film.³ These three films form a sort of unity, almost a trilogy, in spite of having different themes and settings. They all tell stories at the centre of which we find the moral predicament of a young woman, a heroine, who appears, for some reason, to be “stuck” in her own life, unable to move or to make definite choices. Their unity is underscored by the recurrent use of the same actors. Thus, Ellie Lambeti plays the protagonist in *A Girl in Black*, as well as in *A Matter of Dignity*. Giorgos Foundas plays one of the leading roles in *Stella* and reappears in *A Girl in Black* as the heroine’s potential suitor. Eleni Zafeiriou appears as the mother in *A Girl in Black* and as the maid in *A Matter of Dignity*.

The more I studied these films, the more I became struck by their originality. They exhibit a dramatic texture and a dramatic form of plot development, which are both subtle and crude. I came to think that the genre classification of these films is in question; that they do not conform straightforwardly either to melodrama or to neo-realism or, for that matter, to the genre of tragedy.

I began research on these films with the assumption that they were melodramas of some kind. Christine Gledhill’s survey, in her book, *Home Is Where the Heart Is*:

² Nikos Kolovos, for example, refers to Cacoyannis’ early works as belonging to the period of «κοινωνικές ηθογραφίες» (*koinonikes ithografies*). The Greek word ‘*koinonikes*,’ here, means ‘social’ (Festival 47). He also describes *A Girl in Black* as a «δραματική ηθογραφία» (*dramatiki ithografia*) (Festival 53). Another reviewer, Michalis Dimopoulos, refers to Cacoyannis’ cinema as part of the «νεωτερική, αστική ηθογραφία» (*neoteriki, astiki ithografia*). ‘Astiki,’ here, stands for ‘urban’ (Festival 8).

³ Different reviewers point to Cacoyannis’ ‘borrowing’ of neo-realism (Festival 127-141).

Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film, of successive generations of melodrama scholarship, pointed in an interesting direction: At the conclusion of her survey, she develops her own sociological theory of melodrama as a realist form, articulating life questions of middle-class women – the very same women that were the films' target audience. In spelling out how Hollywood melodramas of the 1950s could have this realist function, she refers to the literary scholar Peter Brooks. In *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess*, Brooks presents a historical and moral conception of popular theatre in the 19th century. In light of this theory, he is also able to argue that the novels of Balzac and Henry James belong within the same literary tradition of melodrama as popular theatre. At the core of his theory lie the notions of moral disorientation and of compensation or of making amends. He argues that modern moral subjects feel that they are at a loss because they have lost a definite moral and theological authoritative compass. To make up for this loss, they are inclined to exaggerate the stakes of their everyday actions. The excesses of melodramatic style directly correspond to this need for compensation. Gledhill and Brooks use the term 'realism' in different ways, as she refers to the social domestic reality of everyday life, and he refers to a post-theological or post-metaphysical world, which is merely real in the sense of prosaic, hence, in need of embellishment.

In studying the moral predicaments of the heroines in the early films of Cacoyannis, I found that a similar idea of an ambivalent modernity, a situation in which the dramatic protagonist somehow harks back to a lost world, is illuminating for unpacking what is thematically at stake in each of the three films. However, as I progressed in the interpretation of these films, I came to realise that there are decisive elements in the plot, which seem to go counter to the assumptions of melodrama, however that genre is conceived. These are dramatic elements involving notions of

irreversibility, unnegotiable authority, events presented as having significance entirely outside the heroines' actions, thought and control.

In order to spell out an ambivalent moral modernity that was close to but, nevertheless, distinct from the melodramatic genre, I turned to Hegel's concept of 'modern tragedy.' He uses this concept in the *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art* to justify and explain the aesthetic qualities of Shakespearean drama, which, according to Hegel, contrasts sharply with ancient Greek tragedy. He emphasises that Shakespearean drama is psychological, concerned with the inner turmoil of its protagonists. By contrast, ancient tragedy would, in his conception, be concerned with normative conflicts that are not dependent on the individual psychological differences between characters. The drama of *Antigone*, his favourite play, is enacted by Antigone and the king, Creon, but it is not a drama concerning them as persons. It does not concern or depend upon their subjective feelings. *King Lear*, on the other hand, very much derives its dramatic problem from the individual psychological flaws of the protagonist, the king.

I decided to take the term 'modern tragedy' but to develop it slightly by using other concepts from Hegel's philosophy, notably the distinction that he develops at length across different texts, between the 'ethical' (*sittlich*) and the 'moral.' In his use of the word 'ethical,' he is influenced by various writers thinking about morality as something social, as a set of customs. In the reception of Hegel, one often associates his moral philosophy with a theory of intersubjectivity (or a theory of recognition). However, in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, he uses the distinction between the ethical and the moral to define the difference between a modern and an archaic situation, and he returns to this exact distinction in the *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*. There, he associates morality with relativism. Modern morality entails that one is responsible for an action only relative to one's own actions. That is, one is not responsible with one's

whole being but only with that small part of oneself that can be singled out as having caused an action to take place. The archaic perspective, by contrast, sees the individual agent put at stake with his or her whole being, without having recourse to mitigating circumstances that would relativise his or her guilt. By bringing into the concept of ‘modern tragedy’ a notion of ambivalent modernity, I seek to retain for this concept some of Hegel’s reflections upon the difference between archaic ethics and modern morality.

Now, I do not so much use the term ‘modern tragedy’ to classify the films by Cacoyannis or to exclude, once and for all, that these films, which have been thought to be melodramas, are not melodramas. This would be a difficult and perhaps not very interesting case to argue, since the term ‘melodrama’ is fluid and can be extended to accommodate a wide variety of national film styles. Rather, I use the term ‘modern tragedy’ as a tool of interpretation. The aim of this thesis is to interpret the ethical dimension of the protagonist’s trajectory in each of the films. This means that I seek to interpret each of the films as a whole, in light of the heroine’s journey and development in the progression of the plot.

I said before that one is struck in these films by the heroines’ apparent incapacity to make the choices that are required of them within the plot. This situation of being, somehow, “stuck” is, in all of the three films, more or less, explicitly associated with an underlying normative tension. This tension only rarely and, often, obliquely surfaces as an explicit dramatic conflict. There are various interpretative and thematic questions to be asked about this sort of underlying normative tension. And they will all surface in the argument of this thesis. First, what are the terms of the normative tension? Second, are different norms embodied in or represented by specific characters? Third, are the heroines’ predicament and trajectory dependent upon them

having an awareness of these potentially conflicting norms? In each film, one of the poles in this normative tension is some notion of unbridled freedom on the part of the heroine. This could be a freedom to set her own terms for love and work, as in *Stella*, or it could be the freedom to follow one's desire, as in *A Girl in Black*, or the freedom to obey one's consciousness, as in *A Matter of Dignity*. In each case, the dramatic situation is different, and the sort of freedom that is at stake is slightly different. Therefore, freedom is not uniformly pitted against one sort of obstacle. Nevertheless, an underlying notion of community, in *Stella* and *A Girl in Black*, and an overt presentation of class consciousness, in *A Matter of Dignity*, have in common that the heroine is faced with the predicament that she has to situate herself in relation to normative authorities outside of herself; authorities that are or appear to be real. The status of these normative authorities, whether they are imagined or social, negotiable or absolute, will come to form a central question in the interpretation of each of the films.

Situating this interpretative perspective within film studies and within scholarship on Greek cinema, I must clarify one aspect of this conflict between freedom and normative authority. I use the concept of 'modern tragedy' to describe an ambivalent modernity. This ambivalence is enacted in the drama, and its content is ethical. What is at stake is a complex relationship between external norms and subjective agency. Now, speaking of modernity and subjective agency within a social setting immediately brings into view questions of social history. To what extent do these films mirror or comment upon processes of modernisation in Greece after the Second World War? We see a specific historical epoch within Athens in these films. We see, in *A Girl in Black*, the clash between an upper-class Athenian and the traditional island society of Hydra. *Stella* can be taken as a feminist icon, and the heroine in *A Girl in Black* could be seen to represent all women suffering within a relatively traditional

society within the modern period. Much scholarship on film deals with modernity as social modernity. There are degrees of conventionality, degrees of urbanisation, education, mobility, moral freedom, etc. As I will argue in Chapter 2, where I spell out the theoretical framework of this thesis, I have quite a range of objections to this social perspective as a framework of interpretation. I do not, of course, object to treating the films of Cacoyannis as historical documents, but, in the context of film interpretation, I will argue that the significance of dramatic actions and the stakes of those actions reveal themselves only gradually in the unfolding of the film in a way that cannot easily be mapped onto a pre-existing social map or grid. In seeking to interpret these films, I am concerned with the heroines' stance in relation to external norms and the dramatic development of that stance. This involves, to use a Hegelian idea, an idea of 'reflection,'⁴ that is, a notion of the character gradually becoming aware of her position in the drama. Now, reflection is different from position or stance, which is evident in actions and acts of speech. Reflection is often attributed to characters by way of reconstructing what they must have thought at this point in the drama. In this approach to motivation and agency, I am inspired by the Hegelian film scholar Robert Pippin. In *Fatalism in American Film Noir: Some Cinematic Philosophy*, he outlines a detailed interpretative framework for thinking about character motivation in American film-noir. Of particular interest, for my thesis, is his idea that, when we follow a film narrative, and we observe a character performing an action, we are compelled to attribute motivation to that character even if we have to reconstruct that motivation. In the words of Pippin, we seek to reason from what must have gone before, that is, we reason "ex

⁴ "Becoming aware" stands in opposition to what Hegel describes, in "Greek Art as the Actual Existence of the Classical Ideal," as the milieu that lacks reflection, or the "milieu of free vitality which is not only there naturally and immediately but is generated by spiritual vision and transfigured by art . . .". Hegel adds: "Greeks [did not] make the advance to that deepening of subjective life in which the individual subject separates himself from the whole and the universal in order to be independent in his own inner being . . ." (*Aesthetics* 437)

ante” (39). Responding to characters in terms of an *ex ante* reasoning regarding their motives will also be an important feature of interpreting the protagonists in these Cacoyannis films in my thesis. In my analyses, I will show that the characters’ reflection upon their own situation and predicament, in each case, becomes dramatically explicit in an act of confrontation, which entails a shift in the heroine’s relation to herself and to the world. Although they arrive at this point unwillingly, through a tragic event, which forms the context of the confrontation, it does testify to a new-found resolve and power to act. This moment of subjective resolve reduces the tragic stakes of the dramas, especially in *A Girl in Black* and in *A Matter of Dignity*. This tie in my analysis, between reflection, subjective agency and modernity, is indebted to Hegel’s interpretation of *Antigone*.

Returning to the social view, it tends to associate characters with social positions or with positions on a scale of modernity, defined by criteria that are not derived from the trajectory and evolving motivations of individual characters. Second, the dramatic ethical perspective that I derive from Hegel looks at internal dramatic problems and their unfolding within the fabric of the film. I seek to interpret the stakes and implications of these problems. Hence, what enters the films as social material is incidental, rather than a key to their meaning, according to the perspective that I adopt.

Another prominent feature of much film studies scholarship is that meaning is thought to be located within salient moments of the film image. *Mise-en-scène* is, then, often thought, as in David Bordwell’s theory of narrative, to be the presentation of story information. Setting and events, relations between characters, motivations for action, important emotional responses on the part of the protagonist; these are all story elements that are highlighted by *mise-en-scène*. Now, it is striking that these early films by Cacoyannis in their mixture, as I said before, of crudeness and subtlety do not

present a classical narrative flow. In this, they are reminiscent of Bergman, who derived his approach to film from theatre. The theatrical feature of Bergman's 1950s films is evident in a preference of monologue over dialogue. The theatrical devices in Cacoyannis are less sharply foregrounded but, in a way, quite similar to Bergman's static scenes; he privileges poses, moments of waiting, reactions, rather than actions. I refer to this static element of narration as contributing to an intransparent character presentation, which I refer to as the 'theatrical aesthetic' of Cacoyannis. This stasis and this intransparency have the effect of focusing our attention on the materiality and literalness of specific gestures and situations. I have tried to do justice to this style in the choice of stills from each film. Renouncing continuity storytelling, to some extent, means that Cacoyannis, often, presents ambiguous or elliptic situations; moments that are not fully explained. This calls for a hermeneutic approach. Thus, whereas classical *mise-en-scène* analysis seeks to unpack the reason for the progression of narrative in decisive moments, the elliptic and ambiguous character of the theatrical aesthetic, in Cacoyannis, calls for a hermeneutic approach that probes the reasons for how the story evolves and interrogates the motivations of the protagonists.

The term 'drama' is very important in this regard. Whereas the concept of 'narrative' is defined by sequence, drama implies a slightly different temporal perspective, something like an extended tension. Drama, in the context of this thesis, is not just a succession of events but resides in a problem that does not find a resolution. To look at these films from a dramatic perspective, thus, also means not to focus on narrative progression but, rather, to look at the heroines' trajectories in response to their situations in terms of specific, irreversible events. There are, in each of the three films, tragic moments, which imply an irreversible, non-negotiable transition. These tragic elements constitute the tragic component of modern tragedy. They also signify the real,

rather than the merely psychological dimension of the plot, which makes these films depart from melodrama to some extent.

I shall show that characterisation and other features of dramatic perspective are used systematically, in these films, to develop a point of view upon the protagonist that is embedded in her social world and which is, therefore, not purely psychological, not purely aligned with or sympathetic to the protagonist's own point of view. Hence, the films, in different ways, endeavour to introduce a distance, a slightly critical perspective upon the heroine, which makes us see her in her world and not merely as a reflection of her own feelings and thoughts. This perspective is one of the differences from classical melodrama, which tends to be solidaric in its visual and narrative perspective with the protagonist. Thus, the acknowledgement of an external normative reality and a response to it, on the one hand, and a dramatic perspective that is not entirely psychological, on the other, form the context for thinking of these films as other than melodramas.

The dramatic perspective on these films and the theatrical aesthetic of stasis that I attribute to them find support in the subsequent career of Cacoyannis. As he turned to making film adaptations of ancient Greek tragedies, Cacoyannis flourished as a filmmaker. He also showed that his interest in film was theatrical. In all of his films, Cacoyannis is interested in the way that characters are tied to a role that they think they have to play, that they have to conform to. When he uses the term 'poetic realism' about his own early films, we may, therefore, think of Marcel Carné. In his films from the 1930s, Carné depicts characters who appear chained to a role. He maintains that the roles allotted to his characters have serious implications, but the characters may come to perceive the role that they play as a role. In the Cacoyannis films, the self-reflective nature of the characters having a role to play is not accentuated, but we see this potential carried out in the slightly later, lyrical film *Ερσικά* (*Eroica/Our Last Spring*, 1960).

Here, instead, the emphasis is hermeneutic: As they are partly trapped in a role, the heroines are enigmatic to themselves and to us. This is why they call for a hermeneutic style of interpretation.

By hermeneutic, I mean a type of interpretation, which, as Hans-Georg Gadamer writes, in *Truth and Method*, seeks to reformulate the question that a text responds to. Thus, I argue that we need to pose, for ourselves, the questions of moral choice, modernity and normative authority that arise within the trajectory of the protagonists in these films. The scope and aim of this thesis is defined, thus, to articulate the questions that arise for the heroines in each of these films.

This approach moves from the inside out. I begin with *Stella*, following the process of characterisation of the protagonist and, subsequently, the articulation of her moral predicament and the situation of that predicament. That chapter is followed by a theoretical chapter, in which I outline my use of Hegel, my understanding of modernity and hermeneutics and my approach to film aesthetics. This is followed by the interpretations of *A Girl in Black* and *A Matter of Dignity*.

A note on scholarship and reception: It is a problem in scholarship of the early Cacoyannis films that very little was written at the time and not much more has been written since. In order to contextualise these films, I have, therefore, organised each chapter around a comparison with one or two other films, which are not Greek. As I do not consider Cacoyannis as merely a Greek filmmaker but as an international *auteur*, it is natural to compare him with other European and non-European directors, such as Agnès Varda, Roberto Rossellini, Michelangelo Antonioni and Satyajit Ray. The choice of films for comparison is thematic. Like *Stella*, Varda's *Cléo de 5 à 7* (1962) is the portrait of a female artist. Like *A Girl in Black*, Rossellini's *Stromboli* (1950) and Antonioni's *L'Avventura* (1960) are island films. Ray's marvellous film, *The Music*

Room, from 1958, is the most significant comparison (to *A Matter of Dignity*) in that it deals with substantial ethical and historical problems that are very similar to the problems addressed by Cacoyannis. This set of comparisons is meant also to stress that Cacoyannis does not address merely local issues. The themes of subjective agency, the opposition of nature and modernity, the demise of an ancient order, which we find in the non-Greek films, are comparable to the themes that we find in Cacoyannis.

Part 2.

The aesthetic impression of ambiguity and complexity that one may think of Cacoyannis' early films is sustained by what we know of his background, intentions and, also, by the early reception of his films. As already mentioned, a Greek term sometimes used by Greek reviewers, in the 1960s, to describe his early films is '*ithografia*,'⁵ meaning a noting down or recording of customs. Throughout the early reviews and the comments Cacoyannis makes about his life and his early career, the picture emerges of an international director whose main ambition would be to give expression to specifically Greek customs and aesthetic values. I use the word 'custom,' but, in fact, the corresponding Greek term «ἦθος» (*ethos*) is not immediately translatable into English. It means 'custom,' but that word is a bit old fashioned and tends to be replaced by words like 'culture,' 'social practice,' 'ideology' and other terms from modern social science. Thereby, a nuance and a double meaning, which is present in the Greek word '*ethos*,' is lost. This word means both what one does or a way of doing things, in a particular place, but it also retains the connotation of ethical norms. (I compare '*ethos*' to the Latin word '*mores*,' which retains such a connotation.) One may think that this is also the case with social science terminology, but there one establishes oneself at a distance of objectivity. The suffix '-graphy,' on the contrary, which comes from the Greek word «γραφή», meaning 'writing,' has a very literal connotation that is different from the implication of scientific terminology, which is associated always with a certain method of explanation. *Ithografia*, as applied to the early films of Cacoyannis, means that certain features or portions of Greek reality, a particular place and a particular class, are isolated for scrutiny and, then, described.

⁵ Nikos Kolovos, for example, writes that *Stella* constitutes a «λαϊκό δράμα ηθών» (*laiko drama ithon*). The Greek word 'laiko,' here, means 'popular' or 'of the people' (Festival 52).

The term has a specific meaning in Greek literary history. *Ithografia* means short story or novel describing the Greek countryside, the Greek village with its local traditions and naive, simple inhabitants.⁶ Some critics broaden the term to consider ‘*ithografia*’ as also describing life in Greek cities after the 1930s. *Ithografia*, as a genre of prose, begins in Modern Greek literature the penultimate decade of the 19th century, around 1880, after the move away from romance and the culture of the historical novel of the old Athenian school.⁷ A Greek scholar defines it as “the realistic representation of the morals, customs, behaviour and ideologies of the collective way of life of a specific segment of society, either rural or urban” (Voutouris 159-260) whilst *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines the term ‘ethography’ as the “[d]epiction or description of human character . . .”

Out of this scrutiny, we can say that Cacoyannis’ films were seen to uncover not merely a set of habits or relationships of power and the like but certain ethical questions⁸ that are specific to a segment of society. It is not the case that these films are not social or do not deal with social reality, but they do so with a view to bringing out particular ethical conflicts, problems and dilemmas. As I will go on to show, in the case of Cacoyannis, these ethical problems are expressed through a particular dramatic aesthetic borrowing from the Greek tradition of tragedy⁹ but also from other aesthetic features of Greek life. This, at least, was the intention of the director, and this was how his films were perceived abroad by contemporary critics.¹⁰

⁶ The term ‘*ithografia*’ can also be extended to refer to painting. Genre painting is usually defined, as such, on iconographical grounds, that is, its subject matter is derived from daily life, especially from that of peasants and the countryside in general.

⁷ For more info on *ithografia*, see Hokwerda’s “Modernism in Greek Literature.”

⁸ Nikos Kolovos writes that the early films of Cacoyannis wrap up his first «ηθολογική, ηθογραφική» (*ithologiki, ithografiki*) period of his work (Festival 53).

⁹ Antonis Moschovakis, for example, defines Cacoyannis’ work as a movement “from *ithografia* to tragedy” (Festival 17).

¹⁰ A critic in France, for the *Espress*, makes the bold statement that “Cacoyannis introduced Greek tragedy into the constellation of cinema” (Siafkos 95-96).

His various reviewers also emphasise, however, that Cacoyannis' films are part of a wider European tradition of cinema, and Cacoyannis himself stressed that he came from a uniquely international background. His artistic oeuvre was both permeated by his ideas of home and Greece and the drive to expand horizons and gain popularity: "In my art, I chose to deal with the impossible, which I made possible, to combine, that is, even unintentionally, from the very start, quality with commercialism" (Siafkos 15). In various hard to find biographical comments in Greek, Cacoyannis stresses that he came from a privileged Anglophile environment with close ties to Greece. In his early career, he got to know an international cultural jet-set. I will start by presenting some of his own comments about his life, in my own translation:

I was born in a land by the water, Cyprus, and lived my life as a wanderer in the cities of the world with Greekness as my dowry and provision, which I carried within – a virtue indeed. (Siafkos 15)

Cacoyannis presented himself as a nomad, who had an explicit and noble idea of Greece and of "Greekness." His artistic vision, presumably, was permeated with a vocation to express this particular quality of "Greekness." At the same time, coming from the particular island of Cyprus introduced an international element into his life and shaped his destiny in the period of the Second World War:

Cyprus was then a colony under British control, a fact that played a significant role in my life. By going to study law in England, as the son of a middle class family, I was "saved," eventually, since the Second World War cut all ties with the island for many years. (Siafkos 15)

Cacoyannis' outlook was shaped by this particular condition and the political choices it implied.¹¹ The family was semi-colonial in its attitude; it also had other indirect links to England: "We had many relatives in Egypt. The family tree of my mother held many

¹¹ "At that time, everyone spoke of the "union," but conditions were not ideal. Ideally, I was in favour of it since very early – since even ten years old. Of course, my influences originated from the general atmosphere, although I was torn because I liked the English. We socialised with the children of many English families, and we all spoke the language very well. In a relatively small town, with my family belonging to the bourgeois and due to the particular profession of my father, it was natural that many direct contacts with the English existed." (Siafkos 26)

important branches there” (Siafkos 29). In Cacoyannis’ own words, his future in England was presented as undisputed: “My journey to England for study purposes was long predetermined, since it was decided from the start that I had to become a lawyer – as the elder son – in order to continue the practice of my father. . . . I was barely 18. . . . It was 1938” (Siafkos 33). Eventually, the war created a diaspora situation for the family, as it was divided between England, Greece and North Africa: “With the start of the war, communication with my family in Cyprus was cut, while my father had arranged to send my mother and the other children to North Africa, where we had relatives” (Siafkos 37).

During the war, Cacoyannis settled in London and became a journalist reporting on Greece and, then, on Cyprus for the BBC radio. Later, he came to make programmes on culture. He stayed in the UK until 1951.¹² Cacoyannis got involved in the arts and, whilst there, socialised with important people of letters, some of them with close ties to Oxford.¹³ He also had a passion for theatre.¹⁴ While in England, he started pursuing this interest. In 1944, he took acting classes at the Central School of Dramatic Arts, and, in 1946, he took some basic directing classes at the Old Vic, the same year it opened. He appeared in a play by Oscar Wilde just as back in Greece had appeared in a play by Albert Camus (Siafkos 55). While at the BBC, he was surrounded by well-known

¹² “In 1941, I passed exams into the Greek service of the BBC as a translator and a broadcaster. Very soon, a show for Cyprus was created that aired twice a week, which I took over. I stayed at the BBC until 1951, having later taken the management of its art shows” (Siafkos 37).

¹³ In his autobiography, Cacoyannis reminisces about his first love interest, a married woman from Romania, called Flora, whose husband “later became a professor at Oxford” (Siafkos 35).

¹⁴ In his autobiography, Cacoyannis remembers fondly his love for the theatre: “[B]ecause I loved Marlene Dietrich, I photographed a poster of hers, and, after printing it, I wrote on the back, “to my dear Michael, Marlene,” and showed it to everyone as a genuine signed autograph. . . . We used to go to the theater in the summer when touring productions visited Cyprus from Greece. . . . Theater mesmerised me. . . . I wanted since a child to be the centre of attention, for a drama to always exist around me. Furthermore, I was twice threatened with a pistol . . .” (Siafkos 30-31)

figures, such as Orson Welles, whom, however, he abstained from fully knowing.¹⁵

Acting became his vocation, even though, by 1943, he had taken his law degree.¹⁶

During this time, Cacoyannis did not lose his connection to Greece: “In 1945, I returned to Cyprus after almost 7 years. On my way back to London, I had to pass through Athens. My plans were to stay in Athens for almost a week for job interviews. That is when I met Sikelianos, Tsarouchis, Engonopoulous and others” (Siafkos 48). Cacoyannis’ meeting with such important Greek figures – Sikelianos, a lyric poet and playwright, Tsarouchis (a painter who later became Cacoyannis’ long-time collaborator and designer of the sets of his films) and Engonopoulos, a poet and painter – was indicative of his capacity to make connections, something which became a feature of his life. When he was later in the U.S., he frequented or was frequented by a very wealthy set of *mécènes* and was introduced to select clubs.¹⁷ This aspect of his life and the friendships he had established determined his early career as a filmmaker:

For my return to Athens, an important factor was my meeting with Dimitris Horn¹⁸ – ‘Takis’ to friends – who was in London with a scholarship from the British Council in order to watch English theatre. . . . I received a letter by Takis stating that he was offered to take part in a film in Egypt with a director of his own choosing, and that Ellie (Lambeti) had also wanted me to be that director. . . . It was meant to be my first movie, *Windfall in Athens*, with which I learnt to make cinema. (Siafkos 67-69)

¹⁵ “In the office next to mine existed that of Orson Welles. We didn’t hang out. I was bored by him. He was generally a very closed person” (Siafkos 40).

¹⁶ “In 1943, I graduated from law school. I had decided to send the diploma to my father so he can... frame it. It is obvious, of course, that I never practiced the profession. The same year, I gave my first and last recital as a Greek tenor in my life” (Siafkos 42).

¹⁷ “To find myself in America wasn’t difficult. In London, all my relationships were on a high level. We were visited by various millionaires from the other side of the Atlantic, who supported the arts. . . . [T]hrough all the Americans that had come to London, I had reference letters for all the great families: the Astors, the Fords, etc. . . . When I arrived, I was taken to a club, the New York Athletic Club, which distributed rooms to the guests of its members. . . . I even went to Hollywood, an unknown then in the midst of celebrities, sent with all expenses paid by Minnie Astor, Vincent Astor’s wife . . . On my right, sat the sister of Olivia de Havilland, Joan Fontaine. At the table across, sat Elisabeth Taylor, who wasn’t invited and had just married Hilton. She was still a child then.” (Siafkos 62-66)

¹⁸ Cacoyannis, here, refers to the protagonist of his film, *A Girl in Black*.

With his mixed and international – partly, quite privileged – background, then, Cacoyannis’ approach to Greece, its society and cultural traditions could not, of course, be spontaneous or unreflected. He developed his own idea of what it meant to be Greek:

I often think of who I am, and I decide that I am a philhellene. I consider the term of crucial importance as it shows that I adore something which wasn’t given to me by default, but, on the contrary, that it is a gift I conquered consciously. Simultaneously, I am also a Greek from Cyprus, a fact I honoured often with acts – not words. (Siafkos 283)

Ultimately, Cacoyannis comes to think of his relation to Greece as a determining factor in his overall relation to theatre and drama: “And in theatre, too, I had always in mind Greekness, despite belonging to the class of international directors, something which hasn’t probably been established in Greece yet” (Siafkos 284).

Now, in Cacoyannis’ own reflections and in the early reflection of his films, there is the notion that his films express a particularly Greek aesthetic that is conditioned by nature, the extreme luminosity of Greece, which has been interpreted in Greek drama or by Greek poets, for example Odysseas Elytis,¹⁹ as a Greek light imbued with an implication of truth. Something like this idea of a stark light leaving nothing hidden is also present in the notion that ancient Greek tragedy is concerned with stark, objective oppositions – not with psychology or subjective mysticism. There is, thus, in Cacoyannis and his early critics, a conception of cultural continuity between visual aesthetics, ancient tragedy and a transition from the aesthetic to the ethical based on a notion of stark explicitness. When I come to discuss the philosopher Georges Bataille, in Chapter Two, this conception of an ethical aesthetic synthesis around a perspective on the world, which is objective, rather than subjective, will become relevant. Bataille articulates a modern relation to the sacred, in which mysticism and tragedy are parallel on the same level, as both the tragic and the mystical involve a subjective experience of

¹⁹ See Odysseas Elytis’ *Prosanatolismoi*.

transgression in relation to common sense and nature. The conception of ancient Greek tragedy, invoked by Cacoyannis and by his critics, is clearly different from this notion of subjective experience. The tragic universe is a space of clarity, of stark luminosity, in which the terms of conflict are all too clear. They are clear for the participants and for the audience. There is nothing subjective, private or hidden about the tragic conflict. Tragedy, thus, carries an implication of ethical and aesthetic objectivity. This notion of objectivity is very important to this thesis, as it represents the antidote to the genre of melodrama.

Even though Cacoyannis intended to engage with a Greek tradition and was perceived to do so by his first critics, he is also, as I mentioned, perceived and saw himself as an international filmmaker – indeed, as one of the only international Greek filmmakers. Cacoyannis, thus, states about his own films that they “caught on from the first moment abroad because they were clearly Greek; I always dealt with Greek problems” (Cacoyannis 94). Although his early critics kept returning to comparisons with Juan Antonio Bardem from Spain and with Rossellini from Italy, they agreed on seeing his first films as international neo-realist or ‘poetic realist’²⁰ films about Greece made according to specifically Greek aesthetic principles.

We need not, of course, agree with Cacoyannis or with his early critics. We could question the notion of a ‘Greek aesthetic tradition’ or the idea of ‘*ithografia*,’ and we could be sceptical, more generally, about an auteurist approach that would take the director’s stated intentions as the sole horizon of interpretation. The hermeneutic approach presented here sees the films in light of or against the background of these intentions but, at the same time, provides a philosophical context in which the significance of the characters’ predicaments, the events in the drama and the ethical

²⁰ Éric Rohmer, for example, in *Les Arts*, from 1958, pinpoints to Cacoyannis’ drawing on elements of poetic realism in the scene of the picnic in *Stella* (Festival 131).

stakes of each film can be interpreted. Hence, this mode of interpretation goes far beyond the notions of ‘poetic realism’ and of ‘Greekness’ that the director uses to elucidate his work. Nevertheless, these indications provide very useful clues as to how to approach the relationship between style and drama in his films.

Cacoyannis’ films are Greek in a multitude of ways, in the structure and presentation of ethical conflict, in the emphasis on clarity and objectivity and in specific references to places. It is, perhaps, precisely because Cacoyannis came from Cyprus and had access to an international cultural elite, that he could approach Greek society and culture afresh. Precise references to locations or collaborations with Greek artists were very significant for the creation of these early films. Through Melina Mercouri, his leading lady in *Stella*,²¹ he got to collaborate with the famous theorist and composer of Greek music, Manos Hatzidakis. Hatzidakis composed the music to the songs for the film *Stella* (Cacoyannis wrote the lyrics), and these songs, subsequently, became extremely famous and well-known in Greek popular culture. The location for the story in *Stella*, the bar Paradise, was real. A later location in the film, a crossroads, was real at the time, now transformed.²² Shooting scenes of Athenian high society nightlife, in *A Matter of Dignity*, coincided with actual high society nightlife off-screen.²³ In *A Matter of Dignity*, specific locations are highly significant for the dramatic action and, partly, generate the action:

As it has been rightly observed, neither the scenes in Arachova, the Tinos scenes nor the scenes in the nightclubs of Athens, are there by chance as cases of

²¹ “We had met when I stayed for a week in Athens, after an aeroplane adventure over the Aegean. We anyway moved in the same circles. Then, she even introduced me to Hatzidakis” (Siafkos 81).

²² “The people’s bar Paradise existed in Neapoli. . . . As far as the crossroads is concerned, which appears in the finale, it is unrecognizable nowadays. It is formed by the meeting of the streets Kallidromiou, Plapouta and Tsamadou” (Siafkos 83).

²³ “Finally, we made a night shooting at Chez la Pain, a nightclub in Kastella that looked over Mikrolimano from above. The high society of Athens in its entirety was there, even my mother, who happened to be in Athens. We set the cameras to roll when we announced it. Present were Onassis, Lykourazos, who danced salsa and rumba, and others” (Siafkos 102-103)

folklore and of interesting settings. They are closely linked with the necessity of the action, which follows its own way. (Festival 138)

Likewise, the setting of *A Girl in Black*, the island of Hydra, had qualities, which went directly into the story: “The island wasn’t yet touristic then and maintained its nobility and its old families. People were guileless, innocent” (Siafkos 93).

Returning to how Cacoyannis’ early critics perceived him, and apart from noting his fame and the parallels that may be observed between his films and those of Bergman, Bardem, Federico Fellini or Rossellini, some of his reviewers tried to reflect on what is common to a Mediterranean style in cinema.²⁴ In 1958, comparing Cacoyannis to Fellini and Bardem, one Greek reviewer makes the vague but suggestive remark:

It’s not by chance, perhaps, that both aforementioned directors are Mediterranean just as Cacoyannis is. The society of Spain, Italy and Greece present the same “closed” character; religious faith doesn’t possess the Western mysticism; nature and everyday things tie more easily with the ethical problem and with faith. (Festival 136)

We may not want to endorse this generalisation about Mediterranean European countries and still appreciate the point that, in certain historical situations that the films of Cacoyannis depict, questions of religion are directly involved with everyday life. Marcel Martin, for the French magazine *Cinéma* ’57, makes a similar remark, but, this time, focussing away from the content of these films on Cacoyannis’ style, which he calls, again, “objective” (Festival 134). This notion of objectivity appears to be very important to the aesthetic reflections of Cacoyannis himself. It is, as I mentioned, important to the interpretation put forward in my thesis, in that a certain kind of aesthetic objectivity will turn out to match a particular sort of ethical objectivity. Marcel Martin, thus, writes: “On the other hand, rediscovering alone cinema, whatever the level

²⁴ In 1959, Isabel Quigly, of *The Spectator*, writes that “[a]long with Bardem and Fellini, Cacoyannis gives us a serious and melancholic view of the Mediterranean way of life” (Festival 141).

of their filmic culture is, the new creators of these countries turn naturally to a style of expression that is realistic and objective” (Festival 134). Early reviewers perceived a strong connection between style and the Greek tradition of tragedy. In a flowery passage from 1959, one reviewer, for *The Manchester Guardian*, waxes lyrical about the face of the actress in *A Matter of Dignity*, speculating that her beauty recalls ancient Greek sculptures but, then, making the more subtle point that this cultural rootedness provides for the film a sort of weight and motivation, which carries the story onto an international level.²⁵ Thus, the paradoxical but, of course, very persuasive idea is that, by drawing on the weight of a Greek cultural tradition, Cacoyannis imbues the local, quite particular story, with a near universal significance – given that the ancient Greek heritage is widely known outside of Greece.²⁶

One reviewer, from the *Financial Times*, notes that the ending of *A Matter of Dignity* presents, further, a perfect union of something realistic and something dramatic: “The last unforgettable scene of Chloe (the film’s heroine) becoming assimilated in the crowd of simple people holds the perfection that only a great director could impress” (Siafkos 104).²⁷ Other reviewers, among them, Éric Rohmer, for *Les Arts*, in 1958, seek to designate a particular classicism or balance in these early films, a balance between the local and the universal, between style and dramatic significance.²⁸ This aesthetic

²⁵ “In the archaeological museum of Athens, that treasure of treasures, exist the stone copies of this actress. Her beauty is classical with the strict Greek sense of the term, which, among other things, means that she is neither cheaply pretty nor particularly in fashion . . . The most natural comparison to her gaze and her looks is that of the tragic muse . . . Even if there wasn’t for the scene of the dawn on top of the Acropolis, the essence of the film might still have existed, but, if it weren’t for this young actress, this portrait of the Athenian society by Cacoyannis, as much as it might have been carefully drawn, would have been both tiring and, perhaps, not even accepted outside of Greece.” (Festival 139)

²⁶ “I proved that tragedy is alive and, even though it is Greek heritage, it belongs to the whole world. . . . For me, the deeper the local roots of a film, the more universal the film can become” (Cacoyannis 91-94).

²⁷ In a 1956 review of *A Girl in Black*, G. Charensol, of *France-Soir*, states that “the setting, brilliantly clear, creates a shocking antithesis to the dramas that unroll within these white pathways, next to the eternal sea” (Festival 132).

²⁸ “There is in this film . . . a mix of the natural and of the holly that recalls . . . what we find in the works of Mizoguchi. Greece, just as Japan, is the carrier of a tradition that cannot be invested in cinema through traditional channels, as it happens with the Latinos or the English speaking. Let’s allow

subtlety is very well formulated by Karel Reisz, of *Sight and Sound*, in 1956-57, who comments on *A Girl in Black*:

Avoiding to give both the postal card beauty and the awkward lush effects that are of fashion in the more expressive films being shot on location in Italy, Cacoyannis achieves communicating the feeling of the place, avoiding to shove *couleur locale* to our faces; he prefers coming closer to his characters and inspecting them through a sympathetic but not romantic viewpoint. (Festival 134)

Simultaneously, in a 1955 article by Achilleas Mamakis, for the Greek newspaper *Ethnos*, and, again, in Rohmer's article, what is emphasised is the dramatic strength of Cacoyannis' films:

Cacoyannis, . . . taking as a basis an unpublished theater play by Iakovos Kambanellis, made a sufficiently solid plot that, for the first time, . . . ventures to not only tell a story in images but to portray a psyche, to bring to life a character, to present a type. (Festival 128)

The end recalls that of *Othello*, the only difference being that the stabbed heroine still finds strength, in a series of close-ups, to tightly embrace her murderer, whilst in the verge of dawn the housewives in their nightclothes surround the couple as a chorus in ancient tragedy. (Festival 131)

It appears that this balance of spontaneity and grandeur, realism and drama was also very much intended and orchestrated by the director in his work with non-actors.

For instance, Cacoyannis states:

The scene at the dock in Hydra, in *A Girl in Black*, of the boats returning with the drowned children, was shot by misleading the local women, pushing them in a frenzy of despair and placing the camera in between them, giving them directions while yelling, re-arranging the crying crowd with hurry and recording images that only non-actors could bring alive so unpretentiously and vividly. So the scene had to be completed in real time and with the consequences of real life. (Cacoyannis 48)

Cacoyannis' "classical balance" does not just include the dramatic strength of his films, however, and his use of actors and settings, but, even, a particular infusion of

the soul of Aeschylus roam around the world. . . . [L]et the Greeks learn about Maupassant. . . . [T]he performances of the actors, which we would have accepted with difficulty from other parts of the world, become acceptable under the Attica sky and through the participation of the people in this drama. Even if it is a forced and vague mimesis of the ancient chorus, it echoes so rightly that it makes us believe in a possible exchange between the glorious heritage of the ancients and the fresh blood of modern teachers." (Festival 131)

the setting within the style. As Marcel Martin comments: “The drama unrolls in a marvellous setting of cliffs and sea, where a blinding light carves the shadows and seems to uncover mercilessly the truth of the people and of things” (Festival 134).

Cacoyannis, later, looking back on his early career, observes that the balance of style is achieved both by a general maxim of using what is at his disposal but, by extension and in a much deeper sense, by using his own knowledge of the reality he is about to render. This rootedness in reality is itself balanced against his deliberate artistic choices. There is no question, therefore, of his films merely recording reality, in spite of what the term ‘*ithografia*’ may suggest. He prefers the term ‘poetic realism,’ to that of ‘neo-realism,’ because it contains the idea that reality is taken up and, then, used as material for a poetic or artistic construction:

In any case, the director has to do his best under specific circumstances, adapting the simplicity of his means²⁹ to a simple approach in general. . . . The director can do this with success by stepping firmly on ground and having his eyes on the life that rolls by in front of him. . . . Of course, I don’t mean that he has to be satisfied with recording just reality, far from it. He has to make it submit, through careful choosing and composition, to his own interpretation, tragical, lyrical or satirical, depending on the case. (Cacoyannis 48-49)

At this point, we can perceive a union or, at least, a transition between aesthetics and ethics, style, location and spirituality. For the knowledge that the director possesses of reality is wide and inclusive and extends into history and religion:

Elaborate effects or the movement of the camera with a crane . . . are not only technically impossible in Greece but foreign to the form, character and rhythm of life. By contrast, the dramatic antithesis of, let’s say, the black-dressed women of the village against the white-washed walls, provides the much needed strictness of composition and framing. In the dashing sharpness of the Greek light, even the convention of make-up ends up being unacceptable: Faces must have the earthly quality of stone in order to come alive. . . . This logic, heritage from the pagan tradition, dispenses with mysticism, nourishes the individual pride that defies even the gods and is found not only at the roots of Greek life but also of Greek art. From the perspective of tragedy, this means that the fate of mankind, stemming from its conflict with the environment, follows the logical

²⁹ “Whatever the Greek director misses in expanse and spectacle he can win in dramatic intensity and depth . . .” (Cacoyannis 50).

shape of personal responsibility, rather than the dark laws of some hidden power. (Cacoyannis 50-51)

It is this very cultural knowledge of Cacoyannis, of how the present is embedded in a past, which also justifies for him his choice of adapting ancient tragedies for the big screen. This later choice is significant also for his early films, which, as my thesis argues, also contain tragic elements³⁰ and a relationship with tragedy.³¹

³⁰ Many reviewers of Cacoyannis have highlighted his films' relationship to tragedy. In 1956, a critic from *The Times* refers to *A Girl in Black* as "[a] modern Greek tragedy on screen" (Festival 131).

³¹ "For me, tragedy is not something outdated. It is the most alive Greek material that exists, the most modern, and I say 'modern' because it is eternal. It is not something tied with the superficial aspects of life. It goes to depth, and life at depth hasn't changed. Nor, despite the appearances, is it about to change, since man is mortal, and the basic problems remain the same. I am not interested in dealing with the superficial social problems, because those change and, therefore, are overcome. From the beginning of my career, I wanted to touch on deeper conflicts. I am talking about the time before I did tragedy. From my first films, I tried to reach at the roots of life. Of course, I don't ignore the contemporary and the historical importance of change that progress brings, the consumerist reality, the daily hues of life, but I think documentary renders those a lot more faithfully than interpretative cinema." (Cacoyannis 89)

Chapter 1 | *Stella*

“A creature cannot but obey. The only choice given to men, as intelligent and free creatures, is to desire obedience or not to desire it. If a man does not desire it, he obeys all the same, perpetually, inasmuch as he is a thing subject to mechanical necessity” (Weil, *Waiting* 76).

1.1 | Introduction

This chapter is devoted to the film *Stella* by Michael Cacoyannis, from 1955. In presenting an analysis of the plot and the film's central character, Stella, the chapter raises a number of questions of interpretation. The questions focus on the motivation of the protagonist within the plot and carry wider implications, concerning ethics and subjectivity. These questions will come to inform the thesis as a whole and will be explored further in the following chapters along two parallel tracks: First, the methodology chapter, Chapter 2, presents a framework of analysis based on a German (Hegelian) tradition of dramatic and ethical theory that I will begin to introduce below. As mentioned in the Introduction to the thesis, central to this perspective, as it has been applied to film by Robert Pippin in his book on film-noir, is a dual focus on motivation and character. This focus is certainly not new in American criticism of Hollywood films; there is a humanist tradition of American critics of which, for example, Lesley Brill is one who has most relevance to my thesis. Still, as I will explain below, this character-centred method of interpretation has not been strongly represented in recent film theory. Second, Chapters 3 and 4 present my interpretation of the remaining Cacoyannis' films covered by this thesis, *A Girl in Black* (1956) and *A Matter of Dignity* (1958), in terms of this theory.

In this chapter, thus, I seek to introduce the problems that will be described conceptually and abstractly within the rest of my thesis, in order to motivate the choice of my theoretical framework. In the chapter on *Stella*, these problems arise from an interpretation of the protagonist's motivations, i.e., her reasons for acting as she does. In particular, I devote close attention to the characterisation of the protagonist, her relationships with other characters and the evolution of the protagonist within the plot.

The analysis and interpretation take the form of a kind of spiral: They follow the film's description of its protagonist from the setting of the story, through its web of character relations, and culminate in an interpretation of the climactic events within the plot. The result of this interpretation, however, is a further question. The interpretation shows that the protagonist's motivations involve a sort of gap at the dramatically most important point in the story. If we begin to spell out the implications of this motivational gap, we encounter ethical questions, which I will refer to with the term 'modern tragedy' and which the rest of the thesis will develop both theoretically and in relation to the three films by Cacoyannis.

In his book on motivation in film-noir, Pippin identifies a similar question: Noting that characters in these films appear to act on very quickly shifting motivations, assumptions and circumstances, he argues that these films challenge the very idea of a rational agent, carrying out his or her intentions in a deliberate way. It is striking but also paradoxical that this sort of detailed analysis of motivation takes place in the context of highly stylised genre films made within studio conditions, that is, films in which any notion of realism is based on aesthetic conventions internal to film. The tradition of poetic realism³² that Cacoyannis sees himself as belonging to provides less stylised portraits of characters and, thus, would seem to invite even more strongly than the American genre films a detailed interpretation of characters and their motivations. Yet, neither the criticism of Cacoyannis nor the criticism on French poetic realism or Italian neo-realism has adopted the method of the American character-based tradition represented here by Brill and Pippin. It is, therefore, one of the aims of this thesis to introduce into the discussion of European *auteur* cinema this critical idiom initially developed in the study of classical Hollywood studio films.

³² Cacoyannis refers to poetic realism in an interview entitled "Personality of the Month."

The Hegelian paradigm that I see as the framework of my interpretation can usefully be thought of as a certain dramatic approach to filmic expression. Drawing upon – but significantly revising – Aristotle’s definition of tragedy in the *Poetics*, Hegel sets out the following definition of dramatic expression:

What drama in general needs to be is the presentation, to our minds and imagination, of actual human actions and affairs and therefore of persons expressing their actions in words. But a dramatic action is not confined to the simple and undisturbed accomplishment of a specific aim; on the contrary it rests entirely on *collisions* of circumstances, passions, and characters, and leads therefore to actions and then to the reactions which in turn necessitate a resolution of the conflict and discord. (*Aesthetics* 1159)

In this account, drama is defined by its content, the conflict and the human actions it makes present. Applied to film, this would mean that what the film aims to do, aesthetically, is to represent a dramatic conflict; what film experience offers is an opportunity, for the spectator, to witness and, then, think about this dramatic conflict. Pippin’s painstaking reconstructions of motivations are very good examples of this. His interpretations do not purport to spell out an immediate experience but to spell out the experience of the film by someone who is thinking about it afterwards.

Of course, a current trend in film theory stresses a very different aspect of expression and experience. A series of critics, drawing either on the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty³³ or the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze,³⁴ describe film experience as an immediate sensory engagement with the basic features and parameters of perception. I quote three representative passages by Sarah Cooper, Vivian Sobchack and Martine Beugnet respectively, as well as a passage by Dudley Andrew who refers to the influence of Merleau-Ponty on Bazin:

By describing the face as the privileged imprint of being and naming this the most legible trace of the soul, Bazin is locating the soul as the imprint of

³³ See Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s *Sense and Non-Sense*, specifically Chapter 4.

³⁴ See Gilles Deleuze’s *Cinema 1: The Movement Image*.

individual identity, akin to a fingerprint, within the finest and barely visible, swirling tracks of the skin. (Cooper, *Soul* 78)

As a communicative system, then, what is called the “film experience” uniquely opens up and exposes the inhabited space of direct experience as a condition of singular embodiment and makes it accessible and visible to more than the single consciousness who lives it. (Sobchack 9)

In mainstream practices, then, cinematic vision is bound to the requirements of narrative exposition and tends to be constructed according to a strict optical organization; to watch a film is to distinguish objects and human forms (characters) at the level of representation, already distinct and encoded. (Beugnet 67)

Bazin would be obliged to say that the real exists only as perceived... (Andrew 64)

The Hegelian approach to film expression as dramatic expression leads to an aesthetic focus opposed to the above: Film experience is not a sort of immersion or participation in the film but a tracking of the characters, their relations, conflicts, motivations, out of which we, the viewers, come to ask the film the questions that we see arising in the trajectory of the central character. This hermeneutic approach is clearly ethical in its widest implications, in that it is concerned with the characters’ reasons for acting.

In their recent book, *Film and Ethics: Foreclosed Encounters*, Lisa Downing and Libby Saxton make the following introductory statement: “As already stated, film studies has had surprisingly little to say about ethics, at least in the philosophical sense in which the term is used here” (11). They go on to spell out the term ‘ethics’ with reference to spectatorship and psychoanalysis. Another influential approach to ethics, in film studies, has taken its starting point in the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas. Thus, Sarah Cooper approaches the films of the Dardenne brothers through the Levinasian concept of the ‘face’ (*rapport de face à face*) (Levinas 95), considered as a source of ethical authority: “The concept of the face is central to the four most recent films of the Dardenne brothers, as is the resonance of its commandment” (Cooper, *Mortal* 69).

The character-based method of interpretation practiced here does share with Cooper's approach an interest in normative authority, but this question will be located within the dramatic context of the film as a whole and not primarily within specific encounters. By contrast, it is concerned with problems that arise, within the plot, from different sources of motivation. Stella is, essentially, a character portrait of a woman performer and the world she lives in. The term 'ethical' is used, in this thesis, in the context of Hegel's philosophy, which deals with questions of normative authority, rather than personal, purely subjective, responsibility. The 'ethical' refers, in his philosophy, to a notion of objective norms. These are commands that have a binding force within a community, commands that, however, are no longer unproblematic in the modern age.³⁵

In his analysis of Sophocles' play *Antigone*, in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel presents ancient tragedy as an ethical drama in which the conflict stems from a contradiction between objective norms. This kind of drama illustrates, for Hegel, what the ethical is or originally was.³⁶ Whereas modern moral responsibility can be attributed to an individual, the ethical act carries a significance far wider than the concerns of an individual: "The content of the ethical act must be substantial in character, or must be entire and universal; hence it can only stand in relation to the entire individual, to the

³⁵ I refer both to Hegel's discussion of *Antigone* and his *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art* and to works in literary theory by Georg Lukács and Péter Szondi, who are both directly inspired by Hegel. All of these authors take their starting point in an idealised, conceptual distinction between an archaic past, identified with classic Greek literature, and a period of aesthetic and ethical modernity, which they define in different terms, depending on the time in which they write and the kinds of modern literature (drama or novels) which they write about.

³⁶ The term 'ethical' translates the German word '*sittlich*,' which comes from '*Sitte*,' meaning 'custom' or 'convention.' This could suggest a notion of ethical relativism. However, the term 'ethical,' in Hegel, does not carry this modern, relativistic connotation: "But Hegel through the bulk of this chapter reads the dialectic of society's ethical life, or *Sittlichkeit* as he calls it, on another level, more detailed; whose vocabulary is borrowed from the Greek tragedians" (Taylor 173). In this theory of an archaic world, Hegel is, first of all, interested in the binding force of ethical norms within a community: "Morality concerns the *inner* sphere of the individual . . . ethical life considers the individual as an integral part of the social and political whole." (Beiser 234)

individual *qua* universal” (258). The distinction between the ethical, which extends the bounds of the individual, and the moral, which finds its location within an individual consciousness and character, is at the basis also of Hegel’s distinction in his *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, between ancient tragedy – of which the plays by Sophocles are his primary example – and the plays of William Shakespeare (and other subsequent writers). Plays like *Hamlet* do not derive their dramatic tension and their interest from the sort of ethical conflict presented by Sophocles but from a refined psychological analysis of character motivation. Hegel coins the term ‘modern tragedy’ to describe this kind of play. This concept of ‘modern tragedy,’ which will be central also to my thesis, is summed up concisely in the introduction to a study on Shakespeare, entitled *Hegel and Shakespeare on Moral Imagination*:

According to Hegel, the difference between ancient and modern drama has to do with the kind of ethical agency at work. In Sophocles’ *Antigone*, Antigone and Creon are two sides of an immediate ethical substance that is self-divided into the law of the Penates (the household gods) and the law of the State. The tragedy is not so much personal as the destruction of that form of ethical substance. In *Hamlet*, on the other hand, what is at issue is Hamlets’ character, his skepticism, and the strictly individual pathos that drives him. And the tragedy is his. (Bates 8)

For the purposes of this thesis, the terms of interest in this quote are “immediate ethical substance,” “modern drama” and “character.” Especially of interest is their appearance together in one passage. The ethical substance is, for Hegel, the cohesive archaic community that I referred to above. Modern tragedy is opposed to this ethical community and finds in the psychological analysis of character its source of drama. My interpretation of *Stella* will be an analysis of character, but the interpretation of this character will bring up ethical questions that cannot find an answer solely within the horizon of her psychology. Whereas Hegel uses the term ‘modern tragedy’ to demarcate Shakespeare and subsequent writers of tragedy from the writers of tragedy in ancient Greece, my analysis, by contrast, will be concerned with an unsettled relationship

between psychological modernity and ‘the ethical,’ in his sense of the term.³⁷ Said in passing, this is not a question of intertextuality. I am not trying to show that *Stella* is quoting ancient drama. I would also like to specify that I refer to Hegel’s reading of *Antigone* only in terms of a quite limited theoretical problem: how objective ethical commands can find a presence within an otherwise modern context.³⁸

Writing now, just a few years after the death of Cacoyannis, one may say that he is beginning to gain recognition internationally as a seminal European filmmaker, famous, most of all, for his adaptations of Greek tragedy. However, this status was not as self-evident to his contemporaries during the early part of his filmmaking career. It is, for instance, interesting to note that especially Greek critics of the time either did not pay much attention to his films or did not perceive them as representing an original style and approach to filmmaking. Although Cacoyannis fared better abroad, still, very little was published on the film *Stella* at the time in international film journals, and, notably, nothing was written by the French arbiters of taste in *Cahiers du Cinéma* and *Positif*. In a presentation of his early career, entitled “Personality of the Month,” appearing in the journal *Films and Filming*, in July 1960, Cacoyannis’ approach to film is implicitly classified under the heading of melodrama. The text opens on a comparison between Cacoyannis and Bergman:

³⁷ For more on Hegel’s distinction between the moral and the ethical see Wood. Wood writes that “Hegel . . . sees morality as a standpoint that is characteristic of the modern spirit, in contrast with the noble naïveté of ancient ethical life” (133). But Hegel’s conception of these terms changes depending on chronology: “Hegel plainly sees modern morality as an advance on ancient ethical life; but he has still not abandoned his earlier view that morality is at the same time a one-sided view of ethical life. This leaves an unresolved tension in Hegel’s ethical thought: the *systematic* superiority of ethical life versus the *historical* superiority of morality. . . . Hegel’s Jena writings tell us that morality is a standpoint characteristic of the modern world. The moral standpoint is limited, but not false. These writings make no real attempt, however, to show how morality is a *positive* (if limited) aspect of ethical life. Nor do they provide an account of a specifically modern ethical life in which morality is supposed to play a decisive role. Both these tasks are left to Hegel’s mature ethical writings, beginning with the *Heidelberg Encyclopedia* and culminating in the *Philosophy of Right*.” (Wood 133-134)

³⁸ I do not address the full range of questions that the play and Hegel’s reading of it engage with. For instance, Judith Butler, in *Antigone’s Claim: Kinship Between Life and Death*, writes on the foundation of the law; George Steiner, in *Antigones, How the Antigone Legend has Endured in Western Literature, Art and Thought*, interprets the philosophical, anthropological and spiritual implications of the play through a reading of its reception.

Michael Cacoyannis shares with Ingmar Bergman the distinction of being the only internationally famous director from his home country. But there any similarity between the two directors ceases. Bergman concentrates on spiritual and sometimes religious qualities in his films, whereas Cacoyannis aims his at the emotions. (5)

Depicting emotion is less exceptional or distinctive as an artistic project than exploring spiritual themes, perhaps. Certainly, in the early films by Cacoyannis one finds a will to tell stories, to work within an idiom of conventional narrative cinema, rather than, like avant-garde or experimental filmmakers, extend the language of film.

In order to highlight the specificity of Cacoyannis' dramatic style, my analysis of *Stella*, in this chapter, is framed by a comparison between the film and an overtly canonical, modernist film: Agnès Varda's *Cléo de 5 à 7*, from 1962. Thematically and dramatically, *Stella* and *Cléo* have much in common. Both films depict the trajectory and dilemmas of a female protagonist who is a performing artist. Both films deal with themes of art – the freedom that art brings in its wake and the life choices faced by the protagonist. The two films are comparable, further, in that they dramatically involve a moment or question of death. They are different, on the other hand, both in style and in the way they present the protagonist in relation to her surroundings. These two differences are related. Varda's approach to film is that of a conceptual artist who openly exhibits the structural devices that organise the story and the film image. The film is told almost in real time. A large part of the film follows a semi-circular tour around recognisable locations in Paris, depicted in accordance with the actual distances between them. Each segment of the story is presented as a chapter, named with a headline across the film image written in large white letters, referring to a precise point of time between 5 and 7 – the time limits contained in the film's title. This conceptual control over the medium can be traced down to many other details of dialogue and props; I shall look at some of these in the analysis of the film below.

The starting point for Cacoyannis' approach to the film image and to film style is given by the film's dramatic setting: Being a story of a performer named Stella, the film takes its tempo and texture from moments of performance. Its central location is the bar where she performs, and Stella herself is a flamboyant and interesting character who gives the film its dramatic momentum. Varda's film and approach to its protagonist are notably more abstract, immediately given to the evocation of philosophical themes. I will show how the figure of Cléo, in the course of the film, becomes an existentialist character; Stella, by contrast, is a character presented through her performances, her relationships, her shifting attitudes and reactions to people around her. This difference in characterisation entails, as I will show, a further difference in the sort of subjectivity that we, the viewers, can attribute to the protagonist in these two films. An exploration of this difference is the main concern of this comparison: In *Stella*, subjectivity emerges as a locus of ethical responsibility, coinciding with the protagonist's realisation of a limitation within her capacity to make significant life choices. This limit and this realisation appear at the culmination of the drama and are supported by its plot and thematic structure. By contrast, my following analysis will show, in Varda's film, that subjectivity is represented as a locus of self-examination, detached from any relation to an ethical or communal universe of limiting normative authority.

Returning to the question of style, *Stella* straddles the conventional aesthetic divide between realism and theatricality. Cacoyannis himself seems to have been aware that his films exhibit an original generic style. At the same time, one gets a clear impression that he thinks of himself very consciously as an *auteur* who seeks to control his films from the script (written by him)³⁹ through to the finished film. In an early interview devoted to his films of the 1950s, in *Films and Filming*, Cacoyannis presents

³⁹ *Stella* is based on Iakovos Kambanellis' play *Stella with the Red Gloves*, see "Film."

his films as having a recognisable style, independently of the theme and story of each film. He makes the suggestive remark that his films, in terms of style and genre, fall within the category of ‘poetic realism’:

The style changes with every subject, I take it?

Yes of course. But there is an overall personal style which should make one artist’s films identifiable. I don’t think I am a neo-realist at all. I think that many people are deceived by the fact that a lot of my pictures are contemporary and they are shot a great deal on location. But they are not naturalistic. I prefer to think there that they are closer to a sort of poetic realism – the result of a selective and personal interpretation of life. (13)

It is worth dwelling on this quote for it contains, in my view, an important clue to what constitutes the artistic project of Cacoyannis in these early films: When he defines the notion of ‘poetic realism’ in terms of a “selective and personal interpretation of life,” he implies that choices of film style, which this quote and other passages in the same interview show to have been made deliberately, follow concerns and criteria that have little to do with film style and the film medium. These concerns stem, he says, from a personal interpretation of life, that is, from a conception of a reality, which his stories aim to reflect. In other words, his filmmaking begins with a conception of life and proceeds to devise a style of film drama that is faithful to this conception. This corresponds to a principle in Pippin that I will come back to in the next chapter, which consists in treating characters in films, in some respects, as if they were real people. In the distinction between Italian neo-realism and poetic realism, Cacoyannis, further, does not just align himself with one tradition in cinema against another: the French tradition of the 1930s against post-war Italian cinema. In the way that he comments on the meaning of poetic realism, Cacoyannis implies that his films reflect a personal vision, rather than a political or moral ideology, which, presumably, we find in Italian films like *Roma città aperta* (Roberto Rossellini, 1945) or *Ladri di biciclette* (Vittorio De Sica, 1948).

In this context, I would also like to situate my analysis in relation to the social paradigm of ‘national cinema’ analysis, formulated by Susan Hayward, Marcia Landy, Mette Hjort and others.⁴⁰ They consider film as a representation of social conflict and national identity. From such a perspective – and because of the narrative themes of modernity, tradition and the elements of neo-realism in the films – Cacoyannis could be taken to represent and to contribute to a discourse on modernisation in post-war Greece. In fact, Dan Georgakas offers just such an angle of interpretation, in a recent article on the representation of women in the early films of Cacoyannis. There, he presents the plot of *Stella* in the following, explicitly social, terms:

Stella contains almost all the thematic and cinematic elements that became his directorial trademarks. The film turns the Greek cultural given of virgin brides upside down. Stella . . . , a singer at the Paradise taverna in the Plaka district of Athens, is so hostile to the concept of marriage that whenever one of her lovers proposes marriage she ends the relationship. . . . She simply asserts marriage would transform her from a free spirit into a dishwasher, cook, and housekeeper. (24)

Two points in this passage illustrate the difference between a social mode of analysis and the kind of ethical and dramatic interpretation that I present here: first, the parallel drawn in the phrase, “one of her lovers,” between two rival characters in the film, Alekos (Alekos Alexandrakis) and Miltos (Giorgos Foundas), without reference to their respective place and function in the temporal development of the drama; and, second, the interpretation of the plot and the protagonist in terms of a social conflict between freedom and convention presented as external to the film.

Extrapolating from the above passage, one may say that, in this kind of analysis, character, theme and narrative are interpreted in terms of and serve to represent a social condition. In my kind of dramatic analysis, by contrast, social materials are taken as building blocks in the construction of character, plot and theme. My own angle of

⁴⁰ See Susan Hayward’s *French National Cinema*, Marcia Landy’s *Italian Film*, Mette Hjort’s *Small Nation, Global Cinema: The New Danish Cinema*.

analysis of *Stella* is dramatic, hence, the film's visual references to cultural and social tradition are analysed in terms of their contribution to the drama, specifically, the role they play for the protagonist in her effort to define her own standards of conduct and position herself in relation to conventional ethical norms. My interpretation is guided by the idea that the plot and protagonist of *Stella* involve an irreducible ambiguity. The analysis of characterisation, plot and character relationships, conducted in the following pages, serves to present this ambiguity. This analysis concludes with an ethical interpretation of the film – an interpretation that briefly introduces the notion of 'modern tragedy' that I develop in the remainder of the thesis. As mentioned, the analysis of drama and subjectivity in *Stella* is framed by the comparison with Varda's *Cléo*, with which I will now begin.

1.2 | Existential Cléo

In order to bring out the contrast between *Cléo* and *Stella*, my analysis focuses on the gradual presentation of point of view in Varda's film. This process, which I will now follow in detail, consists in a progressive depiction of Cléo, leading from a social characterisation of her as a diva through a psychological depiction of her as a solitary character. The film culminates in an existential perspective on her, as she appears to adopt a new attitude towards herself and towards the world.

The plot is framed by a motif of death, as we first see Cléo receiving an ominous prediction by a tarot reader. She suffers from a mortal illness and expects results from tests at the hospital. The plot of the film extends for just two hours, between her visit to the tarot reader and her visit to the hospital. In the space of these two hours, we are given a snapshot of her life. She is a relatively successful singer of popular music. One of her songs plays in the radio of a taxi. A saleswoman in a hat shop recognises her, yet we are throughout left in some doubt as to her actual fame and status. This uncertainty is intrinsic to the narrative and moral perspective that the film presents upon Cléo. This perspective is itself uncertain. Initially, she appears through the eyes of those who surround her: a maid, her fellow musicians, a good friend. All these companions, in one way or another, present a critical view upon her. Either through their comments or in the interaction that Cléo has with them, she appears vain, insecure, vulnerable, narcissistic, anxious. The emphasis varies. The maid, a robust woman from the country, treats Cléo as a spoiled child. The musicians, both male, tease her, put her down, make her appear difficult. Her best friend, Dorothée (Dorothée Blank), who is content with herself, with her beauty, with her boyfriend (even though her life appears quite precarious in material terms) projects a reflection on Cléo through contrast: For Cléo has money and success;

in social terms, she has, as one says, “everything.” Yet, this everything is not enough, we understand, as she appears dissatisfied and frustrated with herself or with her life – we never quite know.

Through these external perspectives upon Cléo and through the self-presentation she makes in their company, a question gradually arises in the film as to the relationship between who she appears to be and who she is in herself. Delphine Bénézet makes this observation in comparing the character of Cléo to a character in one of Varda’s first films: “Dorothée Blank, like Cléo, another of Varda’s beautiful heroines, has very little privacy and is constantly defined and circumscribed by the gaze of others” (18).

“Everyone spoils me, no one loves me,” Cléo says, quite rightly, after her row with her musicians. Cléo’s wish to be admired means that she encourages others to spoil her and, thus, is unable to find a source of self-esteem that would have a centre in herself, independently of how she is seen or treated by others. What appears, in the film, through the perspective of the maid and the musicians as Cléo’s spoilt nature is, however, not only her own trait of character but appears as a reflection of other characters’ bad behaviour towards her.

I am beginning to suggest how Cléo both adopts and adapts the role of the diva. Her character is, in fact, treated as one that takes on roles, and the film soon sets up a powerful contrast, within the arc of the narrative, between an indirect presentation of her, in terms of roles, and a very different, more direct, revelation of her subjectivity towards the end. In terms, then, of Cléo’s social position as a famous artist, in the way this is conveyed in the film, Cléo is seen to take on the various roles that are required of her. We need only turn to Cléo’s behaviour with her lover, José (José Luis de Vilallonga), for an example. We see him entering Cléo’s apartment almost as in a stage – Cléo’s blank room looks like a modern, spacious and empty set – the music marks his

entrance, introducing him as a caricature: The lover who drops by hastily to check on his “one true love,” all the while exchanging exaggerated compliments and declarations of affection. (She calls him “the lover of the moment.”) Cléo appears annoyed by the superficiality of his sentiments but, at the same time, continues on the same note of those very same sentiments. As she confesses to her maid, she is always ready to please him, always “free when he wishes... well dressed,” her “hair done up” (fig. 1).



Figure 1: Adjusting the hairpiece

Cléo, thus, responds to the way she thinks she is supposed to be perceived, always playing her part beautifully (figs. 2 & 3). This role-taking, on her part, does not seem to be coming from the same part of herself that is the source of her artistic drive, which, as I will show later, appears more clearly towards the end of the film.



Figure 2: Rehearsing the seductive gaze



Figure 3: Checking her beauty

Cléo is a perfectionist, a true artist in the way that she controls her social appearance, as she enters both the roles designed by her and by others. But the question in the film – and part of its general enigma – is why Cléo is so keen to master these performances, since they do not seem to satisfy her. We do not know in the film that there is something else in her that she does not express, but it appears that her role-taking comes from a lack, rather than from an artistic drive or from a subjective drive towards self-assertion.

The film's characterisation of her is, thus, sociological: It depicts her through her interaction with others, and it shows her as being partly formed by that interaction. This genealogical interpretation, of how Cléo is characterised through her behaviour, becoming, through the performance of vanity, a "trapped" person, is based largely on the social scenes in her flat; scenes that concern her directly, as they describe her work and her love life. Cléo is, indeed, spoiled, as different characters throughout the film constantly remind her, but, even through the prism of Cléo's self-obsessed attitude, her problematisation of the values reigning in her world reveal a different perspective upon her that is embedded in the film as a whole. This different perspective, which does not exclude the social judgement that she is narcissistic, involves an additional perception of her as being endowed with agency of thought, in that her self-questioning gradually gains ground in the film as being reasonable and something to be taken seriously. This perspective is conveyed through the narrative progression of the film in the way that the thoughts of Cléo come to invade the narrative universe and become co-extensive with the entire film. For the viewer, therefore, the world of the film tends towards being a rendering of Cléo's inner world. This perspective culminates in an existential, rather than merely psychological portrait of her as facing up to her own life.

This existential reading of the film, which I present, is distinct, for example, from the social feminist reading proposed by Sandy Flitterman-Lewis. Although she also views the trajectory of the film as a movement from passivity to self-affirmation – a movement from dependency upon the gaze of others to self-discovery – the terms in which she expresses this movement leaves little space for character "psychology" and the existential drama of the protagonist:

In *Cleo*, Varda's structural dialectics are everywhere apparent. A documentary approach to daily Parisian activity is combined with the poetics of formal harmonies in the same way that the "objective" views of the milieu are articulated with the controlling subjectivity of Cleo. A correlative of this is the

constant interplay of public context and private life, the ascendancy of the former over the latter tracing the movement of the film as Cleo's new self-awareness is presented, paradoxically, as profoundly social. (229)

In contrast to this structural and allegorical reading of the film, in which the progression of the narrative towards the protagonist's assertiveness is projected as the gradual overcoming by Cléo of her social isolation, my interpretation stresses that it is only by leaving her immediate social context behind and moving further into her isolation and vulnerability that she, at the end, arrives at a stance of assertiveness. This new stance is existential, as I will show later.

The film, in its dual and open perspective, is, I might say, aligned with the existential self-questioning of Cléo, which, being concerned with death and the ultimate questions of existence, is itself open-ended and without definite answers. As her thought process invades the film, the viewer comes to identify with or participate in her existential questioning. This, further, gives authority to these questions and to the character who puts them before us, i.e., Cléo. For this reason, the viewer's point of view upon her subtly changes, in the course of the film, from a social and satirical to a serious and existential perspective. The gradual change of our perspective, accompanying the shifting appearance of Cléo, is structured by a distinction between social contexts and her later, quieter moments of driving through Paris. Much of the film is devoted to Cléo's journey through Paris.

In his book on the film, Steven Ungar makes this journey the focus of his study. He emphasises how, in the initial moments of this journey, the film brings out Cléo's isolation:

Cléo's anxiety sharpens her attentiveness to objects and messages she links to illness and death. And this occasionally to the point of a paranoia that sets her at odds with a human and spatial environment she takes to be threatening. As Cléo and Angèle return by taxi to her apartment in Montparnasse, they pass a Left Bank art gallery on the rue Guénégaud whose displays of African masks frighten

Cléo because she sees them as omens of supra-human powers. Her fear heightens when a black student among art students parading in costume draws near the taxi and plays at scaring her. It is as though one of the masks she had just seen suddenly came to life. (35)

By showing the direct passage from perception to anxiety through the careful *mise-en-scène* and subjective point of view of the film, Ungar clearly shows how the film, in such moments, achieves a sort of externalisation of Cléo's inner world. In a similar vein, in my reading, the most highlighted part of Cléo's journey is the scene that takes place in the café. This does not portray specific characters or art forms but, more generally, the social world of art and artists, where people discuss art. We see Cléo entering the café wearing sunglasses (fig. 4). At this point in the film, we know that she is vulnerable and agitated. The film registers how she notices bits of conversation as she passes through the room. Most of these conversations concern art. Filtered through Cléo's point of view, they also have a menacing air of snobbish triviality, as if art and talking about art were nothing but a social game played in a particular cultural environment. But this satire of the art world contributes to the film's characterisation of Cléo: She, herself, is an artist, part of this intellectual world. The discussions that we hear about art seem random and pointless. Within the dramatic structure of the film, art comes to carry a particular charge and functions as a signifier for meaninglessness. Cléo is dying, and she knows this to be the case. This is the reason why she is overly sensitive to the world around her. From that point of view, the cultured and cosmopolitan discourse on art appears weightless: No art work, not even a painting by Picasso, carries weight for Cléo when measured against the fact of her own imminent death. She is herself a famous artist, and, even so, art cannot save her, cannot help her in the place where she now is, having to confront her own mortality. Within the scene of the café, this existential void that opens up before Cléo, as she confronts the world of art, is echoed in the dramatic flow and *mise-en-scène* of the scene. As she cruises

through the large space of the café, eavesdropping briefly on different conversations, she appears to be overwhelmed by a flood of art discourse: There are many arts, many artists, many observers, critiques, experts. Art appears to be lost in a cacophony in which statements appear to cancel one another.



Figure 4: All alone

It is only in the last part of the film, when she meets a man, a stranger outside of her circle and far removed from her life, with whom she confronts the truth of her mortal illness – visiting the hospital to get the results of her cancer test – that she appears to begin to live. Then, she is able to shrug off her manners and capricious ways and talk simply and truthfully to another and about herself. Again, this movement, from her loneliness to overcoming her social isolation is, in my reading, existential. Thus, in one sense, death brings life. Although, her illness cannot but seem congenital to her personality and way of life. The first part of the film shows her isolation not only from others but from the whole world of work, love and human relationships – her isolation, in short, from life itself. It seems, thus, that her abstract way of living is already a kind of morbidity, which brings death in its wake.

Cléo's illness, her fear and her mortality carry a complex significance in the film. In the time span that the film covers, Cléo is constantly haunted by her fear, announced by her visit to the card reader at the beginning, and culminating in the meeting with the doctor at the end – a meeting that is itself an object of fear in the intervening time. Yet, her illness and the prospect of death come as an antidote to her psychological isolation. Her illness is an objective feature of her body. It points to a definite future that is beyond her control. When she relates to the future in the present, in the form of abstract worried thoughts that are unrelated to her illness, for example in relation to her lover, she is at one remove from herself. When, however, she is at last confronted with the fact of her imminent death, she appears, for the first time in the film, to inhabit the present completely, without thought for the future. This is the existential dimension of the drama that I am about to examine.

We finally catch glimpses of Cléo appearing without “masks” when she is alone. A moment like this comes towards the end of the film, during the park scene. As soon as the taxi drops Dorothée off, the atmosphere and music of the film change to mark Cléo's altered mood. The taxi cruises slowly along a wide and beautiful Parisian street and, then, makes its way into the park. There, Cléo gets out of the car and, for the first time in the film, starts looking at what she sees. Away from the buzz of the city that pushes Cléo into a process of looking and being looked at by others – a process that makes her respond to and acquire her various roles – we, at last, see Cléo as she expresses herself unguarded and unobserved. This also includes a genuine and not merely social expression of her talent: She sings and dances solely for herself at the top of some steps. In this scene, we see a lighter side of Cléo; a person who enjoys her gifts for their own sake; here, for the first time, she appears lively and dynamic. This dynamic aspect of Cléo's character shines only too briefly during the film's previous

scenes, for example, when she angrily exits her apartment after her row with the musicians. This side of her personality is, during the early stages of the film, always associated with something negative; her liveliness merges with her roles to which she previously would have never unreservedly surrendered. But, finally, when we see her dancing on the steps, we begin to understand that her talent and self-expression are in tension with her role as an artist or as a celebrity, therefore, not restricted to it. Cléo is, in other words, not really who she seems to be.

In the structure of the drama, this scene marks the beginning not only of a change in Cléo's appearance for the viewer but also a change in her perspective on herself and the world: From this point onwards, she seems increasingly ready to shrug off the worries and social masks that shaped her appearance previously (fig. 5). This change does not take place all of a sudden. It is not only expressed dramatically, through Cléo's behaviour: It is enacted directly and visually in the taxi ride leading up to the park scene. In contrast to the previous taxi ride in the film, which emphasised the hectic and invasive nature of the Parisian urban environment, seen from the mental point of view of Cléo's nervous sensibility, this taxi ride enacts a beautiful reverie. When one compares the lyrical mood of this taxi ride to the claustrophobic taxi scene in the beginning, where Cléo is driven through a student demonstration while the radio speaks of a conflict in Algeria, we see how deliberately these scenes are orchestrated by Varda. They form the backbone of the psychological drama on a par with the scenes of social satire and dialogue that I discussed before. The tone is set by the shot, which sees the departure of her friend. The camera poetically follows her as she quickly escapes along a flight of stairs. From then on, what we see Cléo observing is a series of beautiful vistas. We come to understand that this sequence of pleasing views, which do not intrude themselves upon her, have the effect, simultaneously, of calming her and of

gradually taking her away from her normal existence. This is a long ride, shot almost in real time, moving along a boulevard with leafy trees, leading to the large park. In contrast to earlier scenes, there is no background radio soundtrack. The scene marks a transition from the urban world of art, friendship, work and politics to a different sphere. This passage is, in fact, prepared in a previous scene, when Cléo first steps out of her flat without her elaborate hair accessory and manages, as she says, to begin seeing her “own fears.” It is during that scene that Cléo reflects, for the first time, on her own reflexivity and obsession with looking. Staring at her reflection in a street mirror, she murmurs, “That unchanging doll’s face, with that ridiculous hat... I think others look at me. I look at no one but myself.” By then, the heroine has removed her tight polka dot dress and has toned down her appearance by wearing an all-black costume. It is important to note that it is whilst being dressed in these neutral clothes and accessories that she has an encounter with a stranger, the soldier (Antoine Bourseiller), whom she meets in the park and strikes up a conversation with.



Figure 5: Changing

He bombards her with questions and little observations. From the start, she allows him to invade her space, and, soon, she enters the conversation herself. She does

so in a spirit of openness that is far removed from the code of flirtation as a game of hide and seek: It is not as if they do not communicate erotically, but they do so openly, because they quickly discover that they share a common destiny. She is awaiting the results of her cancer test; he is about to be sent as a soldier to Algeria, where he is likely to be killed. In short, they meet at the threshold of having to confront their own imminent death. We are given the impression that it is because of the soldier's possible impending death – he says that they are “both in the same bubble” – that Cléo is able to communicate openly with him, but it is equally clear that her moment of truth comes at the exact right time for her: As she says in relation to men who try to flirt with her by making small talk, “Usually, I don't respond. Today I forgot.” Away from pre-defined social roles, this time, Cléo welcomes all the potentialities that a meeting with a stranger could entail. Just as her singing on the steps was different from her diva persona, her giving herself to the situation of flirtation is free from the script she followed with her official lover.

Her timeframe of enjoying life and love expands from being restricted and located somewhere in the future to being located within an open-ended present. The soldier tells Cléo that the women he has met “half-love” and turn away from love to “save themselves.” Cléo says, in return, that, upon looking back on her life, she regrets having wasted time in matters of the heart, never having dared to give herself completely, since she was “saving herself” – she does not complete this sentence – but the implied thought seems to be that Cléo had been saving herself for a great love in the future but has, now, at the point of possible death, in fact, been saving herself for death. (In her song, she refers to this loss as “beauty wasted in the cold of winter.”)

The idea of this meeting conveying, at last, for Cléo the sense of a self-sufficient present is reinforced by the film's conclusion: Cléo, despite learning the results of her

medical test, declares that she is no longer afraid of what may happen later. Death, after merely showing itself on the tarot card and driving her through an agonising process of fear within her imagination, has finally granted her a peace, of sorts, by being confirmed. And Cléo, in her difficult situation, can finally appeal to a source of power that she, previously, had no expectation of possibly acquiring. Earlier in the film, she says that, if she has cancer, and it shows on her face, she might as well kill herself, that she is as dead already. (*“Autant dire que je suis morte déjà.”*) To her soldier friend, she says that she is “afraid of everything” – a dire contrast to her last phrase to him. (“I’ve the feeling my fear is gone. I have the feeling I am happy.”) The purpose of Cléo’s meeting with the soldier is for her to give herself to the present, and it is in this present that she has to fight death. It is only in this present that she can learn to appropriate death. This interpretation of the film, as leading up to a confrontation with death, is explicitly existentialist: Heidegger famously writes that, when I acknowledge that my own future death is mine, I collect myself and perceive what is important to me (“being-toward-death”).⁴¹ Existentialism was part of the French cultural climate at the time when the film was shot; this was a time when Jean-Paul Sartre was at the height of his fame.

Cléo appears as a subject only gradually within the arc of the film, and this, one might say, is the film’s existentialist project. Throughout the film, we get to know Cléo through her reflections upon her life. What changes in Cléo and characterises her as an existential subject, when she faces her possible death, is that her thoughts, while still being about herself, are not about her as a person or as a social character. The film’s mode of characterisation and narrative conclusion, which are supported by the absence of dramatic conflicts and an external plot progression, align the film’s subjective point

⁴¹ See the section of *Being and Time* entitled: The Possible Being-a-Whole of Da-sein and Being-toward-Death (Heidegger 219-246).

of view with existentialist philosophy: The film's last scenes highlight the difference between reflecting upon oneself as an existential subject (in terms of death) and thinking of oneself as a person (in terms of character traits). Further, the film follows a narrative arc, moving from social characterisation to the presentation of such an existential subject. In this, the film follows an existentialist pattern of thought, which consists in opposing the authenticity of the self's confrontation with itself to a social world in which, as Heidegger writes again, 'They,' rather than I, decide what I should do and think.⁴²

The existential trajectory depicted in the film, from psychological self-awareness to a direct confrontation with mortality, does not involve others as an internal feature or component. The Other that is the soldier, who courts her at the end, is a potential lover and a solidaric other subject. He understands her, and they understand each other, because they both face imminent death or, at least, have to confront a very real risk of dying. However, this Other is a catalyst at most, and he and what he stands for – manhood, love, another human being, another social class etc. – do not enter the process of self-reflection that Cléo goes through. She is and remains confined within the space of her own thoughts, even when she lets go of her anxieties and allows herself to perceive the world and to feel the presence of others in a way that is not menacing – as it was earlier in the film, when strangers in the street seemed to invade her consciousness and to pose a threat to her right to exist. As I shall show in the following sections, the protagonist of *Stella* positions herself in the world in a very different way.

⁴² In expressing this idea, Heidegger coins the neologism '*das Man*,' literally, 'the They.' To avoid misunderstanding, he does not use the word 'subject' but the term '*Da-sein*' or 'being there.' See the following passage, from *Being and Time*, where he contrasts the self-relation of *Da-sein* to the public world of the they: "In being-toward-death, *Da-sein* is related to *itself* as an eminent potentiality-of-being. But the self of everydayness is the they which is constituted in public interpretedness which expresses itself in idle talk" (233-234). There are many interpretations of Heidegger and, after writing *Being and Time*, he turned away from existentialism, see "Letter on 'Humanism.'"

1.3 | Stella in Paradise

Stella is vain. The walls of her bedroom are covered with photographs of herself, and she frequently checks herself in the mirror. Below her window, we see a poster advertising her singing act in the *taverna* next door to where she lives. Through her various efforts to improve the quality of her performances, we get a clear sense that she has an idea of herself as being more than a *bouzouki* singer. Thus, we frequently see her striving to improve her singing; she even has a piano brought to the *bouzouki* bar.

Both in her aspirations and in her manner of carrying herself – and in contrast to Cléo – she exudes confidence and appetite for life. As she walks through the streets of Athens, bristling with energy and joy, as she exuberantly jokes, flirts, quarrels her way through the little incidents of everyday life, in her assured manner of receiving glances and compliments, she asserts her place in the city where she lives. Her beauty is part of this self-assertion in two ways: She is confident because she is beautiful, and her confidence goes much further than her beauty. Her beauty is not that of a picture but is inseparable from her liveliness. We see that she enjoys the gaze of others, but we never get a sense that she would anxiously await confirmation from them nor that she has modelled herself on an external idea of beauty – this is the wider thematic difference between the portrait of Stella and the feminist portrait of Cléo.

In fact, from all of Stella's behaviour, we see that she has a definite idea of herself as a singer and a star: As I shall show, she defines herself according to this idea or ideal in all that she does, but, at the same time, we do not get the impression that she copies herself on an already available norm. Thus, she sets her own rules of what it is both to be a star and to be beautiful. In her performance and behaviour, she seems to act as if she were already a Hollywood star (fig. 6). An example of this is her bizarre effort

to combine *bouzouki* music with jazz coming straight from a gramophone. This is also the significance of her pin-ups of herself in her own room. We can say that, just as she transforms everyday interaction into moments of self-assertion, she makes the narcissism that goes with the role of a singer into a very active project. In her performance, she interacts with both the light and the male audience, and, in so doing, she seems to absorb the admiration and erotic energy around her and fuel it back into the music, into the performance. Even the musicians around her are drawn into the flow of this self-assertion (fig. 7).



Figure 6: Movie star



Figure 7: Drawing everyone in

Stella, thus, is both very rooted in one place, a slightly dingy *bouzouki* bar, as well as expressing an effort to transcend this frame and assert herself as a star. Both the erotic energy and the flow of self-assertion, which I mentioned above, colour the manner in which Stella is a star. She is not a star who is separate and isolated from others, those who admire her, but she is a star who both fascinates and is involved with the people around her. By this, I mean that she defines herself and her stardom through her relations with others. More specifically, what we may call Stella's "worldliness" is introduced in the film in the context of a family, and this family provides for Stella an antidote to the more abstract nature of her stardom. This is not an actual family, let alone a straightforward family. It is a substitute family, and, at the same time, its structure is one that allows for freedom and incorporates the freedom of art.

Within this scheme, the *taverna* owner, Maria (Sofia Vempo), could resemble a mother, whilst Stella's friend, Anetta (Voula Zouboulaki), a jealous sister. Along with Mitsos (Dionysis Papagiannopoulos), a somewhat distant father figure, Maria both protects and admires Stella. This influence is not controlling and, thus, remains limited – also in the sense that there is a limit to her understanding of Stella. Her admiration seems to hide a sense of awe in the face of what she cannot understand in Stella. I will come back to this in the interpretation of the last part of the film. This lack of understanding extends to Anetta, who, one has the impression, does not mean to harm Stella but simply misunderstands her, reading her according to her own fears, feelings and desires. In contrast to Maria, who seems to rest within herself and is far from Stella's age and can appreciate her without being competitive, Anetta is positioned, in the film, as her peer and rival. On the level of action, she shadows and is envious of Stella (fig. 8). She is single and always out to get Stella's boyfriends. Anetta's mother, too, is the spitting image of her daughter. In one scene, she complains about her

daughter's lack of prominence in her Paradise performances in relation to Stella. On the level of representation, Anetta is the voice of logic and common sense.



Figure 8: Framed by “friends”

Stella is free to come and go within this “familial” space, and, also, like any “child,” she seeks ways to escape from it. This is where the ambiguity of the *taverna* Paradise lies. This is both a place where Stella acquires her strength, happiness and artistic freedom and a place that Stella seeks to leave by perfecting her performances and making them her own. By courting Miltos, the handsome footballer, who is foreign to her world, she also seeks to carve out a space outside this substitute family. Paradise is, then, both Stella's shelter and the locus from which the drama of *Stella* will arise; a drama that, in fact, will lead the heroine very far away from paradise: to her death. In addition to Stella's own efforts to distance herself from Paradise, Miltos, in fact, invades Paradise; literally, he crashes in with his car and, from then on, tries to further pull Stella away from it by means of his marriage proposal and his mother's advice to Stella to quit her job.

Stella's relation to Miltos follows on from her ambiguous relation to Paradise (her freedom within a substitute family). By virtue of the film's plot – Stella's

acceptance of Miltos' marriage proposal and her consequent plan to run away – she appears to both wish to hold on to her relationship with Miltos and to keep her environment and familial world intact. This paradox, we come to see, corresponds to an ambiguity within her character, which, in turn, fuels the love drama with Miltos. Stella's freedom is rooted both in her artistic nature and in her erotic temperament, but this temperament, in turn, leads to her increasing responsibility towards Miltos. The nature of their love is manifest, at the beginning, in a passionate and instinctive phase, but, when it escalates to Miltos' demands for a married life, Stella's love for Miltos is transformed or appears reduced – as she reverts to her artistic freedom and her calling.

It is, then, paradoxically, only through her art and freedom that Stella knows how to love Miltos. Stella is, in the plot, locked within a battle of wills and life models: between being herself – being free both in love and art or loving freely, “as animals,” as she says, and her effort to live up to Miltos' demands. This thematic triangle – of love, freedom and art – which dominates the plot, is not made up of entirely static poles or separate stages in the drama. The three elements are intertwined at each point and are given a dense expression in the particular dramatic form of the couple's courtship: the physically intrusive, sexually charged acts of bravura with which they challenge each other (fig. 9). The game of dare that begins in Paradise with a piece of dynamite or the game of dare with the car, with which Miltos threatens to overrun Stella, escalates to a game of yes or no to Miltos' marriage proposal. It ends at the crossroads, where Miltos warns Stella that he is holding a knife, while she bravely walks on. These games of dare serve to show the disparity in the couple's ideas of integrating love into their lives. They present a challenge – on the part of Stella – to Miltos' overblown masculinity and – on the part of Miltos – to Stella's artistic idea of love. They threaten both Stella's substitute familial space and Miltos' virile pride in courting a wild woman.



Figure 9: Meeting their match

Within the plot, Stella is set up in contrast to Miltos, and this amounts to a thematic opposition between two ways of being in the world, two kinds of “worldliness.” Spelling out this difference, in turn, uncovers a fundamental trait both in the character of Stella and in the drama: Stella’s relation to herself, to others, to the world, in general, is characterised by ambiguity. Miltos, on the other hand, comes to stand, in the film, for sharply drawn alternatives, a logic of yes or no, all or nothing, my will or yours, marriage or death. The “worldliness” of Miltos is upheld by clear social values. Stella relates to the world through others and never completely endorses or rejects their rules. She sets her own rules. Rather than making choices or facing alternatives, Stella is a character for whom different desires are filtered through one another. She makes art through her substitute family; she loves Miltos through her art. She exists in a balance between different pressures. Hers is a world of combinations not of oppositions or clear alternatives: The family of Paradise is only a substitute family, and Stella is both free and rooted in it.

As I have shown, Miltos, at first, represents for Stella an intrusion but also the prospect of a desirable outside. The meeting of the couple, as they brush off against each other, is enacted wholly on the level of desire as a game of power. There is,

initially, no social or emotional backdrop. They do not meet as persons but as erotic beings, carrying their beauty and their force of assertion into the world through their collision. To stay in the metaphoric register of fire that Miltos uses to describe his attraction to Stella, their encounter ignites them both, “You are fire.” They respect each other because they respect the courage and the recklessness of the other. But the energy of this initial encounter, which takes place outside the social world, awaits some sort of future, some way for them of forming a relationship.

Here, the drama gathers thematic complexity. The two characters are very much alike in their social position. On the surface, he is a footballer, a virile and handsome man without conventional responsibilities; a man who does not carry or signify specific social values. He is similar to her, and he loves her, we are led to think, for the freedom that she exudes. It is, further, part of the erotic energy between them that they have to fight; that they have to test each other’s strength. It is, however, also the nature of this erotic energy that it always takes the form of a challenge, as we saw, a game of dare that can only have one winner (fig. 10). For him, this means that he must conquer her and domesticate her, even if that would mean destroying the freedom that causes him to desire her. In his effort to dominate her, he convinces her to marry him. She agrees, even though, in the first part of the film, she is seen to cherish her independence as she rejects the proposal of the other suitor, Alekos. Not only does Miltos propose to marry her, however, he also brings his mother along to lecture her on her future duties as a wife. This mother, appearing in the film from nowhere, seems incongruous in relation to the footballer’s freedom. It is in the symmetry between Stella’s substitute family and his conventional family values, which he can invoke when it is convenient, that their relationship is played out. Miltos’ profession guarantees just that flexibility, and it is difficult to know which part of his freedom is truly in his character and which in the

cliché of the footballer. The dramatic conflict in the film, the conflict that leads to Stella's death, is not simply an opposition between freedom and convention or an opposition between her independence as an artist and family values. Miltos is partly a stereotype; he is daring and reckless and provocative (fig. 11). It is these traits that draw Stella to him, so they meet on the site of their freedom. Yet, for neither Stella nor Miltos is this freedom pure. They each seek strength in a family background.



Figure 10: Game of dare



Figure 11: Dynamite

She seeks to be loved freely like an animal; he holds up a mirror to her, affirming her at her most reckless. Yet, they both fail to bring this free love into a

relationship extended in time. As I said, he seeks to conquer her and impose upon her a conventional marriage. Yet, for most of the film, Stella is able to defend her love of freedom and art by loving Miltos according to her own rules, within the setting of her substitute family. Thus, for Stella, the dilemma between freedom, art and love – between their love as passion and a relationship extended in time – is not, initially, one that she needs to resolve. Yet, if she is not allowed to combine all of them, she is also unable to choose between them. In short, the last third of the film describes her struggle with achieving this balance, as she first accepts marriage, does not turn up at the wedding – humiliating Miltos – and, in the end, as she embraces death at his hand. In refusing simply to leave Miltos, she refuses to live solely by her ideas of freedom and art. By not being able to accept marriage on his conventional terms, she shows that she cannot let go of herself. In being unable to choose between herself and Miltos, by giving up and going to her death, she signals to Miltos and to us that the dilemma that she faces does not, for her, admit of a solution; that it is not a dilemma that presents itself to her as a choice.

There are different pressures that hold Stella back from living her love in the manner of her freedom and art. First, it is the presence of Miltos' and Stella's social world, the figures that surround them and do not admit of individuals setting their own rules. These figures are represented as bearers of a normative authority that it, itself, stands unchallenged in the film – somewhat like the voices of the chorus in ancient tragedy – and which also implies for the protagonist a limit to her scope of action, and this limit is one that she negotiates throughout the drama. These figures are Miltos' mother (Hristina Kalogerikou) and the marriage-obsessed Anetta. At every point in the drama, she voices the content of a conventional norm. The entire drama surrounding the wedding and Miltos' exaggerated reaction to Stella's failure to turn up at the wedding is

based on and draws value from this presence of an underlying community pressure. Miltos, literarily, goes mad after losing face, especially considering his status as someone to be looked up to by the fans of football. In an untranslatable dialogue from the film, a bunch of children ask Miltos if the woman he is about to marry is pretty, only for one of them to retort, “What else, stupid? Would Miltos marry an ugly woman?”

Apart from these voices of authority, another element in the film, which contributes to the irresolution of the drama, lies in the character of Stella: her passionate and not analytic response to every situation. As I have shown, Stella is described, in the film, through her relation to others, but she is also shown to have very sharply drawn traits of her own. Stella is rarely seen dwelling in her own thoughts, and her lack of thinking contributes to her spontaneous nature and direct relation to the world. We get a sense of her character and manner of approaching herself and others when Alekos’ sister (Tasso Kavadia) shows up in her room to announce that the family is conceding to Stella’s relationship with her brother. She says that Alekos is not well – that he is brooding – and that, in fact, he had a nervous breakdown in the past. Stella asks, “What is wrong with him? Does he have a fever?” Unlike a mental illness, brought about by depressive thoughts, it seems that a physical ailment is the only illness that Stella understands.

Further, when she confronts experiences that challenge her and which, in another character, would have produced a series of thoughts, Stella expresses her emotions directly in action. After Alekos has died, Miltos asks her in marriage in order to protect her from those who see her as responsible for Alekos’ death. She is, at this point, clearly troubled by various emotions that present themselves naturally: guilt, in relation to Alekos’ death, resistance to the marriage proposal, etc. But Stella responds to this emotive complexity simply by putting on her show at the *taverna*, letting her

emotions flow into the performance. When she has failed to turn up at her own wedding, leaving Miltos and all the guests waiting in vain, she reacts to her own troubling action by another action: She picks up a handsome young man, Antonis (Costas Kakavas), and spends the evening dancing with him. In a scene earlier in the film, we see Stella talking to Anetta, who asks her if she has quarrelled with Alekos. Stella shrugs. Anetta adds that she thinks that he took it hard. Stella replies, “Unlike me, living it up.” She says this wistfully, as if she is aware that others may think of her as cruel. Indeed, the film cuts to the patio where Alekos sits alone, removed from the rest of his family, writing poetry, while they, in hushed voices, speculate about his despondent mood, “He has not been out three nights in a row.” Thus, responding to each situation and each dilemma with an action, replying to an action always with a further action, frees Stella from the option of thinking through different options or ways of reacting.

As I have shown, Stella’s lifestyle is based on combinations between her different aspirations, so she does not need, for most part of the film, to compromise or seek a middle course between the extreme options offered by Miltos. The junction of these two traits in her – not compromising and responding with action – comes to a head in the dramatic conclusion of the film.

After Anetta admonishes Stella for leaving Miltos waiting at the altar, Maria defends Stella’s action by declaring that she, herself, would not have had the “guts” to do the same, that she, instead, takes her “hat off” to her. Maria describes Stella as mysterious, different, one who listens to her heart; she is like “a shot in the arm, a good dream, fresh, full of life, like a field of flowers.” In Greek, the precise words of Maria are that Stella does not allow others to “drag her into a swamp.” This refers to the latter’s inability and refusal to enter a logic of compromise. Her love of Paradise, her

love for Miltos and his demand that she should marry him and give up her artistic career are part of a situation, within the plot, that, one could say, calls for compromise. As I already mentioned, Stella is rarely seen in the film to enter a space of doubt and deliberation. This is not to say that Stella, in the course of the drama, does not appear to have doubts, yet these doubts do not stop her from continuing in a course of action. She is presented ambiguously, as being both self-sufficient and, yet, as belonging in Paradise, and we see her being bound to that place. On the other hand, by courting a man whom she loves, Miltos, she cannot break off the relationship simply because it threatens her freedom – as she could with Alekos and, we may assume, the others who could not be her match. In the face of Miltos, the ambiguity of her freedom in Paradise becomes unsustainable.

What is more important, even though Stella's aspirations and ambitions make her stretch beyond the narrow confines of Paradise, she is always seen to be protected and pampered by her friends there – even in their envy and their rivalries. When she faces the concrete situation of the marriage proposal, she expresses her thoughts and feelings in the company of her friends, and, through their good advice, their exhortation to marry, their admiration for Miltos, it becomes even harder for her to break off and to see clearly what is the core of her own wishes. The two contrastive figures of Maria and Anetta, in a way, not only frame her but also seem to stand in for her as if extending her own feelings, her fear or resolve: The first highlights what is admirable in Stella, her strength, her tenacity, her ability to think straight. Anetta stands in opposition to this, as the embodiment of a poisonous lack of clarity in Stella, voicing and reinforcing her doubts.

To return to the idea of the irresolution of the drama in terms of Stella's character, she is both headstrong and sensitive. She appears pristine and fresh, at the

same time, brittle. She acts directly and honestly – and this makes her vulnerable. When she is confronted with the deviousness of Anetta, Stella does not possess the tools to defend herself. But when confronted with a direct accusation, for example, when Alekos accuses her of seeing other men, she retorts proudly to his face, “You would be the first to know.” When Stella rejects him, Alekos falls into depression, and this leads to his accident. Stella, one could say, rejects him with a purity of heart. It is, thus, out of moral straightness or lack of hypocrisy that Stella brings bad luck to herself and to others. Unable to protect herself, she accentuates the conflicts around her and, hence, attracts the blame of others. This paradox of purity attracting blame and contempt is expressed with poignancy at the funeral of Alekos: The sister instructs a man to ask Stella to leave. This is followed by Stella’s implorations, “It wasn’t my fault; it wasn’t my fault.”

1.4 | Performance and Death

I have shown that Stella is defined through her relations to others. This means that her actions are often reactions. And because of her own honesty – her inability to protect herself – and the intrusive effect of the other characters who frame her, Stella is reduced in each scene to her reactions. She becomes what she performs and is, thereby, for the viewer, largely, what she visibly does. She speaks, sings, performs on stage, leaves situations, stirs up quarrels, flirts. She becomes for the viewer identical with this series of performances. Stella's physicality embodies the particular mixture of strength and vulnerability that defines her character in the drama. She is strong in each moment, through her self-assertions and defiance. At the same time, she appears indefinable, since these intense performances are all we get to see. She is indefinable, above all, emotionally, in relation to her feelings for men, her love for Miltos, in particular, and in relation to herself. However, performance, which in film criticism often connotes artifice and self-reference or self-consciousness, here carries the opposite charge: It is the medium of Stella's unconscious self-expression. Stella is direct and exuberant. She fills the space of each situation with her presence. The vital energy that she exudes expresses, as I have suggested, her raw, sincere relation to others.

Her character tends not to be presented outside or beyond the temporal horizon of each dramatic situation. To say that Stella is identical with her performances means that she appears to live out her life fully and unreservedly in a string of situations, while remaining indefinable as a person or subject within the drama as a whole. The temporal relation between situations in Stella's life and, hence, the temporal structure of the drama itself are structured by the discontinuity that follows from this self-sufficiency of each performance and each situation. The self-sufficiency of each situation, in terms of

performance, is echoed in the manner in which the city of Athens is portrayed. Through its sprawling spread of locations in the city of Athens, the film avoids presenting a coherent, uniform diegetic space, even as its dramatic and visual centre is the bar Paradise. In this film, we are not always sure where an indoor scene takes place, where a room is located. What matters, in these scenes, is the performative interaction that takes place in them.

To come back to the idea of reaction in relation to performance, we have seen that the plot presents Stella with dilemmas that would invite her to make choices. But these dilemmas are not resolved by her within the drama. Instead, the act of choice itself becomes increasingly problematic as the drama unfolds. Stella emerges as an ambivalent character that cannot isolate a particular desire or moral value over another, such as convention over freedom and art – and vice versa. In this threefold dilemma, Stella is pushed, by herself and by circumstance, to act for the sake of acting, to choose for the sake of choosing. Her giving in to the wedding and, later, her giving herself up to Miltos mark the culmination of this problem within the drama. These kinds of action mean that she can act only in the mode of performance, that is, in the form of actions that are spontaneous, reactive and desperate. This is especially true of her last actions, because, at this point in the drama, she appears, to herself and to us, to have exhausted all options available to her; she acts within the horizon of a dead-end as if in defiance of the impossibility to choose in a way that would satisfy her. She acts out, performs this defiance, this choice, within the horizon of an apparent impossibility to choose. She does so to its ultimate consequence, that is, she carries this contradiction to its extreme – and this turns out to be a walk into death. One cannot, in a sense, rationally choose death. So, to introduce a paradox: Within a negative space of choice, she makes a positive choice, or – the reverse is also true – within a space of excluded choice, she

makes the most negative choice possible. As a character, Stella is a dynamic person. She is the sort of person who acts. Thus, faced with this situation of non-choice, she responds to it by making it the source of an action. Death is the most extreme choice in a situation of non-choice: If, by doing something, you want to exclude action or make it impossible to act, this means that you have to die. This is the implication of the dramatic outcome.

For Stella, death is both giving up completely, a form of passivity, and, at the same time, it appears as a way of making a “statement.” The film makes us see that Stella gives up but does so with all her dynamism and assertiveness, making a choice that speaks loudly of her freedom and unwillingness to compromise. She cannot act in a way that we can see as continuous with a motivation; the act appears detached from her motivations and opens a gap between her and what we know about her in the plot. This act is, at the same time, extreme. In this combination of being extreme and unmotivated, the act gains a performative quality, in the sense of pointing only to itself, of not being the sign or the result of a clear psychological intention. As an act of expression, this “statement” is framed by ambiguity and does not carry a straightforward meaning: She can only be free and make her freedom into a statement by acting in a way that annihilates her and, hence, her freedom. This extreme performance is an act of self-expression, which does not reveal much about the character or her intention. At the end, all that remains is the performance.

Thus, noted in passing, a social historical reading of this film could make Stella into a representative of feminist freedom, crushed by convention or a model of social assertiveness. Stella’s negation of life could be seen as an act that accentuates the very existence of her freedom. However, in my reading, the inextricable relationship of freedom and death, in Stella’s predicament, does not allow for such an optimistic and

unambiguous interpretation. I argue that Stella cannot be a model because she negates the freedom she fights for. She cannot represent particular values or conflicts of value because her predicament is defined by ambiguity. The result of this conclusion to the drama and to my interpretation is that Stella cannot be a modern heroine because her statement is self-refuting, marking a limit to her modernity. Her statement is modern by defiance: I will not marry; I will not give in. But this is purely reactive; it is a negative, tragic modernity. The idea of act and passivity, cancelling each other, can be rephrased on a more abstract interpretative level: Stella testifies to her subjective agency by annulling her subjective agency.

This paradox of passivity and action being united is manifest in the dramatic form of the film. This paradox and its function as the core of the drama will, as I suggested before, provide the basis for the term ‘modern tragedy.’ In my interpretation, it forms also a script, of sorts, for the two other films. Each of the three films revolve around paradoxes of action-within-non-action. My interpretation of all three films, the questions I ask about them and their heroines have their origin in the climactic scenes of *Stella*, in which the paradox of action as non-action is carried to its ultimate consequence, that is, to death as suicide. As I will show later, in the two other films, this paradox is less sharp and the possibility of action is given a certain outlet.

In *Stella*, this paradox conveys the sense of a tragic inescapability in the plot, manifest in deferred and displaced actions. Stella acts spontaneously and with a delay, often in compensation for not finding a resolution to her dilemma. For example, when Stella has escaped the wedding, she goes out dancing with the handsome Antonis. At this point, she appears both in the film image and within the plot as if suspended in time. We know that she knows Miltos to be tracking her. We see her acting in a trance-like way, as if there were no tomorrow, as if her actions do not have any consequence

(figs. 12 & 13). Retrospectively, in light of her death at the end, these scenes appear haunted by her future encounter with Miltos. Under the shadow of the death that she does not choose to run away from, she carves out a freedom suspended in the time that separates her from the event that lies ahead. Stella courts the young man in the spirit of giving in to a whim. She seizes a right to be free. Yet, this freedom, being grasped under the shadow of an ominous future, has a dark air of indulgence, as if she is giving herself a treat she does not want. This mixture of lightness and darkness expresses an ambivalence that goes to the heart of Stella's agency.



Figure 12: Facing the void



Figure 13: Trance

In the act of courtship, Stella performs an action in place of another action, which she does not or cannot make: Not being able to act in response to Miltos, she performs a substitute action – courting a man she does not love, while her mind is elsewhere. Taken together, the event of Stella's death and her substitute courtship of Antonis encapsulate the thematic essence of the drama: This is the fundamental ambivalence of a radical confirmation of freedom co-existing with a seemingly absolute incapacity to act, and this incapacity, in turn, is expressed in a performative act of defiance. Action is, here, permeated by passivity and defeatism, but the opposite is also true: Within passivity, the character acts in defiance of what she perceives as necessity. If Stella were entirely free, she would have been able to apply her own ideas of life with someone else. If she would have been able to accept the traditional values that Miltos brings with him, she would have been able to marry him. The ambivalence of her agency is couched, thematically, between these poles that she cannot occupy. Stella appears, therefore, not as a subject of control in relation to her life. She is, as I have shown, a subject of defiance who can express her freedom only reactively, through performative, spontaneous and, in the end, extreme responses. In her death, she communicates both her freedom and her incapacity to use this freedom to master her life.

In a nutshell, this paradox of freedom, in the film, is what makes it into a modern tragedy: Stella has come to see as irresolvable a dilemma, which, at the same time, she takes, in an absolute sense, as the context of her life. Her stance in the drama is, then, that, instead of making a choice, she has to do both: give herself to Miltos and preserve herself from him, to show him her love and to take this love away. This is, clearly, the opposite of resolving her dilemma. Modern tragedy is grounded, then, on the level of character motivation and dramatic resolution, in the protagonist's

understanding of her situation as containing a dilemma that poses a limit to her powers of choice and control over her life.

Miltos' character follows a similar logic: Right after he has killed Stella, Anetta warns him, saying that "It was Stella's fault," and advises him to run away before the police arrives. Yet, Miltos stays there, communicating that his act is not an act of passion, such as revenge. His act of killing appears as an expression of what he thinks is his right, the right given to him by his love and by Stella's love for him. Having this right or claiming this right, he also believes he has to pay for it. Hence, he stays at the scene of the crime and does not run away. Yet, the sense of responsibility that Miltos and Stella answer to is overblown, tragic. Miltos takes responsibility for his murderous act; Stella pays for the act of leaving him at the altar. They assert their freedom and, in this assertion, lose everything – she her life, he his freedom. They act in a total sense, putting everything at stake, summing up their life in one act. (I shall show in the next chapter how such a stance for Hegel is characteristic of a pre-modern, tragic and ethical universe.) They demonstrate and win, in this total act, a freedom, but this freedom that they have gained is immediately lost. In this intertwining of freedom and loss, responsibility and hyperbolic debt, the film spells out the logic of an ethics that is modern tragic. In this ethics, there is freedom, and there is a limit. We are not in a universe governed by fate or objective necessity, but the modern categories of freedom and choice are expressed with a sense of absolute stakes that is tragic, pre-modern and incompatible with the notion of a modern subject choosing actions as a means of asserting independent control over his or her own life.

In short, by dying, Stella asserts her modern subjectivity, but, then, by the same token, in her death, she loses her freedom, thus, demonstrating the tragic nature of her

subjectivity. The profound ambivalence of freedom, demonstrated in the act of death, also questions, ethically, what counts as agency, since freedom is in question (fig. 14).



Figure 14: Standing up to the challenge

1.5 | Representing Subjectivity in *Cléo de 5 à 7* and *Stella*

Comparing the two films, it can be said that both concern subjectivity, but a different kind of subjectivity sprouts from each case. I will begin with what the films have in common: Each film features a young female protagonist. In each film, this woman confronts death, so death becomes an important theme in both films. Both women are artists and strive to assert their freedom and independence, both as women and as artists. The films are very different in narrative perspective, as *Cléo* is told entirely from the protagonist's point of view, and *Stella* describes the main character through her interaction with other characters. The two films are, of course, also different in terms of their style, as Varda's film is experimental and conceptual, seeking to convey Cléo's subjectivity directly – and, at the same time, critically – whereas *Stella* is a conventionally dramatic film. The differences between the two films that concern us here, however, are rooted in the two female characters and the films' rendering of them.

I have shown that Cléo is a character who insulates herself from others and from life itself. She appears lost in her worries and her introspective thoughts; she is unable to disregard the image she believes that others have of her and that she thinks she must live up to. Stella is, on the contrary, marked by an incapacity to reflect upon her actions and make deliberate choices. Spontaneous, uncompromising and reckless, yet, sensitive and vulnerable, she is assertive and embraces life around her. The dilemma that she confronts, in the drama, which she cannot resolve, the question whether she should choose the free life of an artist or a traditional family life – or try to combine the two – reflects Stella's affirmation of life: She is not content with living out just one side of her personality but seeks to realise the full potential for happiness and life that is in her.

Cléo appears, by contrast, as a morbid character, whose illness seems to fit her worried personality only too well.

As it was shown, Cléo is able to embrace life and open up to herself fully only when she confronts her own imminent death. Thus, life comes to her with full intensity through death, and death carries an existential significance of bringing the subject closer to itself. For Stella, death carries a very different meaning and comes about through a very different trajectory. Death comes to Stella from an excessive appetite for life, from not being able to renounce any aspect of life. Death appears as the consequence of a situation in which Stella finds herself unable to choose – and Stella comes to this point because of her assertiveness and defiance. Death is the most extreme point of a line running through a series of situations, in which she demonstrates both her freedom and her inability to reconcile the poles of her life, an extreme point, which, however, in terms of freedom, is already illuminated by what went before. Death in *Stella* is, thus, not existential; it does not focus or concentrate the subject or reveal to it some truth about itself. Death, in *Stella*, is, rather, as I will show, the outcome of a realisation, a highly negative realisation, and one which Stella cannot use to guide her in her life. Both films present a drama of self-realisation. In *Stella*, this realisation is negative and, for the viewer, tragic. It is a realisation that results in her embracing of death as the ambiguous and paradoxical response to a dilemma, which she cannot resolve. In *Cléo*, death or the thought of death brings a positive, existential realisation to her character.

If I talk of Stella's character as a "subject," it is not merely to say that this character acts, chooses and thinks. Nor do I wish to imply that she exhibits unconscious thoughts or desires in the sense of a psychoanalytic subject. The term 'subject' is used, here, in an ethical sense: She is a subject of responsibility for her own life as this life is brought into perspective within the drama. We come to ascribe subjectivity to Stella in

terms of a self-realisation that we can attribute to her in some of the scenes preceding her final meeting with Miltos. This self-realisation is signalled within Stella's appearance through moments of ominous foreboding: In the scene after Stella has decided to call off the wedding, she exits her house saying to Maria and Anetta, who try to stop her by very explicitly warning her that Miltos will kill her, "I will rather die than marry him." Even though this phrase does not seem significant at the time, in light of what follows, it paints a portrait of Stella as fully aware of the danger and the consequence of the action she is about to undertake. A similarly ominous scene occurs later, when Stella bids Antonis goodbye in a sense of never seeing him again. She speaks her last words to him as if talking to herself and warns him not to look back because she considers it bad luck – in Greek, «Το έχω για κακό». Here, it is useful to note that this is the second time that Stella wistfully bids Antonis goodbye (the other being after they have just flirted in her apartment), as if Antonis, by virtue of his name and good looks, comes to represent all the men that Stella has a hard time leaving, either on account of her wedding or because of her seemingly inescapable death. Taken together, these moments constitute a kind of recognition, on the part of Stella, of the situation she is in, within the drama, as well as of the stance she occupies in relation to it. Stella takes responsibility for her life in relation to a situation she caused and that she, perhaps, senses will lead to her death.

This situation of foreboding means that the viewer locates within her a responsibility for her own life, even as her actions are ambiguous, performative, etc. This sense of ethical responsibility is not reducible entirely to psychological motivation, which, as I have shown, is often opaque in the case of Stella's progression through the plot. Just as Pippin seeks to reconstruct for film-noir characters motivations, when they appear to respond to circumstances, I believe we can attribute to Stella the weight of an

ethical responsibility, in the last sequences of the film, partly because her actions and the dilemma we see her caught in are framed by the entire preceding drama. Thus, the character of Stella appears as a subject through the accumulative movement that she goes through within the drama. The basis for attributing subjectivity is, thus, not the motivation propelling the story forward, but it is the coming together, for the protagonist, of all the different elements in the story. Stella is a subject to the extent that she carries the weight of the choices that she has to make, which she cannot make and which propel her into the impossible and tragic situation at the end.

Cléo becomes a subject through a completely different route. She is a subject of existential reckoning and self-discovery. The internal moments and the content of this self-discovery do not, in any significant way, involve society, other people or ethical values that would be in tension with her own style of life. Her self-discovery concerns only herself. (I, thus, disagree with the interpretation, in *To Desire Differently*, that she becomes an “active social participant” through her meeting with the soldier (Flitterman-Lewis 268).) The self that she discovers is hers alone, and she is alone with this discovery – even as she is encouraged by her encounter with a stranger.

By contrast, Stella’s negative realisation that the dilemma of her life presents a contradiction that she cannot overcome implies a reference to an ethical world outside of her; a world in which artistic freedom, erotic freedom, love and marriage are potentially in conflict. I have shown that the drama, in *Stella*, turns on the complex and, yet, sharply drawn features of the protagonist, Stella. Her relations to others, her role in the plot, her reasons for action are ambivalent throughout, defying conceptual understanding but not description. The narrative language of Cacoyannis, in this film, serves, instead, to bring us back, again and again, to the obviousness and the enigma, the paradoxical evidence and intransparency of the main character. The viewer gets to

know Stella through her relations, her reactions and responses and does not get acquainted with her feelings and thoughts considered as motivations: She acts on impulse, in defiance, by instinct, out of a refusal to compromise. What we get to know, when watching this film, is this theatrical person – the person who is assertive, honest, etc. – but this trait of performance takes away our ability to vouch for Stella's character.

There is, in other words, a gap within the narrative language of the film, between the construction of character and the construction of plot. In this gap, the film develops its ethical problem of subjectivity. Stella's decision to face Miltos, even as she has been warned that this action might lead to her death, remains enigmatic. This means that, at the peak of the drama, a choice that is made by the protagonist in the film happens off-screen. As I showed above, at certain moments preceding her final meeting with Miltos, Stella expresses a sense of foreboding, implying that she is aware of what awaits her. These moments signal, I say, a realisation on her part of her ethical responsibility for her life. We, now, see, within the sequence of the plot leading up to this event, a gap in motivation. Thus, we see Stella's hesitation before the wedding, but we also see her acceptance. We see her flirtation with Antonis and her leaving Miltos at the altar, but we also see her willingness to confront Miltos at the crossroads. In between these actions, we are never quite sure what Stella is thinking. Crucially, at the day of her wedding, Stella leaves her friends at Paradise to go to her room and dress for the wedding, yet, when they come to pick her up for the ceremony, she has changed into a black suit. She immediately announces that she decided not to show up at the church. These acts are not presented as completely surprising, but, in between them, not much is revealed about Stella's psychology. They are the results of what we assume must have taken place in her. We, thus, get to know the main character and her actions in a way which excludes that these actions are completely intelligible in terms of moral choice,

psychological motivation or linear plot development. We, thus, find the construction of a certain kind of ambivalence in the characterisation of the protagonist at the heart of Cacoyannis' narrative language. This ambivalence is used to convey to the central character a specific form of depth, which is not psychological but theatrical and philosophical. It is the depth of an unresolved enigma in the protagonist, which, then, opens up more general ethical questions concerning subjectivity. It is, precisely, this lack of transparency of the central character that leads it to become enlarged and theatrical: highly expressive of who she is. The fusion of a lack of psychological clarity, on the level of characterisation, and opacity, on the level of motivation and plot development, is sustained, aesthetically, by what I have referred to, in the Introduction, as the 'theatrical aesthetic' of this film.

Summing up the problem of Stella's agency, it can be said that her incapacity to resolve her dilemma is expressed in extreme and reactive responses. These extreme moments are performative, aesthetically, in appearing self-contained. Psychologically, it seems that Stella, in these performative responses, overacts instead of acting. The dramatic structure has an incremental and a discontinuous axis. Throughout the film, Stella responds spontaneously, performatively, and her death is in continuity with that – one act of defiance too many. Yet, being both an action and, as I have said, a kind of non-action, her embracing death is also qualitatively distinct, discontinuous with all that went before. Pippin refers to a similar type of "theatrical" agency in his discussion of a protagonist in film-noir: "He ends up an agent, however restricted and compromised, in the only way one can be. He acts like one" (49).

The impossibility for Stella of resolving the dilemma of the drama implies, as I argued, that, within this dilemma, she comes to confront something that is external to her and which remains external throughout the arc of the drama. In other words, her

resources of reflection or decision are not sufficient to incorporate this external element and make it part of her choice. I have shown what this external element is and why it confronts Stella as something that she cannot control. The ethical command of a community, represented by the figure of Miltos' mother and by the old-fashioned common sense of Anetta, relativises Stella's agency and power to control her life. Within the drama, thus, the world comes to relativise the claims and aspirations of the protagonist. In this moment of relativisation, the world reveals to the character the subjective limits of her claims. The world reveals itself, in the drama, to be larger than the self – and this is, indeed, the core of the drama.

This notion of 'being larger than' means that, in the ethical universe of the film, the protagonist is confronted with the impossibility of translating the entire range of its aspirations into actions that it can realise in the world. In *Stella*, this confrontation is tragic, since the character responds to this experience, this revelation of the world, as a stark limit to its deepest aspirations: with a negation of itself. The protagonist emerges as a subject in this film not as in melodrama – within the confines of thematic possibilities mapped out by the plot, that is, in synchrony with the unfolding of the plot according to motivation – but at the moment of enforced self-limitation. I have shown that, in the partly tragic resolution of the drama in *Stella*, the final act is paradoxical, as it is self-destructive, so the moment of ethical responsibility that we can reconstruct for this character does not open up to a new life or a new beginning. The latter, on the other hand, I shall show, characterises the drama in the two other films, in which ethical responsibility is dramatised through moments of direct confrontation between the protagonist and figures of normative or family authority. In these less tragic plots, however, the intimate link between death, ethical responsibility and a subject of self-limitation will be seen to be at the core of the drama as well.

The film's dramatic enigma, the gap in motivation preceding Stella's death, serves to present an ethical question. We do not know why Stella returns to Miltos at the crossroads, but we have seen that she does so with an air of insight and foreboding, as if knowing what awaits her. The ethical question emerging from this ending is, then, the following: How is it that the protagonist's freedom and agency go together with this acceptance of a tragic outcome, as if this were her fate? In this question, which lies at the horizon of the film's ending, we find the elements of what I go on to explore as modern tragedy in the remainder of this thesis.

Chapter 2 | Theory Chapter

“Not to accept an event in the world is to wish that the world did not exist”
(Weil, *Gravity* 142).

2.1 | Introduction: The Ethics of Modern Tragedy

I have shown in the analysis of characterisation and plot in *Stella* that the heroine's agency emerges as problematic. This notion of an agency that is not straightforward is, indeed, the central theme and question of this whole thesis, a problem that I believe comes across very strongly and in similar ways across the three early films in spite of their other stylistic and generic differences.

This notion of a problematic agency determines the angle of analysis and method of interrogation in the interpretation of each of the three films. The angle of analysis is what I have characterised as ethical; it aims to bring out the ethical stakes of the story. The method of interrogation, which begins with the predicament of the protagonist and her passage through the arc of the drama, is hermeneutic: The interrogation is a development of questions raised by the films and by the heroines in these films. Against this background, the wider theoretical framework, which I now introduce in order to amplify and spell out the questions of agency in each film, is conceived as an aid to interpretation. Hence, the aim of the interpretation is not to “translate” the questions raised by these films into philosophical terms.

The theoretical amplification of the problems faced by the three protagonists that I propose is derived, as I have already mentioned, from the philosophy of Hegel. My use of Hegelian vocabulary will allow me to analyse a structure of ambivalence underlying agency in these films. This ambivalence has different dimensions. It involves passivity versus conscious choice or reflection. It involves the tension between a modern notion of agency and various figures of traditional normative authority. Finally, and in the conjunction of the two notions just mentioned, Hegel allows us to see the ambivalence, in these films, as a matter of subjectivity. At the horizon of this

interpretation is the idea that the films depict a paradoxical subjectivity, tied not to agency and choice but to a reflection leading to self-limitation. On the basis of this account of ambivalence, I set out to describe the dramatic form of these films as being also, essentially, ambivalent. This is the form that, using a Hegelian term, I call ‘modern tragedy.’

In this chapter, I present this cluster of problems by beginning with a discussion of ethics in film. I, then, go on to situate my use of Hegel within a wider scholarly context. After this, I present the concept of ‘modern tragedy.’ I conclude with an account of interpretation and hermeneutics that will aim to tie together the notions of agency and dramatic form. The problem of subjectivity that is at the horizon of my interpretation will not be fully spelled out here but will be in the course of the interpretation of *A Girl in Black* and *A Matter of Dignity*, since it is a notion that can only be substantiated through the interpretation. Below, I merely situate my use of the term ‘subject’ within a Hegelian tradition of philosophical ethics and aesthetics.

2.2 | Film Ethics

In his book, *The Movement Image*, the philosopher Gilles Deleuze presents what he calls an ‘ethical image.’⁴³ He introduces this term in his discussion of films by the French director Éric Rohmer. These films are, he says, generated by problems. These are problems that the characters cannot resolve within the arc of the plot. The films of Rohmer are not experimental or modernist films, but they exhibit a narrative structure, which is not merely based on a forward-moving plot or story. In a similar vein, while the films of Cacoyannis are not abstract or non-classical, nevertheless, the camera perspective, in these films, tends to be weighted slightly more towards characterisation than towards classical narrative presentation. As I showed in *Stella*, with its slow, incremental build-up of characterisation, character relationships, moral dilemmas and in the preponderance of situations featuring the protagonist amidst other characters, the way we come to follow the protagonists, in Cacoyannis’ films, is not what we may call ‘objectifying,’ if by this term one refers to a classical style that avoids ambiguity through clear narrative sequence and robust structures of plot. On the other hand, the early films of Cacoyannis are also not objectifying in the analytical mode of a clearly modernist filmmaker, such as Antonioni. In virtue of the melodramatic elements of affective emphasis in these early Cacoyannis dramas, we are not at all barred from empathy with their troubled heroines. At the same time, our empathy, as I showed in the final scenes of *Stella*, is infused with a sense of enigma: We may feel compassion with the heroines, yet we do not fully understand the nature of their inertia or the source of their indecision. There are frequent ellipses in the story sequence, as well as marked cuts between scenes, leaving an important element of the drama to the imagination of

⁴³ See Gilles Deleuze’s *Cinema 1: The Movement Image*, Chapter 5.

the viewer. We saw this in *Stella*, in the sudden disappearance from the film image of the heroine's first lover. In *A Matter of Dignity*, which I will discuss later, Cacoyannis practices a montage of sorts, accentuating little breaks in the narrative.

In the book by the philosopher Robert Pippin already mentioned, devoted to the notion of fatalism in film-noir, we find an account of ethics in film that is much more detailed than the Deleuzian notion of an 'ethical image,' defined by unresolved problems. Yet, again, the central notion is that of a problem or, more specifically, a kind of agency that appears problematic, as the viewer cannot follow all the reasons behind the characters' decisions. Pippin claims that characters in classic American noir appear unable to "step back" from a situation or a course of action and form coherent reasons for future actions. He goes on to specify that characters, in these films, appear to act without always knowing what they do: "For one thing, it is clear that in some cases no one of the principals has any clear idea at all why they are doing what they are doing" (15). On this basis, Pippin articulates a notion of problematic agency, and claims that this problematic agency is itself the core narrative and thematic content of noir films. Actions and intentionality are problematic because, while characters do not appear merely as puppets, they are also not in full command of the reasons for the actions they undertake. He presents the notion of fatalism as the partial collapse of a kind of practical rationality, which he calls "the reflective model" and which consists in a picture of agents deliberating, then, choosing, then, acting:

But I want to say that many of the film noir directors present a pattern of what remain actions, subjects doing things, but in a way that prevents us from any temptation to think that they have simply had to become the spectators of their own activities, and in a way that does not fit and in effect challenges the reflective model summarized above. (22)

Pippin also makes the following important methodological point: The condition of a limited understanding of agency is not unique to film, but it is a condition that

appears in life as well: “But this feature, too, is not unique to noirs, film, or aesthetic objects. It is a limitation of which any attempt at action explanation “in life” must also take account” (4). Similarly, my notion of problematic and ambiguous agency can be understood to appear, in this way, as a term implied by action – as that action appears in the films of Cacoyannis – but could also appear “in life.” Hence, the moral realism, if we may say, of Pippin’s philosophical approach to film, is a kind of interpretation of film that is distinct from or, even, opposed to other kinds of interpretation, which would be based, for instance, on the attribution of unconscious desire to characters, the framing of the plot by cultural discourse or the evocative power of the visual image. To be sure, erotic significance, cultural content and features of film style are all elements within the films’ capacity to dramatise the ethical problem of agency. And, it is this problem, as is the question of agency for Pippin, which guides my analysis. I will now explain Pippin’s method in greater detail.

Films address us in the midst of our acting lives, as he says in a passage linking his own method of interpretation to Hegel’s philosophical aesthetics: “The aesthetic form of self-knowledge, while cognitive, is one that uniquely engages our affective and imaginative lives, again in ways indispensable to such self-understanding” (24). In his focus on what he sees as the less than rational motivation for actions in noir films, Pippin makes a grand aesthetic claim for these films. They visualise or provide us with an external perspective upon a world in which agents are not fully and rationally aware of their motivations: “We see what is, in effect, a partially worked-out picture of what it would be to live in such a world, a shared world not wedded to the notions of reflective individuals formulating plans for avowed purposes and then enacting causal powers to effect them” (12). The perspective of interpretation, here, is hermeneutic, in that we are meant to seek to understand or, even, reconstruct what it is like for these, apparently,

fated or fatalistic characters to act in their “world.” Pippin believes with Hegel that artworks are part of a culture’s self-reflection. They contribute to collective self-knowledge. In the case of film-noir, the object of self-reflection is the notion of a limited and problematic agency: Film-noirs “externalize” for us what agency might mean under certain conditions where characters seem to have limited control (23-24).

It is highly relevant to the hermeneutic methodology and the ethical problem of agency, in this thesis, that Pippin, with this interpretation of film-noir, presents a method of film interpretation that is clearly focused on characters, their actions, their motivations. His analysis is, obviously, not confined to these elements, but the features of *mise-en-scène* and dialogue that he emphasises serve the purpose of character interpretation. In this thesis, I seek to follow a similar methodology and a similar hierarchy. Features of *mise-en-scène*, such as framing, which is very important in all three films, are seen to accentuate points in the drama, which, in turn, serve to present or unfold the predicament of the protagonist and her relations with other characters.

The notion of ‘dramatic perspective’ that I use, in this thesis, finds its parallel in Pippin’s notion of ‘narrative perspective,’ which he connects to his particular conception of agency – and this, as I showed above, is relative to a notion of ‘reflection.’ In his discussion of the flashback convention in noir, for instance, Pippin ties narrative point of view to a moral point of view. In flashback, actions appear as unfolding deterministically, and human freedom seems to be excluded: “We watch the events unfold as if they were happening in front of us, even though it is already established how they will turn out, and we have a sense of watching an already determined series simply play out” (38-39). Pippin, then, moves from a philosophical discussion of determinism to another narrative feature of noir stories: the sense of events happening to the characters, quickly and chaotically, rather than as the result of

their controlled choice. Hence, he joins narrative visual perspective and properties of the diegesis to different ways in which events are connected to each other and to the characters in the story; he construes this link around the moral concept of determined, i.e., less than free, agency:

That is, contrary to the reflective model, there is very little opportunity for *ex ante* deliberation in the scenes we see, and little evidence that responses are the expressions of already deliberated about and resolved general maxims of action. In the simplest sense, events come at characters much too fast and too confusingly to allow such reflection or reliance on the already reflected. (39)

We see that, at the core of this complex interpretative point of view, we find the problem of what we, as viewers, are to attribute to the characters in terms of motivation: The interesting and precise term '*ex ante*' is, perhaps, the most significant here. *Ex ante* means, explicitly, that one reasons backwards, reconstructing or, here, failing to reconstruct what must have been a good reason for the accomplished deed. Thinking in terms of *ex ante* reconstruction, then, means that one does not address or participate in the narrative merely by following the flow of narration, what David Bordwell calls '*syuzhet*.' One addresses the narrative by posing questions to it, that is, questions about the characters' motivations, and these questions arise, of course, only when in the narrative these motivations themselves appear problematic or questionable.

In my thesis, there is, in a parallel way, a strong connection between dramatic perspective and the presentation of problematic characters, whose motivation is in question and, thus, invites interpretation. As in the case of noir in the interpretation of Pippin, it is the case in Cacoyannis, for example in *Stella*, that what Pippin refers to as the attribution of prior motivation (*ex ante*) is often obscured by the sudden or elliptic concatenation of events in the story: "Rather than being able to rely on *ex ante* formulated policies, characters can be said to express what turn out to be their actual commitments and aversions in action, and must then retrospectively interpret what that

meant; in a sense, determine who they are” (Pippin 39). This situation of characters finding themselves having to adapt to past decisions is quite analogous to what we saw regarding Stella’s successive decisions (for example, regarding her on and off marriage plans). Pippin takes the idea of characters interpreting their past in the sense of acknowledging or coming to terms with a past action, which, when executed, did not flow from a premeditated plan, and this is the ultimate meaning of the noir flashback: “It is an echo of such retrospective situations as Sophocles’ *Oedipus at Colonus*, where Oedipus utters what I would half-seriously nominate as an early noir line, ‘I suffered those deeds more than I acted them.’” (Pippin 40). The situation of not acting from decision has other aspects as well. At times, actions appear as “creative improvisation[s]” (40), at times, as Pippin mentions, characters appear to be “opaque to themselves” (41) – both features could apply to *Stella*.

Staying on the level of the relation between this hermeneutic strategy and other critical approaches to ethics in film, I would like to mention, in particular, the parallels and differences between this hermeneutic method and the American school of moral genre criticism, which finds its inspiration in the literary theory of Northrop Frye.⁴⁴ The critic who has pursued this line most systematically is, no doubt, Lesley Brill. In his studies on John Huston and Alfred Hitchcock, in *The Hitchcock Romance, Love and Irony in Hitchcock’s Films*, Brill explores the scope for thinking about film genre as a vehicle for moral reflection. This approach is interpretative and not theoretical. It differs markedly, therefore, from other kinds of genre studies, for instance the large body of academic writing on melodrama, which, as Gledhill⁴⁵ has shown, has been a fertile ground for theoretical experimentation in film studies, thus, successive generations of

⁴⁴ See Northrop Frye’s *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*.

⁴⁵ See Christine Gledhill’s *Home is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film*.

academic critics, pouring over American 1950s woman films, have drawn on shifting theoretical paradigms. By contrast, Brill does not espouse a theoretical paradigm. His readings are guided by a set of moral concerns that he sees as embedded in film narrative. Film narrative, in turn, is informed by moral assumptions to the extent that it is moulded by genres encoded with a definite moral map. This conjunction of narrative analysis, genre classification and moral interpretation is anchored in a theory of narrative, which puts great stress on sequence and on how the story ends – for the characters. Hence, for Brill, the moral significance of a genre and, hence, of a particular film narrative is crucially determined by its outcome. To put it simply: A happy end is what makes the difference. His book, *The Hitchcock Romance, Love and Irony in Hitchcock's Films*, makes the argument that the middle-period films of this director are concerned with the moral implications of love, tied to the prospect of marriage between the protagonists as a happy narrative outcome. Seen from the teleological perspective of a morally charged trajectory towards a marital end, characters can be seen to be invested with high moral significance.

The parallel between this thesis and the genre criticism of Brill has different aspects. It consists in the assumption that, in the context of interpretation, film genre is a moral category – not a production device. Second, like Pippin and Brill, this thesis assumes a sort of moral realism in film. Lastly, the notion of sequence and outcome are also very important in the dramatic form of these early films by Cacoyannis, although, at this point, there is an important difference between my approach to drama and Brill's notion of narrative: The difference between the two approaches concerns teleology. The way I look at drama is not teleological. The dramatic form, in these Cacoyannis films, is not so much a movement towards a definite endpoint but a trajectory of questioning. In

this trajectory, what comes to matter are ruptures and reversals in the plot, rather than the resolution of the plot.

2.3 | Hegel Reception

I have shown that ethical film criticism concerns itself with a number of formal aspects of film narrative, such as the sequence of events, perspective, ending. (I do not, at this point, make the distinction between moral and ethical that will be important later.) In the case of Pippin, I also showed that his notion of ethics is tied to an idea of problematic agency. Now, it is not by chance that Pippin is also a scholar of Hegel, since questions of agency are important both for Hegel and, even more, for a number of thinkers who have drawn on Hegelian concepts to discuss issues of moral modernity or questions of literary genre. In *The Theory of the Novel*, by Georg Lukács, for example, questions of genre, modernity and subjective agency are woven together so as to become inseparable from one another. I argued, in the chapter on *Stella*, that Hegel approaches dramatic form from an ethical standpoint, as his opposition between ancient and modern tragedy involves ethical questions of agency – the difference between a psychological modern subject, on the one hand, and an archaic agent wholeheartedly and unreflectively representing a norm, on the other. The notion that I sought to develop from Hegel, in that chapter, was that of an ambivalent modernity expressed on the level of agency, and this ambivalence, as well as the dramatic form that gives shape to it, is what I call ‘modern tragedy.’

In the reception of Hegel in the 20th century, many of those thinkers, who have drawn on Hegel to develop their own philosophy, have retained certain structural concepts from his method, while entirely leaving aside the grand metaphysical scheme of rational synthesis or integration of the individual subject within a collective spirit. Rather, they have retained and developed moments of conflict, split, irrationality that

Hegel also discusses, but, in doing so, they have shifted the scope of discussion from the general and metaphysical to the existential and psychological.

In a work on the reception of Hegel in France,⁴⁶ Judith Butler outlines this transformation in detail. Butler frames her discussion of this problem with an account of the term ‘subject,’ which seeks to show how the abstract metaphysical and epistemological category of the subject in Hegel could come to be used, with only small modifications, as a tool of psychological description in French existential philosophy and psychoanalysis. The basis of Butler’s historical narrative is an opposition between a “unified” and a split subject. She locates this split in the history of philosophy:

The unified subject with its unified philosophical life has served as a necessary psychological premise and normative ideal in moral philosophy since Plato and Aristotle. Without a discreet subject with internally consistent desires, the moral life remains indefinite; if the subject is ambiguous, difficult to locate and properly name, then to whom shall we ascribe this life? (4)

This frame of the unified versus the split subject also involves, on her part, an interpretation of the existential tradition as a conception of modernity as a time coming after the metaphysical synthesis of Hegel’s idealism. Her narrative traces the breakdown – on the level of Hegelian dialectic in French thought – of the metaphysical idealism that allowed Hegel to posit an ultimate harmony in the universe and an ultimate identity between subject and object. According to Butler, such a harmony (what she calls “doctrine of internal relations”) was, gradually, replaced, in French post-war thought, by the notion of a displaced or uprooted subject, a subject which she finds embodied in a concept of “desire”:

As Hegel’s doctrine of internal relations is successively challenged for its philosophical viability, desire increasingly becomes a principle of the ontological displacement of the human subject, and in its latest stages, in the work of Lacan, Deleuze, and Foucault, desire comes to signify the impossibility of the coherent subject itself. (6)

⁴⁶ See Judith Butler’s *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth-Century France*.

When she, then, comes to introduce Jacques Lacan, Butler makes the interesting qualifying observation:

For Lacan, desire can no longer be equated with the fundamental structure of human rationality; Eros and Logos resist an Hegelian conflation. Desire can no longer be said to reveal, express, or thematize the reflexive structure of consciousness, but is, rather, the precise moment of consciousness' opacity. (186)

The term 'subject' and the implicit theme of modernity are, thus, conjoined, here, in a narrative of increasing displacement and derationalisation, as desire, in Lacan, comes to stand for the human subject's lack of insight concerning itself.

The notion of scope that Butler invokes to place Lacan in relation to Hegel is important for the discussion of these terms – 'subject' and 'modernity' – also in my thesis. The Lacanian subject can be seen as one version or case of a concept of modern subjectivity articulated on Hegelian ground with a specific scope that is different from the very general scope of Hegel's own terms. For Lacan, this domain is psychological; for the discussion of modern tragedy, it is ethical. One may say, that Butler's analysis shows that the term 'subject' rarely makes sense outside of a particular theory.

A last thought on Butler could be this: She argues that the existentialist and psychoanalytical theories of desire entail the task of "developing the appropriate hermeneutics of self-reflection" (2). The very same can be said for the paradoxical subject that takes shape in modern tragedy.

In *The Theory of the Novel*, Lukács illustrates just this: He uses Hegelian terms of unity and alienation, in an existential and Romantic sense, to describe both a kind of modern sentiment or existential feeling and the nature of the novel and of other modern literary forms. The focus of this discussion is a concept of alienation. Within the context of his paradigm of modernity as a period characterised by the historical experience of loneliness and alienation, Lukács presents modern drama in the following terms:

Such loneliness gives rise to new tragic problems, especially the central problem of modern tragedy – that of trust. The new hero's soul, clothed in life yet filled with essence, can never comprehend that the essence existing within the same shell of life in another person need not be the same as his own; it knows that all those who have found one another are the same, and cannot understand that its knowledge does not come from this world, that the inner certainty of this knowledge cannot guarantee its being a constituent of this life. (45)

It is interesting to note that the term 'modern tragedy,' used here in passing and not as a well-defined technical term, is flexible in meaning. Hence, Lukács, even as he is dependent for his existential aesthetics of alienation upon Hegel's philosophy, does not adhere slavishly to his terminology.

The passage describes a split between inner experience and the external world, the world of adventure, but also the world of objective ethical norms. If the original spiritual bond, which Lukács attributes to ancient and medieval literature, between the norms of the inner life and the norms of the world is severed, then the tragedy of the hero, in modern tragedy, is not a conflict of norms but a separation between him and all other characters, all other subjects. Hence, he cannot trust anyone, and "the central problem of modern tragedy" becomes "that of trust" (45). The modern novel deals not with absolute ethical norms, religious aspirations, essential conflicts. It deals with empirical, contingent individuals, living in an open-ended world, that is, a world which does not correspond to an underlying or, perhaps, overarching metaphysical concept, such as a cosmos. Lukács says that the pre-modern literary forms of epic and tragedy presuppose what he calls a "totality" (46), that is, they presuppose a historical experience, which can be summed up and grasped, also by metaphysics, as a rounded and closed world in which the inner world of the subject finds a correspondence in the outer world. "Transcendental homelessness" (61), a modern condition, corresponds to the contingent, arbitrary nature of individual psychology and empirical conflicts – the kind of psychology and conflict of which the modern novel is the appropriate form. I

shall show below that a concept very similar to that of ‘transcendental homelessness’ is central also to the theory of melodrama put forward by Peter Brooks.

The most basic ethical problem of modern literature, according to Lukács, is one that arises from a particular existential challenge. This challenge is embedded in a specifically modern historical experience: the poetic notion of “homelessness,” which runs through the text as a metaphorical thread and speaks of an experience – and which is endowed with a concrete structure. In modernity, the subject, who, in his inner life, is not spiritually bound to the laws that govern the world, has to meet the challenge that reality poses, in so far as it is separate from his own interiority. Now, the difference between genres, even on the extremely general level of epic versus tragedy or epic in relation to verse, is defined by different literary means of reflecting and interpreting this experience and this challenge. Thus, the verse form is a means of covering up the split between inner experience and the world, while not offering the subject any means of building a bridge back into the world: “The power of verse, which can spread a carpet of flowers over the chasm, is not sufficient to build a practicable road across it” (Lukács 58). The modern novel is, in turn, an interpretation of the modern historical experience of “transcendental homelessness.” Themes and forms in the evolution of the novel flow from the task of reflecting this historical experience:

For crime and madness are objectifications of transcendental homelessness – the homelessness of an action in the human order of social relations, the homelessness of a soul in the ideal order of a supra-personal system of values. Every form is the resolution of a fundamental dissonance of existence. (Lukács 61-62)

Now, the individual hero, portrayed in this form, is, he says, “problematic”:

The contingent world and the problematic individual are realities which mutually determine one another. If the individual is unproblematic, then his aims are given to him with immediate obviousness, and the realisation of the world constructed by these given aims may involve hindrances and difficulties but never any serious threat to his interior life. (78)

This notion of the ‘problematic individual’ is of great relevance to the conception of modern tragedy that I present in this thesis. The individual hero and character are problematic in the modern novel, according to Lukács, because they do not find before themselves a series of normative goals that are simply, objectively and unproblematically given. In the pre-modern universe, the inner life of the protagonist is not put into question; it is not problematised by the challenge posed by the world. I argue that this characterisation of the modern hero, the protagonist of the modern novel, is clearly analogous to the situation of ambivalence characterising the heroines in the early films of Cacoyannis.

In *Literature and Evil*, the French philosopher and historian of mysticism Georges Bataille also uses Hegelian terms to reflect upon a kind of agency that he finds presented in modern literature and which he terms “tragic” (21). Thus, for Bataille, as for Lukács, the notion of genre is not merely formal. The novel, for Lukács, corresponds to modern existential experience. The tragic, for Bataille, is a particular moral universe – not just a literary form. He develops this notion of the ‘tragic’ in a reflection upon the nature of transgression and sacrifice, where eroticism, mysticism and an active relationship with death form a kind of thematic unity. Bataille is himself inspired by Hegel’s dialectic, and he bases his idea of the ‘tragic’ on a dialectic between the human sphere and a transcendent sphere. In Emily Brontë’s novel, *Wuthering Heights*, for instance, he sees a story that opposes the human realm of interest to a different realm of passion intertwined with a wish for death. This other realm he calls “the tragic domain”:

In *Wuthering Heights*, as in Greek tragedy, it is not the law itself that is denounced: what it forbids is simply described as an essentially human domain, made for man. The forbidden domain is the tragic domain or, better still, the sacred domain. (22)

He spells out the transcendent dimensions of this tragic domain in terms of “mystical experience” (24): “The lesson of *Wuthering Heights*, of Greek tragedy and, ultimately, of all religions, is that there is an instinctive tendency towards divine intoxication which the rational world of calculation cannot bear” (22). The Hegelian dialectical method shows itself in Bataille’s opposition between transgression and the human sphere of natural interest. In ordinary language, one often uses the word ‘transgression’ to signify something that is almost pleasurable, a kind of hedonism. For Bataille, the mystical transgression, by contrast, is incompatible with the human sphere of pleasure and self-interest or, at least, with a pleasure that one could rationally plan and seek out. There may be other pleasures in mystic eroticism, but they are experienced passively. Hence, in the experience that Bataille also refers to as an inner experience, we are not dealing with a subject of conscious intention but, perhaps, if we want to retain the term ‘subject,’ with a subject that is radically passive, a subject that endures an experience.

I showed in *Stella* that her paradoxical agency towards the end introduces a problem of action as – or within – non-action. Hence, also for the interpretation of subjectivity in Cacoyannis, this notion of a ‘subject’ defined by what it endures or by its capacity to endure is highly relevant. Nevertheless, the problematic characters, in Cacoyannis, are modern tragic not fully tragic: Hence, we have, here, a useful distinction between tragedy, as Bataille thinks of it, and modern tragedy. Modern tragedy remains within the human realm of ethics. Modern tragedy is not a negotiation with a transcendent domain. Hence, any appearance of fate or fatalism is muted or incomplete. Even so, a parallel appears. According to Bataille, the tragic is manifest also in a sort of (passively endured) mystical insight. In modern tragedy, there are key moments of climactic action or dramatic reversal in which we may speculate – in the vein of Pippin’s reconstruction of motivation – that a reduced version of such an insight

occurs; these are moments where the protagonist appears to have stepped outside of the normal flow of desire and rational motivation and to obey a different imperative.

Now, the position and role of Hegel and his approach to drama, in this thesis, is both important and limited. It is important that Hegel is at the beginning of a tradition of aesthetic reflection, which seeks to correlate literary or dramatic form with historical subjective experience. It is also important that this approach has shown itself to be fruitful to those theorists who have applied it with modification: Lukács, in his theory of the novel, and, for example, Péter Szondi, in his *Theory of the Modern Drama*.

However, it is also significant, as I have just shown, that such an application of Hegel's method is not simply the use of a theory that remains fixed. Lukács adapts the interpretative approach, which Hegel offers, to his own Romantic, existential poetics of homelessness. Szondi focusses – in his study of how drama developed from the bourgeois theatre of Ibsen to the abstraction of Brecht, existentialism and other forms of avant-garde theatre – on the spatial setting of the drama, the nature of the stage, the changing conceptions of dramatic time. In short, he focuses on specific formal features characteristic of successive or rival schools of dramatic art. We, thus, see, in the example of Lukács and Szondi, that the theoretical authority of Hegel's aesthetics consists in presenting a definite point of view, which is based on the correlation between form and historical subjective experience, but which can take very different concrete forms depending on what is salient in the works under discussion. Far from seeking slavishly to apply what Hegel has to say on modern tragedy in his comparison between William Shakespeare and ancient tragedy, I seek to mould his concept of 'modern tragedy' so that it corresponds to a specific kind of modern experience. In so doing, I also seek support in the notion of the 'problematic individual,' developed by Lukács, and in Bataille's notion of passive experience.

However, one specific aspect of Hegel's discussion of ancient tragedy has been very important, hermeneutically, to the deciphering of the Cacoyannis films. It is a notion that we arrive at if we think about the conclusion of his *Antigone* analysis. Contemporary readings of Hegel's *Antigone* analysis by Butler, in *Antigone's Claim: Kinship Between Life and Death*, or Bonnie Honig, in *Antigone, Interrupted*, have tended to focus on its political implications and to analyse the ethical stakes that are internal to the play. George Steiner, on the other hand, in *Antigones: How the Antigone Legend has Endured in Western Literature, Art, and Thought*, chronicles the reception history of the play and devotes close attention to the interpretation of particular moments in the drama. The importance of Hegel's *Antigone* analysis for my work has less to do with the play itself or with how Hegel interprets it. It is the general structure of Hegel's reading that proves inspiring, specifically the intimate link, in this reading, between the notions of tragic insight and subjective reflection. This structure follows from his discussion of *Antigone* as a sort of afterthought. If, in simple words, the play of Sophocles is an important example of historical experience for Hegel, it is because the play presents characters who, unwaveringly, endorse absolute ethical norms but who find that these norms, even though they have support in the ethical universe of the community, enter into unresolvable conflict. Since these characters are not reflective, not self-conscious in the sense of being able to look at the world in the eyes of another, which is the mark of self-consciousness for Hegel, the conflict of norms becomes a tragic conflict between these characters. Now, the result of this conflict is the opposite of who they, themselves, are as characters. They are unreflective, but the conflict, which they carry through to the bitter-end, demonstrates a fissure within the normative framework of the ethical community and, thus, constitutes a moment of reflection. This reflection is the effect of the drama; it is an afterthought for those who assist the

spectacle. It is not for the characters to benefit from this reflection – which is why the play is a tragedy. Yet, through this tragedy, the moment of fissure and reflection enter historical experience and gain objective reality – retrospectively. The afterthought that one can have from this Hegelian reading of *Antigone* is this: A certain kind of subjective insight can emerge from tragic experience.⁴⁷ This notion, at this level of generality, has been something like a motto for the hermeneutic work on the three Cacoyannis films and a guiding star.

⁴⁷ For Hegel, thus, *Antigone* is the first modern play. Wood writes: “The distinguishing characteristic of modern social life is “subjectivity”; the moral standpoint is the standpoint of the ‘subject’” (134).

2.4 | Moral Modernity and Modern Tragedy

In the connection between ethics, agency and modernity, the problem of genre presents itself, within the Hegelian tradition outlined above, as a question of how a subject of agency is rendered problematic within a particular generic form. My concept of ‘modern tragedy’ refers to just such a generic form. In the concept of ‘modern tragedy’ that I formulate to describe the drama of these Cacoyannis films, I present a particular kind of dramatic form, which is used to render, in a particular way, a certain kind of subjective agency and experience. The subjective agency that I refer to is located in the drama and is directly dependent upon the sequence of events and certain moments of rupture occurring within the drama. It is a kind of stance, which we can attribute to the protagonist in the course of the drama. It has much in common with Bataille’s notion of a passively endured experience, but, paradoxically, it also involves reflection and choice. Yet, in the context of a passive experience, choice comes to appear as a forced choice, and, as I showed regarding the last scenes of *Stella*, action appears as a kind of non-action. This paradox of action, appearing within or as non-action, in response to external events in the drama and under the pressure of all the elements surrounding the heroine in the drama, is the version of problematic agency that I find in these Cacoyannis films. It is, therefore, also the core of the questions raised by these films. It is parallel, in certain ways, to Pippin’s notion of fatalism, as it also arises at moments in which it is difficult to make *ex ante* reconstructions of the protagonist’s motivation – and this is difficult, as it is in his film-noir analyses, both for the viewer and for the characters themselves.

I will describe the ethical implications of this problematic agency in terms of ambivalence and in terms of the protagonist responding to ethical limitations to her

agency. These limits appear, alternately, as external – communicated through a tragic event – and internal – actively embraced by the character in a movement of subjective self-limitation. It is this movement of self-limitation that constitutes the concluding moments of these dramas, I argue. It is through this movement of self-limitation that the subjective stance, which emerges in the drama, reflects a certain experience of modernity that is ambivalent: It is the experience of an ambivalence between subjective agency and reflection, on the one hand, and objective and external ethical norms on the other.

In order to amplify the notion of modernity as ambivalence, I will now turn to a theory of modernity that is also ethical but which is not directly dependent on Hegel. This is the theory developed by Alasdair MacIntyre in *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*. This work directly presents a way of thinking of ethical modernity as ambivalence. It will further clarify how we can think of the notion of modernity as an ethical, rather than social or political condition. Thus, MacIntyre clarifies the contours of an ethical approach to modernity by explicitly situating his own account in relation to other rival conceptions of modernity, the sociology of Max Weber and the existentialism of Kierkegaard (29ff). This articulation of the difference between ethics, on the one hand, and sociology and existentialism, on the other, which MacIntyre undertakes, is extremely helpful for situating my own approach to modern tragedy in relation to rival positions within film studies.

A sociological conception of modernity is present in many different kinds of film studies, cultural studies and cultural history. Since my thesis adopts a different, ethical approach to modernity, it is very important to distinguish this ethical problem of modernity from a sociological approach. Existentialism, as a broad cultural strand in the 20th century, was contemporary with Cacoyannis, and I believe his films reflect a rival

approach to subjectivity, one that is rooted in history, ethics and a conception of belonging to a cultural community, which are at odds with or, even, antithetical to existentialist notions of isolated subjectivity of the kind we saw represented in the film *Cléo de 5 à 7*, by Agnès Varda.

MacIntyre's approach to ethics or, as he says, "morality" (22), is similar to the conception of 'modern tragedy' that I develop here, in that it reflects an ambivalent historical experience. His book, *After Virtue*, is an attack upon different forms of moral modernity; most notably, he attacks the notion that morality is something that is not already objectively given in experience but which is in need of some sort of justification, some sort of rational argument that would be more persuasive, more compelling than the moral commands that it seeks to justify. He presents his account with explicit reference to Hegel, saying: "It is what Hegel called philosophical history" (3), i.e., a conceptual, rather than empirical concept of how civilisation or societies develop. MacIntyre holds that objective morality, in a sense that is not in need of further justification, whether through argument or subjective choice, is lost in modernity, and that it is this loss, which is properly modern, hence, which defines what it is to be modern. From this thesis, follows two tasks that he, himself, sets:

The first is that of identifying and describing the lost morality of the past and of evaluating its claims to objectivity and authority; this is a task partly historical and partly philosophical. The second is that of making good my claim about the specific character of the modern age. (25)

Existentialism and sociology are two characteristic expressions of the modern age. MacIntyre argues that, for Weber, normative authority is contextual, bound to particular social frameworks, such as bureaucracy. Existentialism, on the other hand, makes behaviour, feelings and choices intelligible as the outcomes of a choice, which itself is not grounded on anything. Between context and arbitrary choice, the modern self is referred back to its own shifting emotions. The modern self, thus, corresponds to

the empiricist doctrine in moral philosophy whereby moral judgements have no objective validity or meaning but, merely, reflect the feelings of those who utter them.

In his further development of what he takes to be a characteristically modern experience, MacIntyre makes an important distinction between two ways in which a self may embody and be perceived to be a “character” (32). He argues that cultures and, by implication, epochs differ in the way they allow individuals to become characters:

One of the key differences between cultures is in the extent to which roles are *characters*; but what is specific to each culture is in large and central part what is specific to its stock of *characters*. So the culture of Victorian England was partially defined by the *characters* of the Public School Headmaster, the Explorer and the Engineer . . . (32)

To think in terms of characters, rather than, say, norms or rules, means both to think in a historical and particular way about embodied moral ideals and to think in terms of aspiration and normative models, since these characters are thought of by MacIntyre as culture specific models of conduct: “Characters . . . are the moral representatives of their culture and they are so because of the way in which moral and metaphysical ideas and theories assume through them an embodied existence in the social world” (32-33).

MacIntyre continues:

A *character* is an object of regard by the members of the culture generally or by some significant segment of them. . . . The Public School Headmaster in England and the Professor in Germany, to take only two examples, were not just social roles: they provided the moral focus for a whole cluster of attitudes and activities. (34)

The character is marked by his exemplary function. He is, thus, a bearer of normative authority. Therein lies the difference between a character and a purely modern self, a self defined by its series of affective states or by the roles it chooses to adopt. Such a modern self, what MacIntyre calls the “emotivist” (36) self, finds in itself no limits to its own choices and commitments. In the social context of bureaucracy, it will espouse the norms of office work. Confronted with itself, it can only rely upon its own will and

whim. The self possesses no internal limits or definite moral criteria giving shape to its conduct independently of its own desire and the social roles it chooses to adopt:

The specifically modern self, the self that I have called emotivist, finds no limits set to that on which it may pass judgment for such limits could only derive rational criteria for evaluation and, as we have seen, the emotivist self lacks any such criteria. (36)

By contrast, the most substantial notion of character, the one that is the most distinct from the relativism of choice and of social roles, would be a pre-modern conception of an unnegotiable social role, implying for the self a definite and normatively charged passage through life. I quote the following passage at length since it gives a very complete picture of the sort of pre-modern situation, which also the Hegelian theory of ethical modernity implies as the Other of modernity:

In many pre-modern, traditional societies it is through his or her membership in a variety of social groups that the individual identifies himself or herself and is identified by others. I am brother, cousin and grandson, member of this household, that village, this tribe. These are not characteristics that belong to human beings accidentally, to be stripped away in order to discover ‘the real me’. They are part of my substance, defining partially at least and sometimes wholly my obligations and my duties. . . . To know oneself as such a social person is however not to occupy a static and fixed position. It is to find oneself placed at a certain point on a journey with set goals; to move through life is to make progress – or to fail to make progress – toward a given end. (39)

We see that MacIntyre, here, moves very close to sociology, but he does so in order to make a normative claim that is opposed to modernity, whereas sociologists, like Weber, present modern rational behaviour as a historical goal that society inevitably moves towards, even if this move might have costs. MacIntyre presents modernity, then, as the loss of a sense of internal limits and normative ideals, which would have been entailed by communities in which members possess a definite, indeed, unnegotiable identity. Within the confines of such an identity, there is no scope for the individual to see itself differently from how it is seen by others. There is no “real me” hidden behind the social role, since the sum of one’s roles constitutes one’s actual identity.

Stepping outside the circle of this discussion, we may say about the heroines in Cacoyannis that they are ambivalent between the poles that MacIntyre identifies as modern and pre-modern. They discover, at first, the freedom of choice offered by an emotivist self, defined by choice and role, only to discover, in themselves, through a tragic trajectory, a certain sense of ethical limits, which makes them question – as my interpretation will argue – their previous, modern, self. In the course of this trajectory, the protagonist does, in fact, meet charismatic characters, appearing as messengers endowed with a strong charge of normative authority. The footballer's mother, in *Stella*, is an archaic mother, in the sense of MacIntyre's example above. The contrast between the two suitors, in *A Matter of Dignity*, the noble widower and the soulless millionaire, is also presented as a contrast between competing moral ideals. The emasculated brother, in *A Girl in Black*, is a negative model, a character who represents an inverted ideal of virile strength and brotherly loyalty.

Thus, between Lukács and MacIntyre, we find the elements of a hermeneutic perspective upon drama as reflection of a particular kind of ethical historical experience.⁴⁸ The problematic individual, in Lukács, is a particular version of that modern subjective experience, which MacIntyre attributes to an emotivist self. It is an individual who is compelled to question the value of its choices, as it does not find itself confronted or endowed with objective ends or limits to its actions. Modern tragedy is a particular way of rendering a certain kind of trajectory for such a problematic individual.

The literary scholar Peter Brooks, who is also invoked by Gledhill in her theory of film melodrama,⁴⁹ argues that melodrama is, ultimately, an exploration of moral

⁴⁸ MacIntyre, therefore, writes: "[H]uman life has a determinate form, the form of a certain kind of story" (145).

⁴⁹ See Christine Gledhill's *Home is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film*.

stakes, which are exaggerated in the play or novel through excesses of plot construction and stylistic devices. This staging of exaggerated moral stakes responds, according to Brooks, to a specific historical experience of modernity, which, he describes, as an experience of moral disorientation.⁵⁰ This is caused by the decline of established religious authorities, and it is a situation in which ethical commands are put into question. Hence, it is also a situation in which the individual is called upon to construct his or her own moral map. This scenario, therefore, presupposes that at least one thing is not called into question – and that is the individual's capacity to act.

Without being able to test whether this assumption, that choice is central to melodrama, is correct for all films that could count as melodramas – this would fall outside the scope of this thesis – I will refer to this model of melodramatic agency as a benchmark definition against which modern tragedy can be seen to take on a distinct profile. Modern tragedy is, as I have argued already, a genre of drama in which agency is rendered directly problematic by the drama. To clarify this contrast, I will now discuss Brooks' historical thesis in greater detail.

Much like MacIntyre and Lukács, Brooks thinks of modernity as a situation in which a certain kind of morality has been lost, but this loss is not unambiguous as it leads to a specifically modern strategy of compensation. First, the questioning of social, moral and metaphysical certainties that the French Revolution both, in part, produced but also, retrospectively, symbolised creates, according to Brooks, a condition of disorientation. Second, as a response to this condition, the moral subjects represented in melodrama are characterised by a set of postures and manoeuvres by which they seek to make up for lost certainties in some way. These strategies of compensation take the

⁵⁰ "Melodrama starts from and expresses the anxiety brought by a frightening new world in which the traditional patterns of moral order no longer provide the necessary social glue" (Brooks 20). For more, see Peter Brooks' *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess*.

moral form of the characters exaggerating the stakes of their own actions; this exaggeration, in turn, takes the aesthetic form of melodramatic excess. The style of melodramatic excess, in this interpretation, is, thus, the sign of a historical experience, as it reflects the need for these modern individuals of making amends for a loss of sacred or ethical significance in their lives. On the level of meaning, this attribution of elevated significance to ordinary life choices takes the form of invoking sacred or moral norms that are no longer fully active; norms that are, in fact, obsolete but which are, nevertheless, not completely lost. Brooks has a suggestive term for this ambivalent status of absolute norms within modernity as strategies of compensation. He calls them the “moral occult” (5).

Now, this notion of a ‘moral occult’ is very close to the ethical ambivalence that I analyse in the films of Cacoyannis as characteristic of modern tragedy. It is, then, on the level of the moral occult and only on the level of the moral occult that it becomes sensible to compare the modern tragedy of Cacoyannis to the model of melodramatic modernity proposed by Brooks. This is a comparison that will emerge within the interpretation of *A Girl in Black* and *A Matter of Dignity*, but the terms of the comparison are internal to the concept of ‘modern tragedy,’ which I will now spell out drawing together the elements presented already.

Another concept that serves to bring the concept of ‘modern tragedy’ into focus and to accentuate the distinction between that genre and melodrama is that of ‘dramatic perspective,’ which I first introduced above in the discussion of *Pippin*. In these early films by Cacoyannis, the narrative point of view is never aligned with just one character. There is never a suggestion that the world viewed in the film is but an extension of the psychological world of the heroine. Either the point of view of narration is spread out among several characters, as I showed in *Stella*, and as I will go

on to show in *A Girl in Black*, or the point of view of the heroine is relativised by reference to a world outside her control, as I will show in *A Matter of Dignity*. I call this perspective ‘dramatic’ because its focus is the unfolding of the drama – not the feelings of the protagonist and not the social reality that the drama takes place in. The dramatic perspective also implies that the focus, in each scene, concerns the overall stakes of the drama. This split between the heroine’s point of view and the film image grants to the film image a sort of objectivity, which comes to support the ethical problem of the drama.

If we return to Brooks and his conception of melodrama as compensation, we can see a clear contrast between melodrama and modern tragedy in terms of perspective. For Brooks, melodrama is a genre that takes moral questions to be personal, even private. The compensation for lost moral certainty that melodrama seeks to provide is located in the personality of the character who undergoes a moral trajectory. Brooks does not, of course, write about film. If we think of how his methodological focus upon personal morality would translate into film narrative, however, we can see that it would imply an alignment of the film image with the subjective, moral point of view of the protagonist: If moral questions are personal, then, film must show the personal, subjective nature of the moral problems in the story; hence, the *mise-en-scène* and tone of the film must be aligned with the fortunes and predicament of the hero or heroine. This principle of alignment is not stated by Brooks, but it is natural to draw this conclusion, within film studies, from his emphasis on the personal nature of morals in melodrama.

2.5 | Drama Hermeneutics

Now is the time to explain the theoretical difference for this thesis between drama and narrative. Dramatic sequence structured by the question is marked by the following three aspects: characterisation, continuity, rupture. As I showed in the analysis of *Stella*, the dilemmas and motivations of the protagonist take shape gradually, as they are informed by all her relations with other characters. Thus, continuity and characterisation go together and form the tissue out of which questions of motivation and moral choice stand out in the course of the story.

The rupture in the drama coincides with its end in *Stella*: The protagonist interrupts her trajectory by causing an irreversible rupture, thereby, producing a tragic end to the drama. *Stella* is, thus, as I shall show, different from the two subsequent films in this respect, since the plot does not first present a tragic event and only afterwards the heroine's response to it, but it presents a response on the part of the protagonist to her predicament, and this response is the tragic event. The two other films, which are so detailed and precise in characterisation, deliberately leave open the exact nature of the relationship between the external event and shifts in the mind of the heroine. This openness is embedded in the whole narrative texture of these films. We saw a version of this openness already in *Stella*, in the gap in motivation towards the end. This openness is the source of the hermeneutic challenge that these films pose to the interpreter.

Now, the term 'drama' is used, here, in distinction from the term 'narrative' to underline two particularities of storytelling in Cacoyannis: First, there is a gradual build-up of characterisation and presentation of the protagonist's situation and moral predicament. Second, there is a rupture caused by the tragic event. These two elements within the drama combine to form a focus upon the overall situation and predicament of

the protagonist, rather than upon a linear and causal sequence of actions and immediate consequences. Thus, the dramatic rupture makes sense, gains significance, only against the background of the entire moral situation that precedes it, and it makes sense in terms of the continuity of questions taking shape in the life of the protagonist – not in terms of actions or decisions having definite irreversible consequences. Whereas Pippin analyses actions occurring at precise points in the drama within the context of what the characters will then know, my analysis of motivation takes place against the background of questions arising gradually within the protagonist. For this reason, too, the drama is centred on a movement through the situation in which the rupture occurs, considered as a locus of reflection and subjectivity.

This thesis is an exercise in interpretation. Its theoretical base is, therefore, again, hermeneutic. The thesis seeks, in the course of the three main chapters, to unfold one single question, which arises in different ways in each of the three films and to inscribe this question into a philosophical context. This chapter is meant to spell out what this context is and seeks to justify that this is, indeed, the relevant conceptual frame for interrogating the early films by Cacoyannis. The choice of a context for elaborating the central question posed by the films is, further, hermeneutic in that the interpretation does not find its starting point within a theory of some kind, such as psychoanalysis or semiotics. The use of the theoretical concepts of agency, modernity, ambivalence and question are merely aids to frame the interpretation. Hermeneutics itself is also not an exact theory but an approach to interpretation.

In other words, hermeneutics, as presented in the work by Gadamer and applied to film, is a way of thinking about the relationship between a film's meaning and the concepts we can use in order to make this meaning explicit. Thus, even the genre concept of 'modern tragedy,' in my thesis, is used as a tool for interpretation. It is not,

for instance, a tool for classification. I use the concept of ‘modern tragedy’ to contextualise the issues of interpretation that arise in the story of each film. And there are two reasons why this concept is introduced gradually in the thesis. It is important, in order to maintain a hermeneutic openness of interpretation, that the first film that I examine is not already seen through a theoretical screen or as “over-determined” by theoretical concepts. This is all the more important as *Stella* does not fully embody the problem that I define as ‘modern tragedy.’ Or, rather, as it will become apparent after having examined all three films, *Stella*, with its condensed paradox of an agency that is also the negation of agency and of an action that is also a non-action, does, indeed, encapsulate the nucleus of what will appear as the dramatic structure and problem of subjectivity inherent in modern tragedy.⁵¹ Now, having established the hermeneutic context for spelling out the meaning of the questions that arise in the stories of these films (through Lukács, MacIntyre and Brooks), I can, briefly, turn to hermeneutic philosophy itself and see how Gadamer articulates the relationship between meaning, understanding and historical experience.

In his large work on hermeneutic philosophy, Gadamer first presents a history of ideas preparing the ground for hermeneutic philosophy. This background, which is very encompassing, includes humanist notions of character formation or ‘*Bildung*’ (8), Aristotelian ethics, discussions of method in the human sciences, etc. At the end of this

⁵¹ *Stella* can be seen as better encapsulating modern tragedy because a) in terms of the modern, the heroine’s own walk into death is obviously an act significantly invested with agency and b) in terms of the tragedy, because the protagonist’s death encapsulates the paradox of action-within-non-action (also at work in the other films): Death is the most tragic conclusion to a drama; taking one’s life is also annihilating one’s subjectivity/agency completely. Confrontation, in *Stella*, is identical to the tragic event (Stella’s death) not just an indirect response to the heroine’s bleak situation and predicament. In the remaining films, the tragic event forces upon the heroines a more positive epiphany or new-found subjective resolve (which is also more grounded in the world, since the event is external). The tragic event, there, is followed by a marked reversal in the plot, through which the women, in their moment of confrontation, come to terms with their environment – at least in the sense that this “coming to terms” doesn’t involve their own death and comes after the tragedy in the drama. In *Stella*, confrontation is more closely linked to the tragic event; in the other films, the relationship is left more open, hence, their less tragic outcomes.

discussion, when he comes to formulate his own idea of historical understanding, Gadamer writes, in the section “Elements of a Theory of Hermeneutic Experience,” of what he calls “the question” (378). This concept of ‘the question’ can provide an underpinning for the, merely intuitive, notion of questions arising in the drama and for the female protagonist that I have used throughout Chapter 1. Gadamer’s definition of the question can, then, be seen to provide a philosophical basis for the approach that I adopt in this thesis.

Now, what is, for Gadamer, the question? Playing on different meanings of the word ‘sense,’ he says:

The essence of the question is to have sense. Now sense involves a sense of direction. Hence the sense of the question is the only direction from which the answer can be given if it is to make sense. A question places what is questioned in a particular perspective. When a question arises, it breaks open the being of the object . . . (371)

To specify what he means by this metaphysical notion of breaking open “the being of the object,” he goes on to explain:

To ask a question means to bring into the open. The openness of what is in question consists in the fact that the answer is not settled. It must still be undetermined, awaiting a decisive answer. The significance of questioning consists in revealing the questionability of what is questioned. (371)

In other words, the question reveals that something is problematic – not obvious.

Questioning has something in common with a sceptical attitude. Now, if the aesthetics of a film is determined by its capacity to raise questions, it means that something, in the universe of the film, is presented as problematic – this was, indeed, the starting point of this chapter with the reference to Deleuze and the ethical image in Rohmer. One route towards raising questions could be plot ambiguity or the presence of *lacunae* in the aesthetic fabric of the film. As I will show below, the problematic nature of the drama and of the protagonists in Cacoyannis takes a somewhat different form. According to Gadamer, the question is, in fact, not inherent in the surface of meaning but resides on

the level of reference. To understand a text is to reiterate, within a different situation, the question that is posed within the text:

That a historical text is made the object of interpretation means that it puts a question to the interpreter. Thus interpretation always involves a relation to the question that is asked of the interpreter. To understand a text means to understand this question. (378)

Gadamer goes on to explain that this understanding of a question, through repetition, involves a process of self-reflection on the part of the interpreter, a self-reflection that takes place in the context of a difference between the historical horizon of meaning, in which the text first appeared, and the historical horizon of the interpreter. This theory of historical self-reflection is not my concern here.

What I find challenging and fruitful, in *Truth and Method*, for the interpretation of film, on the other hand, is that Gadamer suggests a sort of hermeneutic centre for each text, and this centre could be summed up in a question, which the interpreter would, then, not merely have to understand but to ask anew. Thus, the task of interpretation is to re-actualise the question posed by the text. This notion of “re-actualisation” (381) involves, for Gadamer, a concept of historical hermeneutic experience, which he sees as a sort of dialogue. The interpreter is like the person spoken to in a dialogue; the person speaking is not present but speaks indirectly, through a text from the past. The point of this analogy, between interpretation and conversation, is that the object of interpretation is not, properly speaking, an object at all but a challenge to our own judgement:

This is the parallel to the hermeneutical experience. I must allow tradition’s claim to validity, not in the sense of simply acknowledging the past in its otherness, but in such a way that it has something to say to me. This too calls for a fundamental sort of openness. (369)

The focus for such openness is the question. The essence of the hermeneutic experience, for Gadamer, is, then, the idea that the text “has something to say to me.” In this sense,

the text cannot be treated merely as an object of description, the exemplification of a theory, a historical document. It has to be taken by me as addressing me. I have to take up, for myself, the question that it poses. The underlying model, for Gadamer, appears to be the Platonic dialogue, where Socrates asks a question, such as, “Can virtue be taught?” Clearly, understanding such a dialogue cannot exclude a reflection upon the question itself. Gadamer, in fact, directly refers to Plato as a model. He does so with reference to the latter’s polemic against the written word and his practice of dialogue, but he even indicates a parallel between himself and Plato when he writes: “In Plato’s dialogues we see how the kind of textual ‘interpretation’ cultivated by the sophists, especially the interpretation of poetry for didactic ends, elicited Plato’s opposition” (377). The message is clear: Just as Plato opposes the sophists and their semantic relativism, Gadamer opposes psychoanalysis and other kinds of hermeneutic objectification of the text:

We must place ourselves in the other situation in order to understand it. We may wonder, however, whether this phrase is adequate to describe the understanding that is required of us. The same is true of a conversation that we have with someone simply in order to get to know him – i.e., to discover where he is coming from and his horizon. This is not a true conversation – that is, we are not seeking agreement on some subject – because the specific contents of the conversation are only a means to get to know the horizon of the other person. Examples are oral examinations and certain kinds of conversation between doctor and patient. (314)

Applied to film interpretation, this principle of allowing oneself to be addressed – rather than treating the film as a sign or a symptom – demarcates film hermeneutics quite sharply from any sort of allegorical strategy of interpretation. If characters, their narrative trajectories and the issues at stake in their actions are thought to represent a definite content, which a theory can spell out, then, it matters little whether this theory is Marxist, feminist, ethical, psychoanalytical; the process of interpretation, in each case, is one of attributing to the story and the image of the film a definite, discursive

content. The hermeneutic principle, of taking the film as posing a question and seeing it as addressing the viewer in such a way that he or she has to formulate this question for him or herself, excludes the sort of objectification that theoretical (allegorical) interpretations imply.

In theoretical film criticism, *mise-en-scène*, often, operates as a transparent sign for the meanings, which the theoretical discourse is there to spell out. This principle is taken to its extreme in the writings on Hitchcock by Slavoj Žižek. For instance, when he analyses the play of the gaze, in the film *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943),⁵² in terms of his own theory of the *sinthome*, the passage from visual sign to discursive meaning is very swift indeed. I mention this very explicit use of theory in interpretation in order to spell out how the hermeneutic method practiced here entails a specific approach to *mise-en-scène* and visual signification. If Žižek assumes the path from visual sign to discursive meaning to be direct, there is no hermeneutic interrogation; the “interpretation” of the film is a direct imposition of a concept onto the image. Nothing problematic remains – whether in the character, in the plot or in our response to the film.

On the other hand, the hermeneutic notion of perceiving oneself as being addressed by the film trespasses into the territory of spectatorship criticism and spectatorship theory. The most abstract end of spectatorship theory corresponds most clearly to filmmakers such as Hitchcock and Michael Haneke, filmmakers who use the film medium largely to manipulate the viewer or, alternatively, to provoke the viewer into reflecting upon the viewing experience. From *Rear Window* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1954) to *Caché* (Michael Haneke, 2005), a meta-cinematic and spectator-oriented tradition invites the critical discourse of spectatorship theory.

⁵² See Slavoj Žižek’s *Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Lacan: But Were Afraid to Ask Hitchcock*.

Even if I take Cacoyannis to present a certain ambivalent and modern ethical experience, and even if his films can be taken to respond to modernity in this sense, I do not see them as allegories in the sense of carrying a fixed-meaning structure, which could make the questions posed by the protagonists go away. This does not mean that characters, events or style features are entirely open-ended or, as one says, open to interpretation. All elements of *mise-en-scène*, characterisation and story sequence appear to me highly controlled. Only, this authorial control does not serve a purpose of a meaning of transparency or direct emotional impact. It serves to frame, very precisely, the context where a question can emerge.

The question is presented, in these films of Cacoyannis, through a dramatic perspective that is, for the most part, spread out over a number of characters. This perspective, on the one hand, introduces and supports ambivalence. On the other hand, it also sustains the idea that there is a social world outside the mind and wishes of the heroine.

Chapter 3 | *A Girl in Black*

“Grace fills empty spaces but it can only enter where there is a void to receive it”
(Weil, *Gravity* 10).

3.1 | Introduction

I announced in the previous chapter that the hermeneutic interrogation of the protagonist's evolving self-perception is framed, in this thesis, by a specific dramatic perspective. Here, at the outset, I would like to highlight the difference between this problem of dramatic perspective and two other theoretical issues: These are the questions of how the story is presented narratively and the questions of whether the film or the filmmaker presents a particular ideology, i.e., an ideological perspective.⁵³ The dramatic perspective does not so much concern the step-by-step development of the narrative but the cumulative perspective that the viewer gathers upon the protagonist and her predicament. The dramatic perspective is not aimed at presenting a specific ideology or particular social and ideological tensions but serves to present the ethical question facing the protagonist.

The interpretation of dramatic perspective, in this chapter, is guided by the question of how it serves the presentation of the heroine, how, specifically, it serves the rendering of her self-perception and her response to events in the plot. The analysis takes account of the following three levels of perspective in the film: location, character relationships and the access that the audience has, within *mise-en-scène* and dialogue, to the heroine's evolution, i.e., the change that occurs, in the arc of the drama, on the level of her relation to herself and to the world around her.

An interpretative question lies at the horizon of this hermeneutic analysis of perspective and character. As I showed in *Stella*, and as I discussed in Chapter 2, these

⁵³ The aesthetic problem of narrative point of view in film has been analysed, for instance, by William Rothman and Susan Smith in the films of Hitchcock. His films are canonical test cases for theories of point of view, since they play with point of view conventions. Rothman's analysis of the viewer's complicitness with the camera's angle of framing, or Susan Smith's idea of the audience possessing narrative knowledge that is ahead of that of the characters, confines the analysis of perspective to narrative delivery or *syuzhet*. At the other end of film studies, theories of representation and ideology invest visual point of view with the power to convey an ideological code.

dramas develop an irreducible ethical ambivalence concerning the relationship between tradition, manifest in ethical claims (that are no longer unambiguously valid in the modern world) and modernity, exemplified by a main character endowed with powers of subjective reflection – the power, for instance, to mark her distance to options of action available to her within the plot. The interpretative question guiding the analysis of perspective and character in *A Girl in Black* (1956) is, then: How does the heroine position herself with regard to ethical claims and in terms of her own subjective agency?

In the film *Stella*, the presence of archaic ethical norms is indicated, metonymically, through the figures of Anetta and the mother of Miltos and, by implication, in the significance of Stella's decision to remain absent at her own wedding. By contrast, in *A Girl in Black*, we see a much more explicit conflict between modernity and tradition. Different characters, in the story, represent clearly marked poles on this axis. Further, the location of the story, the Greek island of Hydra, immediately introduces a community living or trying to live according to old-fashioned ethical rules. Just as the ethical conflict between the community and the individual is more explicit in this film, the use of multiple perspectives, which in *Stella* was implicit in the ambiguous relationship between the heroine's decisions and the views of all the characters who surround her, is now also more explicit, emphasised by all the dramatic elements of the film.

In *Stella*, this ambiguity is expressed dramatically in what I called a 'gap' in motivation preceding her final act of meeting Miltos in full awareness of the tragic consequences of that meeting. As I showed, not only the motivation but also the ethical implication of that act is ambivalent and elusive: The act is a statement and an assertion, an act of defiance, but, as a suicidal act, it is also an admission of defeat and, as I concluded, a kind of non-action.

In Chapter 2, I mentioned how the more explicit dramatic conflicts in *A Girl in Black* and the film I will go on to analyze in Chapter 4, *A Matter of Dignity*, are tied to a dramatic structure of reversal. I said that, in both films, the reversal follows a tragic event and enables the heroine to confront her past and her surroundings directly. This structure of reversal, with elements of recognition, issuing in a confrontation and following a tragic event, allows the agency of the heroine, in the concluding part of the drama, to gather a more explicit ethical significance. Hence, the greater explicitness of the plot conflict and the greater powers of agency of the heroine are tied together and jointly mark the difference to *Stella*.

A Girl in Black is set on the island of Hydra and tells three parallel stories: the story of a visitor to the island, the story of a family living there and the story of a boating accident. These three stories become interwoven in the plot. The visitor to the island is Pavlos (Dimitris Horn), who is accompanied by his artist friend, Antonis (Notis Peryalis). Pavlos is from Athens and a writer. During his stay to the island, he falls in love with a young local woman, called Marina (Ellie Lambeti). The second story in the film, concerns Marina's family and its place at the edge of the island community. The family is the target of slander and bullying. This situation is reinforced by the absence of a father figure as head of the family and by the family's social decline due to the war. The events in the story are seen in light of the past of this family: the death of Marina's sister, the mother's long-standing reputation of being promiscuous, etc. The third story narrates a boating accident that involves a group of children. It also involves the larger community of the island and its relationship to Marina's family and the visitors from Athens: Christos (Giorgos Foundas), a young man from the island and suitor of Marina, sabotages the boat that Pavlos is about to use – crucially, not realising that Pavlos

intends to take the children for a trip. The boat sinks and some of the children drown. Following the accident, Marina confronts Christos and the community at all levels.

Like the other two films by Cacoyannis, *A Girl in Black* establishes a way in which the director articulates a relationship with the cinema traditions of other countries. As an *auteur* working in a country with a relatively small film industry, Cacoyannis uses genre to involve issues other than those of formal similarity and production formulae. Still, I shall show that *A Girl in Black* establishes an underlying dialogue with certain second generation Italian neo-realist films. This chapter is organised around a comparison between *A Girl in Black* and two Italian neo-realist island films: Roberto Rossellini's *Stromboli* (1950) and Michelangelo Antonioni's *L'Avventura* (1960). These films are all realist in a photographic sense; they are studies of an island, using the setting of the island to develop the drama. In Cacoyannis, I refer to this aesthetic as his "borrowed" neo-realism. In the case of the Italian films, I seek to show that the setting of the island is used allegorically, in terms of the psychology of the characters, whilst, in Cacoyannis, the island is used to invoke a cluster of ethical themes, which are evoked directly and dramatically through the sequence of the plot and development of character relationships. This island serves to present an ethical context, where the agency of the protagonist, Marina, is, as I indicated above, put into perspective against the background of the island community. My interpretation will show that the location of the island, in *A Girl in Black*, comes to embody very directly the thematic cluster developed in the drama between all the major and minor characters. I argue that the late Italian neo-realist films, by contrast, revolve around isolated individual characters, portrayed in the mode of psychological or existential allegory. Thereby, *A Girl in Black* comes to appear closer to theatrical forms of tragedy than to

these Italian island films, in that its plot concerns not individuals but relations between them.

As in the interpretation of *Stella*, the focus of the drama will turn out to be a question concerning the heroine's motivations, her inaction, her 'stasis' – a term that I introduced earlier but which will be developed further below – and her eventual change of perspective in relation to herself and towards the island community. This gradually evolving perspective presents, even more explicitly than in *Stella*, a philosophical problem of action and its complex relation to non-action in the dramatic universe of Cacoyannis' films. This complex relationship of action and inaction, in turn, will also be seen, in tune with the interpretation of Hegel put forward in Chapter 2, to be the key to an understanding of the ambivalent relationship between modernity and tradition in the film and, hence, to be the basis for what I call the film's 'modern tragedy.' The heroine's evolving stance and perspective is not, however, the only site of ambiguity between the thematic polar opposites of modernity and tradition in *A Girl in Black*. As my analysis will show, the film locates much of this ambiguity within the island where the story is set.

Hence, whereas in *Stella*, the drama follows the protagonist and her (lack of) motivation, using other characters to inform the description of her choices, here, the dramatic perspective of the whole film is heavily shifted towards the island community. The three strands of the plot and the way they become interwoven entail a dramatic frame for the study of Marina, and the study of her development is more sharply filtered through her relations to other characters and to the community as a whole.

This "problem" of perspective is reinforced, within the dramatic universe of the film, by the arrival of the character Pavlos, the visitor from Athens, whose presence introduces a contrast with a more modern, outside world. I will examine the thematic

status of the island in relation to this “outside” as a particular kind of ambivalent space using the concept of ‘heterotopia,’ which I have taken from a text by Michel Foucault.⁵⁴ I use his concept of ‘heterotopia’ to invoke an aesthetic expression of this ambivalence, and, in so doing, I refer to the concept of the ‘moral occult,’ which I discussed in Chapter 2.

There, I showed that the ‘moral occult’ is a category used by Peter Brooks, in his theory of melodrama, to refer to obsolete moral norms that still operate within the present. Hence, the moral occult is the site of a certain kind of ambivalence between social modernity and moral tradition. The plot of *A Girl in Black* explicitly foregrounds an encounter between modernity and tradition: It is the story of an encounter between a modern urban visitor and an island community closer to tradition. However, in the interpretation of the drama, following the concept of ‘heterotopia,’ the island itself turns out to possess an ambivalent status in terms of modernity and tradition. Hence, the tension of the two, in the drama, is not, merely, the result of an encounter with a visitor or an intruder but is inherent in its historical and geographical location, since the community is in close proximity to the city of Athens.

The concept of ‘heterotopia’ conjoins two terms: «τόπος» (*topos*) and «ἕτερος» (*heteros*) or ‘Other.’ Foucault presents this concept as a broad term to describe social divisions that designate certain spaces as the internal Other of a given society. One example of such an internal Other is a residually sacred or archaic place that has somehow been left untouched by processes of modernisation. In relation to the concept of a ‘dialectic,’ heterotopia is characterised by a structure of ambivalence, rather than opposition: The heterotopic place is not simply opposed to the society from which it has been separated and by which it is designated as Other. It entertains an unsettled

⁵⁴ See Michel Foucault’s “Of Other Places.”

relationship of belonging to it, whilst being also excluded from that society. I shall show that this structure of heterotopic ambivalence applies perfectly to the island that forms the dramatic centre of *A Girl in Black*.

3.2 | Neo-realist Allegory

In order to set the stage for a comparison between the expressive function of location in *A Girl in Black* and in *Stromboli* and *L'Avventura*, it is useful to present the stories of the two Italian films.

Stromboli, made in the aftermath of the Second World War, tells of a formerly privileged young woman, Karin (Ingrid Bergman), from Lithuania. She finds herself trapped in a refugee camp in Italy, after her plan to emigrate to Argentina fails. Out of despair, she agrees to marry a young Italian fisherman, Antonio (Mario Vitale), who is waiting to return to his native village on the remote volcanic island of Stromboli. The film describes Karin's various failures to find her place within the village community as the wife of a modest and conventional man. Karin has a series of encounters with people in the village, most notably a priest whom she tries to seduce. She also has a series of intense sensual experiences of the wild nature of the island. Following these different experiences, Karin decides that she cannot live on the island and attempts to flee. At the end, on top of a volcano, she undergoes a sort of conversion. She decides to remain on the island and face its challenges.

L'Avventura tells the story of a young woman, Claudia (Monica Vitti). In a first story, which serves as a preamble, Claudia accompanies her friends, Anna (Lea Massari) and Sandro (Gabriele Ferzetti), the boyfriend of Anna, on an excursion with a group of wealthy people to a small Aeolian island (Liscia Bianca). Sandro and Anna quarrel. She disappears, and the friends, aided by the police, begin a fruitless search. They spend a night on the island. When they return to the mainland, the friends disperse, while Sandro and Claudia decide to continue the search for Anna together. Sandro courts Claudia, and, soon, she becomes Sandro's lover. The couple travel

aimlessly and seem increasingly disoriented; it is as if Anna's disappearance is forgotten. At the end of the film, Sandro spends the night with a woman he meets by chance. In the last scene of the film, we see him sitting on a bench, his back to the camera, while Claudia, with a forgiving gesture, touches his shoulder.

From these two plot summaries, we can already draw some conclusions concerning the similarities and differences between these two Italian films, in terms of narrative form, thematic structure, use of location and the protagonists' development. Only a few years separate the two films, but Rossellini's film is narratively much more conventional. Part of a trilogy with Ingrid Bergman that announces the second generation of neo-realist films, *Stromboli* has a conventional narrative form, and, hence, the existential theme of the heroine's battle with herself is couched in the rich and explicit thematic content of a conflict between convention and modernity. Apart from the first prefatory scenes, the island is the whole diegetic world of the film; the heroine's battle takes place there and is both a battle against the island but also a battle, on her part, to come to terms with it. Her development, thus, ends on a note of reconciliation with the social world.

The obvious aesthetic modernity of Antonioni's film – narrative fragmentation, existential themes that are decontextualised from any social conflict or social setting – is encapsulated in the trajectory of the heroine, Claudia, and her relation to the island. The Aeolian island is not the location and dramatic setting for the whole film. The experience that takes place is, rather, a trigger for the development that takes place within the heroine during the rest of the film. This development ends with the heroine having seemingly lost her attachments to society and its values. Hence, the movement of the narrative is the opposite of what we see in *Stromboli*: The island becomes part of Karin's struggle with herself; her own character and personality appear enriched by the

encounter with the island and its conventional world. The naked nature of the Aeolian island, in *L'Avventura*, seems, rather, to trigger a gradual dissolution of the protagonist.

The Italian films share with *A Girl in Black* a problem of subjectivity. As I said in Chapter 2, the concept of 'subjectivity,' in this thesis, is circumscribed both by the problem of reflection in its relation to ethical commands, in Hegel's terms, and to the dramatic structure of Cacoyannis' films. In the Italian films, we can use the term 'subjectivity' to describe the quality of reflection characteristic of these two heroines. Subjectivity is expressed abstractly and allegorically, in both Italian films, through a dialectical relationship between individual feeling and an experience of unmastered nature. As I will show, the element of nature opens the subject to a dimension that cannot be transposed onto its own inner stage of feelings and choices. Rather, nature serves to confront the subject with its own innermost or most naked existence and reflective ability.⁵⁵

Within film theory, a similar problem of subjectivity, in second generation neo-realist films, is the topic of a well-known discussion by Gilles Deleuze, in his work *The Time-Image*. This discussion is concerned with films, which he sees as breaking with narrative convention. Arguing that Italian neo-realism occupies a key role in the history of this other kind of film narrative, Deleuze claims that characters in films, such as *Stromboli*, are no longer defined by their actions but are reduced to their passive acts of sensation and perception. Thereby, however, Deleuze also isolates these characters from the thematic context in which their acts of sensation and perception find expression.

My approach to subjectivity, both in these Italian films and in Cacoyannis, can be characterised in clear opposition to the above: It is a conception of subjectivity as gaining significance only within the thematic context of the whole film. In both

⁵⁵ This thematic approach and focus on subjectivity are familiar from critical works on Rossellini and Antonioni. For example, see Sandro Bernardi's "Rossellini's Landscapes: Nature, Myth, History," as well as Geoffrey Nowell-Smith's *L'Avventura*.

Stromboli and *L'Avventura*, this context is formed by the presence of archaic convention or unmastered nature as one pole in the narrative universe of the film; a pole that defines the parameters of the protagonist's journey, its struggle or disorientation. For Deleuze, by contrast, the element of nature, as I will show in an example below, is simply a feature of the subject's powers of sensation, hence its experience carries no meaning beyond itself. It is not thematically significant. The allegorical approach to these island films, which I adopt here, serves, on the contrary, to emphasise the intelligibility and the different kinds of intelligibility that characterise the heroine's experience of the island in each of the two films.

If we turn briefly to *A Girl in Black*, for comparison, we may say that, in terms of subjectivity and subjective agency, it is society, rather than nature, that comes to play the role of confronting the character with herself. (Although society, located on the island of Hydra, is already permeated by a sense of unmastered nature or, at least, unmastered tradition.) In the Italian films, by contrast, it is always nature as something alien and non-social, which confronts the subject as an Other, thereby, allowing the subject to experience its own alienation. In *A Girl in Black*, on the other hand, I shall show that there is a sense in which the characters cannot access any nature that is not also or already social. In the terms of ancient philosophy, we might say that, for Caccoyannis, there is no φύσις (*physis*) that is not already the realm of a πόλις (*polis*): There is never, in the film, a presentation of nature as Other, in relation to social relations.

As for the characterisation of the characters and the presentation of the protagonist's subjective reflection, this takes, like nature, a social form in *A Girl in Black*. The characters, who live on the island, appear to suffer because of adhering to old, outmoded family values, which appear increasingly problematic in light of the

Athenians' arrival, and this situation, in turn, becomes thematised. Their plight is, thus, informed by the social fabric which they belong to and in which they interact, as this belonging and this interaction appear negative and destructive. Unlike the protagonists of the Italian films, who are defined in abstract existential terms, the characters of the Cacoyannis film do not appear socially alienated or aesthetically void: They appear as social types, whose psychological life is transparent precisely to the extent that it is informed by the concrete social conflicts they take part in. Marina, for example, as I will analyse in the next section, suffers for the disintegration of her family, the deaths of her sister and father, her family's financial distraction brought about by the war. She is also targeted by the community for reasons pertaining to the institution of the family, for her refusal to marry a certain member of the community (Christos), as well as for the promiscuousness of her mother. In contrast to this web of communal and familial relationships, appearing with the weight of a past for all the characters involved, the islands in the Italian films are presented within the present tense perspective of the heroine's experience. As such, the islands appear marked by a geographical alienation on which the construction and dramatisation of the film's psychological alienation, on the part of the characters, is based.

To begin with, the sharpness of the contrast between the heroine and the island, in both films, precludes any sense that the island is a heterotopia. As a world of pure archaic convention, in *Stromboli*, or as nature outside society, in *L'Avventura*, the islands of these films are defined as an unambiguous Other. The heterotopic nature of the island, in *A Girl in Black*, consists, as I shall show, in resisting any such absolute division. In *Stromboli*, for example, the alienation of the protagonist is set off against the equilibrium of everyday life on the island. Sandro Bernardi has described the plot of *Stromboli* as being preoccupied with an antithetical relationship "between modern and

archaic culture” (56). He writes that the island is a “totality” (55) or “a representative of the absolute” (55), “surviving in small enclaves, islands outside the world, still full of values of truth, characterised by a strong bond between its components” (55). Indeed, in *Stromboli*, the conflict of the story and of the protagonist is predicated upon a fundamental opposition between a modern subject and this archaic order. This conflict is expressed in three or so key film scenes, which are meant to highlight Karin’s alienation from the flow of life on the island. These scenes are: the killing of the rabbit, the tuna fishing and the eruption of the volcano.

In the rabbit scene, Karin reacts in distress to Antonio’s unnecessary demonstration of a ferret attacking a rabbit. Antonio is rooted in the way of life on the island, but Karin perceives this act solely in its cruelty, ignoring the role it plays in the social organisation of the island. Killing for subsistence, death and its casual acceptance are part of the island’s quotidian existence, and Antonio laughs at Karin’s discomfort with this reality. Karin is, similarly, disturbed by the violence of the fishing, “It was horrible.” Rossellini has commented on the scene of the fish-catching, on the “endless wait in the sun, then that dreadfully tragic moment when they kill it: that death that explodes” (211).

In his analysis of the film, Deleuze, too, focuses on this scene, in which the heroine witnesses the very carnal moment of fishing. He sees the scene as a moment within a process of inner dissolution on the part of the heroine: She is as if overwhelmed by the sheer power of visual perception to the point of losing her wits and sense of orientation. It is important to note, however, that the violence of Karin’s reaction, which seems to be justified by the physical vividness of the scene, is, in fact, supported by the thematic structure of the whole film: The natural elements and the practice of killing are part of the islanders’ way of life. They confront Karin as isolated

facts only because she is not part of that way of life. Throughout the film, she struggles to resolve the question of how she can find a place in the island community. Life in Stromboli is organised around and despite of the volcano that spews fire, earth, dust and threatens the islanders' existence. The islanders live in a state of unquestionable accordance with the ways of the land, which includes a significant dose of uncertainty, passivity and, then, stoicism in the face of whatever devastation is headed their way.

It is this dialectic with nature that Karin "bypasses" when she decides to leave Stromboli without considering the lighthouse keeper's (Mario Sponzo) warning that she will have to "go by way of the volcano," namely by way of nature. This is because Karin is, by default, cast as an alienated character: She is a Lithuanian, who, prior to the war, lived in Czechoslovakia and, then, immigrated to Yugoslavia (finally ending up in Farfa, at a displaced persons camp). She is "uprooted" or, as Bernardi mentions, "*déracinée* in Simone Weil's sense" (55).⁵⁶ During a scene between Karin and Antonio's aunt, Rosario, the latter recounts to Karin her story of returning to Stromboli from America. Karin asks, "You were in America, and you came back here?," to which the latter replies, "This is my home."

Karin comes to stand, in other words, for the situation of a modern individual that is destined to define its own place in the world. It is modern because it cannot rely solely on tradition, and because it is endowed with a capacity to decide and to think. Subjectivity, as reflection and initiative, on the other hand, is portrayed in a very complex way in the film: both critically and empathetically. The analytical distance that the film establishes, through spatial patterning and the avoidance of a subjective point of view, means that the viewer is never encouraged simply to share or identify with the

⁵⁶ Simone Weil's idea of 'uprootedness' is much like the lack of "worldliness" characterising Varda's heroine, Cléo. According to Weil, uprootedness results from the destruction of ties with the past and the dissolution of community. Weil specifies the ways through which people can once again feel rooted, in a cultural and spiritual sense, to their environment and to the past and their hopes for the future. For more, as well as for an introduction to her thinking, see *The Need for Roots* and *Gravity and Grace*.

protagonist's dilemma. Karin is portrayed both empathetically – as a modern individual, thrown by circumstance into an alien environment – and critically – as a modern subject excessively given to doubt and introspection. We follow her plight, her process of feeling and deliberation, her final decision. The film embraces the drama of that decision, yet it does not fully annul the critical view of this character as someone who is excessively caught in the circuit of her own subjectivity.

This complex point of view marks a distance to melodrama: In Chapter 2, I discussed how melodrama is dependent upon a narrative point of view, which aligns the events of the story, the style and the flow of narration with the subjective point of view of the protagonist. As I argued, modern tragedy is different from melodrama partly because the drama of self-limitation involves a use of perspective that is not entirely aligned with the subjective point of view of the main character. In these second generation neo-realist films, we find a parallel to modern tragedy in that the subjective problems of these heroines are set off against an external reality that we don't see only from their point of view. How, on the other hand, these Italian films differ from Cacoyannis and do not correspond to my generic mode of modern tragedy, I will come back to at the end of this chapter.

In the second Italian film, *L'Avventura*, the alienation of the modern individual does not present itself through comparison with a more uniform mode of life, as in *Stromboli*. What exists on the island is only a derelict and makeshift hut, inhabited by a lone shepherd (Jack O'Connell). However, like in *Stromboli*, alienation surfaces through an encounter with something that the individual experiences as alien and hostile. In *L'Avventura*, this Other is the untamed nature of the Aeolian island. Regression to nature works, here, as a catalyst, as a reminder to the characters of the disconnected

state they are in, particularly because nature is, here, seen as a cipher of emotion and desire.

In *L'Avventura*, imagery of nature appears through the depiction of Lisca Bianca as a rocky, volcanic space with monoliths thrusting out of the sea and mineral textures. At every twist and turn, it offers dizzying views of craggy peaks and chasms. Its shores are noisy, battered by winds and waves. Moreover, the first close-up of the island is an impressive rock barrier, appearing like a monumental and powerful obstacle. A bit before arriving, when the film's male lead, Sandro, asks the film's female lead, Claudia, "Shall we go for a swim?," she responds, "Not here, it is frightening." This dialogue, followed by a shot of the island's sharp terrain (fig. 15), is indicative of how, through imagery, the film's evocation of nature serves a dual purpose: Nature is both consistently presented as foreign, external to the lives of these modern characters, but this foreignness itself comes to function, in the film, as an inner psychological symbol, expressing to the viewer the evolving feelings and existential questioning of the heroine.



Figure 15: On edge

The success of the trip, for example, is overshadowed by the premonition of an alarming weather change (fig. 16), which accumulates into a powerful rainstorm and symbolises the characters' inner state. And Anna, the woman in the group who disappears, expresses her existential anxieties or bourgeois boredom by imagining that swimming in the island's waters sparks the interest of a shark (fig. 17).



Figure 16: Threatened

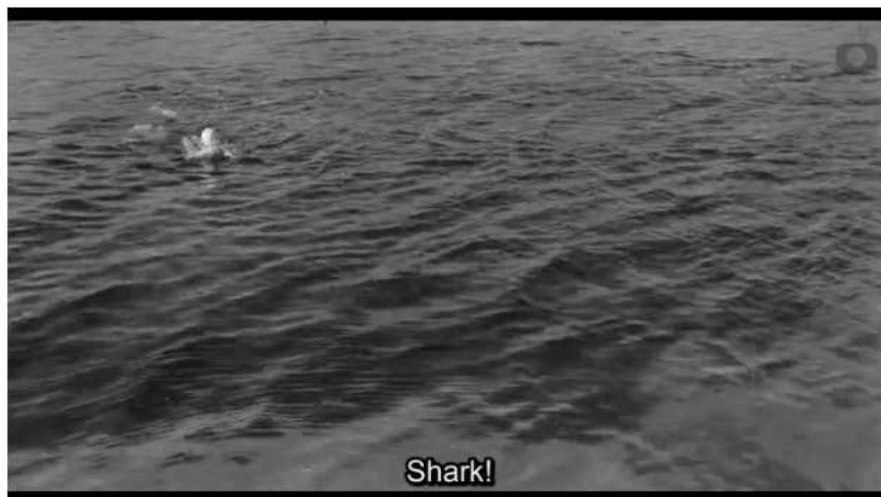


Figure 17: Seeking adventures and attention

The friends' yachting trip into nature results in a series of emotional "reclassifications." Indeed, Antonioni has referred to the party's visit to Lisca Bianca as an "adventure," given rise by "emotional encounter[s]" (*Film Culture* 51). Apart from

Sandro and Claudia embarking on an affair, after the former's relationship with Anna deteriorates, and she disappears, Giulia (Dominique Blanchar) begins to notice that her husband, Corrado (James Addams), does "nothing but to belittle" her. Another male character in the group, Raimondo (Lelio Luttazzi), tries to lure married Patrizia (Esmeralda Ruspoli) into, what he sees as, "dissipations, degradations, infidelities... debaucheries," a series of sexual games that drive her into calling him "a child."

In his reflections upon the creative origins of the film, Antonioni declares an effort to use film to establish a critical perspective upon his characters and upon their modernity in moral,⁵⁷ emotional and erotic terms. This critical perspective upon the characters is evident, in the film, in the well-known techniques of long takes and long shots, but, more subtly, it is expressed also in the way that the film establishes, again, a mixed narrative perspective of sympathy with Claudia and critical distance to her character. This method of critical perspective brings *L'Avventura* close to the films of Cacoyannis, but, as I am about to show, the critical perspective in Antonioni's film, as well in Rossellini's film, ultimately, serves the purpose of an allegory of alienation, and this allegory is structured by the opposition between a modern heroine and a nature that remains hostile.

In *Stromboli* and *L'Avventura*, the employment of nature simultaneously as a concrete visual manifestation of modernity's Other and as a symbol of the characters' alienation and inner void, leads, paradoxically, to an expressive convergence of nature and subjectivity at the site of their opposition: Alien nature brings forth a fundamental modern solitude in the heroine and, thus, comes to be the home or the proper realm of that solitude. Hence, in viewing *Stromboli* and *L'Avventura*, observing the natural

⁵⁷ Antonioni, in his Cannes statement for *L'Avventura*, says that man "suffers under the sway of moral forces and myths which today . . . should not be the same as those that prevailed in Homeric times, but nevertheless are." He continues: "For even though we know that the ancient codes of morality are decrepit and no longer tenable, we persist, . . . in remaining loyal to them." (*Interviews* 32-33)

landscape of the islands means always to immediately engage in a psychological, existential interpretation of the protagonists, who are lost or estranged on these islands (figs. 18, 19 & 20).



Figure 18: Claustrophobia



Figure 19: Man vs. rock in the background



Figure 20: One with the universe or too small?

Therefore, in *L'Avventura*, in one of the first shots of Lisca Bianca, the island is imaged as one of the characters. As Claudia leans from the yacht out to the sea, the island is set clearly visible behind her. In a similar fashion, since Anna gets lost in the island, the former comes to symbolise her, and Anna becomes present through her absence. When, for the first time, Sandro and Claudia face each other in a confession scene, a new but familiar character appears in the background: the island of Lisca Bianca. The sequence gives the impression that there is a witness to the characters' guilty conscience, and that this witness can be understood as Anna. Something similar occurs in *Stromboli*. When Karin imagines that she hears the cries of a child, she leaves Antonio's house, frantically looking for the source of the crying. Her mental state is represented by the maze-like alleys of the island, in which Karin is lost and she wishes to escape from, repeatedly stating, "I want to get out."

Apart from such situations, neither Antonioni nor Rossellini explores their films' central characters any further. Their inner and surrounding world is stricken by alienation solely to represent alienation; as characters, they have no depth; we may say: They do not evolve much; there is little question as to their motivations or the nature of their inner crises. To depict their solitude and alienation, the films isolate them from human relations, and, by presenting them, thus, outside of relationality, they tend to make them appear both abstract and void.

However, these films still obey classical narrative conventions of psychological characterisation. We follow and understand the feelings of the two heroines, but the films also present these feelings analytically and critically. Subjectivity is not presented, as in melodrama, embedded in an alternation of emotional postures but stands out as something specific, something that is separate from relations to other characters. This is the case even when the plot, as is the case in both films, confronts the heroine with

dilemmas or dramatic situations that bring forth violent emotions and vivid thought processes.

The ending scene of *Stromboli* has been analysed extensively in relation to a possible epiphany that Karin undergoes when she comes in contact with the primordial, active volcano and, especially, in relation to a certain Christian Humanism or Catholicism that is attributed to Rossellini (e.g., by André Bazin) (96ff) and presupposes a shift in Karin's attention from herself to her unborn child. Torn between freedom and responsibility, individuality and motherhood, Karin appears to be set in a classical melodramatic predicament, yet the very fact of her own self-important and highly charged affective response to this predicament, "I will save him, my innocent child," which jars with the austere tone of the rest of the film, presents melodrama critically: The viewer is not simply lured into a space of emotional alternatives but is presented with a protagonist that is seen to be slightly too fond of her own feelings and thoughts, even as the content of these feelings and thoughts is her wish to annihilate her own freedom and individuality. Subjectivity appears, here, as the dimension of thought and feeling pertaining to someone who is not able to live within human relationships, hence, Karin's final monologue comparing herself to the islands' peasants, "I am worse!" (figs. 21, 22 & 23).



Figure 21: Curves of a woman vs. mountain curves



Figure 22: New gaze



Figure 23: Befriending nature

In *Stromboli* and *L'Avventura*, the emptiness of the characters and, by extension, the replenishment of this emptiness by a space that stands for it, the island, testify to the films' inability to be seen as something other than allegorical. The films make the island an occasion for the characters to engage in retrospective reflection; Karin's experience on Stromboli, especially, is both a self-discovery and a rediscovery of the physical world around her. The island, in these films, is allegorical, in the sense that it is a space alien to the characters, that it symbolises the characters' alienation, and, above all, that this alienation is clearly portrayed through visual contrast and dialogue (fig. 24).



Figure 24: Identifying with the island

In the Cacoyannis film, the island works differently: Hydra is not completely unknown; there is social difference between the Athenians and the islanders, but there is also cultural familiarity. For Pavlos and Antonis, Hydra is not mysterious, yet its conventional social world is unknown and quite distinct from the modern urban world of freedom and subjective desire to which they belong. This underlying theme of intimacy and strangeness informs the film's style. The island is seen partly from the

point of view of the Athenian protagonists, but it is not presented as a completely alien space in the manner of the islands in the two Italian neo-realist films.

Visually, this dynamic is rendered through a gradual narrative editing, which induces the viewer to think that he or she is part of this space. He or she is drawn into the space that has its own dynamics of power; it is represented as separate from the mainland but not as exotic. It is also worth mentioning, here, that none of the Cacoyannis characters are portrayed literally as “homeless,” as immigrants – in the way Karin is cast. Hence, the spectator is not encouraged to think of the island as Other, as something completely foreign, and Cacoyannis does not treat the opposition between a more robust way of life and modernity in such a clear-cut way. He presents it neither as an incomprehensible space, like the island in *L'Avventura*, nor as a self-contained coherent realm of convention, like in *Stromboli*. In a sense, the characters both belong to each other's space. This is the perspective I will now explore in more detail.

3.3 | Heterotopic Perspective

In this section, I analyse the ambivalent perspective that the film establishes during its opening scene. Then, I go on to explain how this initial ambivalent perspective conditions the very exchange between Pavlos and Marina as a whole. I will also discuss how the temporal encounters on the island, between Marina and Pavlos, are themselves tainted with this ambiguity.

The film opens with the two friends, Pavlos and Antonis, sailing into the shores of Hydra on their holiday. Pavlos, upon examining the seascape from a distance, remarks, “One has the impression that everything is immersed in light. Nothing remains hidden,” to which Antonis adds, “not even men’s sins.” This dialogue is crucial, as it introduces the dual character of Hydra. On the one hand, the island, in its white luminosity, evokes the sort of Greek light that, as I mentioned in the thesis’ Introduction, is often celebrated by Greek poets, such as Odysseas Elytis. Seen through this perspective of Elytis, the “Greek light” of the island appears like an expanse of transparency, in which every stone under the sun is turned around. In the words of Pavlos, it suggests the island’s capacity to bring truth to light. In the beginning, light, combined with the effect of the island’s architectural whiteness, brings forth positive connotations, and truth is solely associated with its liberating qualities. On the other hand, as the film progresses and the drama unfolds, the island and its pristine whiteness, as well as the sharpness of truth with which its white surface is associated, become endowed with more complex and more ominous qualities. This development takes the form of an encounter between Pavlos and the island.

Foucault's notion of ‘heterotopia’ may help, as I suggested before, to think of Hydra as something less allegorical than the islands of Stromboli and Lisca Bianca: The

unmitigated Otherness of Stromboli, as a place of archaic conventions, or the sinister exoticism of the Aeolian island, in Antonioni, make these islands function perfectly as allegories, and, as I showed, these allegories are visualised in striking scenes depicting the islands as hostile environments. The heterotopic space in Foucault cannot become an allegorical sign in this way for, as the word implies, a heterotopia always exists in relation. It is neither exotic nor a utopia. But the heterotopic, relational or relative space is the perfect setting for the sort of encounter and exchange that constitute the plot of *A Girl in Black*: The film focuses on the encounter, on the island, between Pavlos, the modern character, and Marina, a woman who is torn between social convention and the freedom associated with a modern sense of subjectivity, which, in her case, means an ability to follow her aspirations of desire.

The possibility of this encounter affirms the island's heterotopic quality. Hydra is not completely outlandish, because the characters are able to undergo a form of exchange. There is, here, a basic point of contact, a common ground for communication. Pavlos and Marina fall in love; one world is informed by the other. Pavlos matures; Marina sheds past burdens. The same is true for the relationship between characters and space. Pavlos and Antonis are in a position to influence the world of the island. Hydra changes, with their arrival, since they embody modern ideas that disturb the sensitive "balance" on this island. The heterotopic space of exchange, in *A Girl in Black*, is, thus, different from the allegories of mere subjective change in the Italian films. However we interpret Karin's trajectory and relation to the island – as being a personal development or an effort to integrate into society – the island community itself remains intact and does not appear altered by the presence of this modern foreigner. Hydra's status as a heterotopia enables the islanders and the visitors to engage in a transaction that is not governed by the moral norms of either world.

Looking more closely at how Foucault defines the concept of ‘heterotopia,’ let us examine its implications for the status of norms on the island. Foucault points out that the heterotopia is a “contemporary space [that] is perhaps still not entirely desanctified” (23). He writes:

To be sure a certain theoretical desanctification of space . . . has occurred, but we may still not have reached the point of a practical desanctification of space. And perhaps our life is still governed by a certain number of oppositions that remain inviolable, that our institutions and practices have not yet dared to break down. (Foucault 23)

Foucault brings some examples of these oppositions regarded as given, such as family and social space, private and public space, etc. He writes: “All these are still nurtured by the hidden presence of the sacred” (Foucault 23). This notion of a residual space of moral archaic, sacred norms applies perfectly to the island of Hydra in the film. Its location of Hydra is a space that is ambiguously archaic and close to social modernity, and, as such, in its ambiguous historical status, it harbours a potential for change. Furthermore, as I announced in the plot summary, Froso’s life of transgression reveals that Hydra is already a space where tradition, the authority of the family, are contested. In accordance with the modern connotations that the idea of ‘heterotopia’ carries, the island is already “infected” with (social and moral) modernity. Thus, in the interaction between the islanders and the visitors, moral norms from a former time are played out against the claims of modern freedoms (represented by the visitors).

This exchange between the modern and the archaic is not, as I will go on to show, fully transparent to the characters. As already mentioned, in *A Girl in Black*, the transaction between the two main characters takes place in the medium of love, and it turns out to be a transformative force for both of them. Hence, the transaction between the characters and their own subjective transformation are intertwined as dramatic and thematic elements within the plot. This movement of transaction and transformation

takes place, as I have pointed out, within a complex dramatic and temporal perspective. Indeed, there are, at least, three distinct temporal dramatic points of view: 1) Pavlos and Marina interact in the present; 2) This transaction of Pavlos and Marina is shaped by their interaction with the community; 3) Past events on the island condition Marina's present stance and role in relation to herself, to Pavlos and to the community, as she relates to this past.

The dramatic force of the film arises from the dynamism of this transaction. Neither Froso nor Marina is completely on the side of convention. Even though Marina remains passive to her bullying by the community, she appears not to fully understand the reasons for the disrepute of her family. She responds to this bullying by the group of young local men with angry incomprehension, "Leave us alone. What have we done to you?" Apart from such rebuttals, she does nothing to actively break with convention or challenge those who hold her family in low esteem. It is only through her encounter with Pavlos that she will find the force to do so.

Thematically, this moral problem of autonomy may seem clear-cut, but, in the aesthetic fabric of the film, it is filtered through a layer of perspectivism, which makes it less transparent. This problem of perspective, which, I said, constitutes the difference to the Italian films and which will turn out to support the modern tragedy in the drama, is established from the very first moments of the film. I already referred to the ambiguous dialogue concerning light and the reference to Elytis during the film's opening, but I will now look further at the construction of visual and narrative perspective in terms of this ambivalence. As I mentioned, this perspective conditions the exchange and imbues the temporal encounters between Pavlos and Marina with an air of ambivalence.

In its depiction of the visitors' arrival to the island, the film establishes a subtle visual perspective. Initially, we see the boat and the sea from an objective point of view,

i.e., one that is not aligned with any character. Thus, before any individual characters have been singled out, we see the collective group of holiday makers, tourists from Athens on board the ship, standing at the handrail, watching the scenery. Then, we have a cut to two young men, who are seen watching from the boat. And, as they disembark and enter a smaller boat, we get a classical subjective point of view with a shaking camera. This, however, is, again, followed by a series of short shots of characteristic island scenes. Hence, in a montage sequence detached from the actual subjective point of view of the characters, the film cuts between the following three stereotypical, idyllic postcard scenes: children in the midst of fishermen and animals (fig. 25), a benevolent Orthodox Priest having a rest (fig. 26), a crowd on the pier with the *façades* of the town houses and a rising hill behind them (fig. 27). As we only see these scenes subsequent to the narrative point of view of the film having been aligned with the visual point of view of the visitors, these scenes have a curious and ambivalent or in-between status. They correspond to what the visitors see, but, at the same time, they have received a stamp of generality, of cliché, of what such visitors, in general, see. Thus, the subjective point of view is anchored in the more objective, establishing shots of the film itself and vice versa: The film shows itself, in these initial scenes, to be entirely on the side of the visitors, although these visitors could be any visitors.



Figure 25: Innocence



Figure 26: Representing authority and tradition



Figure 27: A haven

This is what I meant before when I referred to the exotic gaze. The explicit and slightly staged nature of this cliché, supported by the popular songs we hear in the background, implicitly infuses these scenes with an ironic note, which is quite different from the style of stark objectivity that we saw in the islands' appearance in *Stromboli* and *L'Avventura*. In these initial sequences, the film raises an expectation, which the drama will, then, complicate: We see the island through the visitors' gaze as a place of tradition, separated from their own modernity. Through their exotic gaze, traditional life is romanticised and tainted with nostalgia. Their perspective upon tradition is carried, in the film, by a visual presentation that infuses realism with romanticism and imaginary reconstruction.⁵⁸ We hear the sounds of women chanting a traditional song. As the tender takes the visitors to the shore, we see the camera lingering over fishermen laying out their nets. The men raise from the nets, when they see the ship approaching, as if to greet it. Within the two visitors' narrative perspective, there is already a hint, however, that these romantic, idyllic scenes of traditional life may not be something to be enjoyed at a safe distance from reality: The shaky point of view shots from the tender indicate that, in their new experience, they will no longer be on firm ground. They will be exposed to a reality that lies outside of their expectations. The apparent obviousness of the exoticism of these opening scenes is not criticised openly in the film. It is not simply contrasted with a superior perspective or knowledge but becomes subverted by the gradual undermining of the *cliché* within the drama, which shows the actual conflicts and life of the community and, thereby, also exposes the visitors to a partly hostile reality. As I shall show, the spectators participate in this transition; we are not encouraged to scorn exoticism, but we are made aware that not everything is what it

⁵⁸ A *Sunday Times* reviewer notes the ambiguity of the film: "Here is the Greece I know, strict but wild, soft and harsh, with the intensity of an ancient world and the passions of a nation that hasn't yet been corrupted" (Siafkos 96).

seems, or, to put it more strongly, that much is involved in everyday situations that the visitors will not have understood.

I said before that the heterotopic status of the island implies that it is already, potentially, affected by modernity in view of its close proximity to Athens, but, in the film, this partial modernity is only fully revealed to the characters and to the viewers within the drama of exchange. Now, through the evolving perspectives of the visitors, we come to see that the partial modernity of the heterotopic place is dialectical: From the point of view of the visitors' initial gaze, the island is exotic, hence, uniform and, we might say, perfect in its Otherness. However, as they become involved in the life on the island, and as some of the islanders show themselves ready to enter a process of exchange with them, Pavlos and his friend undergo a change of perspective. They, then, experience how the apparent exotic uniformity of the island masks dormant tensions between convention and modernity within the island community. Marina, the protagonist is, of course, also the centre of these dormant tensions in the island. The exchange between her and Pavlos takes place under the shadow of hostility, as a series of furtive encounters.

This quality of stolen moments is the form of heterotopic exchange in the plot and presents a dramatic perspective upon Marina and Pavlos from the point of view of the island. This quality is further emphasised by a temporal quality corresponding to what Foucault calls '*hétérochronie*.' This notion describes vacation villages in their capacity to abolish time by providing an indefinite, eternal rediscovery of modes of life past, which is, nonetheless, immediate, fleeting and transitory. Hence, holiday time is not fully articulated social time: The visitors, in the film, are holiday makers, and, as such, they do not only refrain from engaging with the customs of the place they visit, but they expect this place to be located somewhere entirely outside of social customs.

Indeed, this is a crucial feature of their exotic view of the island. *Hétérochronie*, the experience of a temporal difference or, more precisely, of a difference in daily social time, cements their status as visitors, but it is also the concrete manifestation of the island's heterotopic status. In their leisurely visit to Hydra, Pavlos and Antonis come to inhabit and embody a time frame that is outside their own social routine and, also, cut off from the habits of the islanders. *Hétérochronie* supports the exchange that forms the basis of the plot, in that it leaves both the visitors and the people they interact with in a temporal no man's land, a kind of temporal suspense, which forms the ground for the transaction between them and the islanders. Heterochronic time is favourable to unscheduled encounters; it is the frame for mutual interest to grow between visitors and islanders next to or outside of social habits. The plot of the film is, thus, centered on the mutual interest between the visitor and the islander. This mutual interest is, then, supported by a suspended time outside of social habit, which allows the characters to experiment: Pavlos, who is not encumbered by the rules and rumours of the island, can meet Marina afresh, see her without prejudice. She, on the other hand, is different from the many other women of his social set that he has, presumably, previously courted. On the other hand, this condition of meeting outside their social condition quickly infuses their relationship with a certain fragility. The heterochronic time and space of their meeting is, thus, ambivalent; it is a time of openness and a time of menace.

Pavlos and his friend are lodgers in the small hotel that Marina runs with her mother. As he strikes up a conversation with her, over a jug of water in the kitchen, he immediately impresses her with his affable manner and easy charm. They meet, then, by chance and coincidence, simply by him co-existing with her under the same roof. At the same time, theirs is an illicit, socially unacceptable relationship. Their courtship carries the stamp of secrecy and fragility: They have to find places to meet and times to be

together away from the prying eyes of others. Apart from the small spaces and short times allotted by the common spaces in the house (kitchen, corridor) or the time she can steal to visit him in his room, there is nowhere for these prospective lovers to go. Outside the house, there is the town of Hydra, a town in which Marina's family is in disrepute, and she is bullied by Christos, the former suitor, and his friends. Adding to this spatial threat of their meetings, Pavlos is challenged by his friend to give up his love, which seems socially doomed, and take the next boat back to Athens. The scenes of their courtship are, further, punctured by the sound of boats leaving and pictures of clocks: It evolves under the weight of his supposed impending departure. Their courtship takes place in a heterochronic time-space outside of what is given to them as a social possibility; it is, we might say, a time-space that they have to snatch away from social impossibility. In this heterochronic time, their courtship gains a furtive quality. They meet in hiding from the gaze of prying onlookers, always seeking to arrange the next meeting. As they create a possibility to meet, which is not given to them socially, they form a space for their liaison that is just outside of – or next to – the gaze and the space of their hostile surroundings. The semi-clandestine nature of their being together is depicted in the film along two axes: It is shown against the background of invasive others, and it is shown as “virtual,” a being next to one another, rather than actually together.

In the following three stills, we see two of their meetings. The first two stills show how they meet at church. In the first of these (fig. 28), we see how they communicate without actually speaking to each other. In the next (fig. 29), they speak and walk side-by-side without looking at each other. Note how, in the dialogue, they refer to time. He says, “I must see you. I am leaving tomorrow.” In the third still (fig. 30), from a meeting later in a small street of the town, they speak after having almost

been betrayed by an inquisitive child. Marina says, echoing Pavlos' line from before, "I must go." He replies, "What time will we meet?"



Figure 28: Stealing moments



Figure 29: A quick *rendezvous*



Figure 30: No future

On the same note, in the next two stills, we see how Marina fantasises about Pavlos in his proximity, as he is just out of reach. In one scene (fig. 31), she has languorously been cleaning his room, lingered over his affairs, caressed his shirt. She then goes to the window of his room, and, as she watches him from above walking by, she clutches the window frame giving herself to him in her mind. Marina, in an earlier scene, overhears Pavlos coming home late, drunk after a night out and still singing. She listens with intense concentration as she, dressed in a white nightgown, lies down on her bed (fig. 32).



Figure 31: Coming closer



Figure 32: Dreaming of Pavlos

I have shown that the perspective upon Marina and Pavlos on the island, in their furtive encounters, presents their longings as both fragile and intensely personal, necessarily hidden. I will now turn, from the beginning onwards, to the build-up of narrative perspective once again to examine how Marina's predicament is invested with thematic significance and, from there, follow how the dramatisation of Marina's freedom (and lack thereof) is situated within the ethical context of the island community as a whole, as well as her family's place within it. I shall follow the film's process of exposition and the progression of the drama quite closely to observe how narrative presentation of the setting, characterisation of the three protagonists (as well as of the other characters surrounding Marina) and the evocation of thematically important events – some located prior to the diegesis – function as framing devices for the film's dramatic perspective upon Marina's situation on the island and her own changing self-perception.

3.4 | Modern Freedom vs. Tragic Guilt

Upon the Athenians' disembarking on the island, Pavlos, true to his first, idealised comments on Hydra, seems keen on acquiring *couleur locale* and decides to take up lodgings in a local family house. His friend, the pragmatist Antonis, suggests that they move into a hotel. As they disagree, they toss a coin. The friends' idea to leave the decision down to the flipping of a coin sets the tone for the film's evocation of coincidence. I showed how the courtship between Pavlos and Marina is governed by the coincidence of their co-existing under the same roof. More importantly, the genre of the film is informed by the different clues and hints that are given in the opening scenes. Genre convention is used, here, as one among several codes in a web of, often misleading, frames for understanding the characters and the events, including evocations of chance, premonition and symbolism, as I shall now show.

Like the slightly false expectation of exoticism discussed above, the tossing of a coin raises a misleading expectation of comedy, of a universe governed by incident. However, like the Elytis quote, the tossing of a coin functions as an ambivalent symbol: The notion of luck carries a sinister implication, since the notion of man being governed by fortune, losing control over his life, can be aligned with a *rota fortunae*, in which characters are but puppets. Here, the decision left to chance is made as a prelude to the drama and to Pavlos being exposed to unforeseen events. The local guide, Aristides (Nikos Femas), summons Marina to meet the two visitors and offer them a place to stay (since Marina's family, as we are told, rents out rooms to tourists). This first innocuous meeting, under the friendly auspices of the guide, is what triggers the entire drama. Within the structure of the film, this initial emphasis on incident will, retrospectively, once the drama is well under way, cast intentionality and conscious

choice in a slightly ironic light. Pavlos meeting Marina is not the result of a specific choice; indeed, it is not something that he could have chosen or foreseen. I shall show to what extent this wider implication of chance also impacts upon the peripeties within the drama and inflects its generic form. Noted in passing, melodrama often employs peripety to highlight hidden pragmatic opportunities for or within the main character, whereas tragic peripety, of course, cements a sense of the protagonist's possibilities having run out.

Marina replies to the guide's proposal in a slow and hesitant voice. She says that the house is very old and, she adds, "completely dilapidated." In Greek, her words are even stronger, "Have you explained to the gentlemen that the house is old, and that, on the inside, it is almost destroyed?" There is a sense, here, of a forewarning, as if the house is burdened in some way, and there is a suggestion, conveyed by Marina's apprehensive manner, that her sentence refers to something more than the age and condition of the house: Her brunette features are accentuated by her black clothing and her downcast look, all of which seem to assign her an unidentifiable sorrow, a slightly foreboding aura (fig. 33).



Figure 33: Tragic figure

As Marina leads them up the hill, into the heart of the town, along steep and narrow streets, Cacoyannis makes the most of the confined spaces of these streets and their movement through them to evoke the sense of a tunnel. The wider thematic context of this introduction to the drama is that Marina is cast, from the outset, as a figure tainted with sorrow, tied to a mysterious past, unable, it seems, entirely to make her own decisions. Indeed, on the way to the house, she stops to consult with her brother about taking the two lodgers.

Directly parallel to this characterisation of Marina as a potentially tragic heroine or as the emblem of tragic emotions, Pavlos steps off the boat carefree and open, even more so than his rather serious friend. If Pavlos comes to represent, in the film, a modern antidote to Marina's rather conventional world, his modernity is of a particular kind: He is not simply independent of spirit, manner and financial means; he is fundamentally open and unattached, in the sense that he has no job, and his only family ties are to his mother. The free-spirited nature of Pavlos and the burdened appearance of Marina, thus, from the start, accentuate, in a hyperbolic way, a thematic contrast between freedom and attachment. I will now go on to develop the thematic cluster of freedom and the various kinds of past and family obligations, which we see foregrounded in the characterisation of the three characters of Marina, Pavlos and Antonis. This characterisation is embedded in the proceeding exposition of the plot, after their first introduction to the island.

Immediately after their arrival at Marina's house, the visitors begin to discover the source of Marina's apparent suffering: On the wall, in Pavlos' new bedroom, hangs a portrait of Niki, Marina's recently diseased sister. Upon seeing the picture, Antonis, faithful to his bland and unimaginative attitude towards Hydra, complains that what should have been a joyful coming to the island has, instead, plunged them into the heart

of “misery and mourning.” Pavlos, bemused, dismisses his comments, suggesting that Antonis’ successful career as an architect has made him “grumpy” and “irritable.”

Here, the film’s evocation of grief as a weighty, underlying theme and symbol serves to present Marina’s entire world as distinct from the visitors’ carefree leisure and, as it turns out, artistic ambitions. The conversation between the two friends soon reveals that they both come from an artistic background (architecture, literature), although Pavlos complains of his creative block: his inability to follow up on the success of the two novels he published when he was twenty. Cutting across this contrast between a burdensome past and a creative, artistic life, the “proud” Marina (as Aristides describes her) is also endowed with cultural credentials, but, in her case, belonging to the cultivated society of the island is connected to a notion of past family glory, the wealthy days during which “They lacked nothing.” Marina’s sorrow, thus, springs from the degeneration of her family, the death of both her father and sister whilst her mourning is associated with the coming of the war and the fall of an entire social order. Pavlos’ suffering, on the other hand, is self-centred and, in some sense, vain. His words, “If I were worth anything, I would have proven it by now,” sketch a self-pitying figure. The plot will now bring these clues concerning freedom or the lack thereof into a sharper conflict defined by sexuality and explicitly presented in the light of ethical norms. The evocation of sexual desire, associated in the film with nature, shapes the background of its entire dramatic conflict.

As some of the local children follow a path to the top of Hydra’s hard-to-reach hills, they (and the viewer) discover Froso (Eleni Zafeiriou), Marina’s widowed mother, in the arms of a lover. Her position in the community as a widow who takes lovers is, we are repeatedly told, problematic. We can see, then, a parallel and a contrast between the two characters of Pavlos and Froso. Pavlos’ reveling in his own, very personal,

problems has, of course, no relevance to the island community and no potential impact on their lives. Froso's problem, her inability to live by the strict moral codes of her community is, on the other hand, very much a problem for the community. It is a scandal. By thus neatly tracing two ways in which a character, preoccupied with his or her own subjective problems, relates to the ethical community, the film also positions Pavlos, in the thematic structure of the drama, as the bearer of a specifically modern, detached form of subjectivity: a self-relation that is both triggered by the character and confined in its meaning and importance to that character. Froso's affirmation of subjective desire, on the other hand, constitutes the origin and ethical basis for the film's dramatic conflict: It exposes and problematises the conventionality of the community that this woman is part of; she highlights, with her refusal to follow the ethical code of widowhood, the community's ethical code.

The children of the village, with all the cruelty characteristic of their age, run back down the cliff and let the news of the sighting "echo" through the valley and into town. After this, the entire island waits for the widow's return. This includes Froso's disgruntled son, Mitsos (Anestis Vlahos), who realises that the conduct of his mother reflects badly on the name of the family. From her window, Marina listens to the mother's lament, as Mitsos attacks the latter physically, hitting her and pulling her hair in an act of anger and punishment. Yet, for a moment, Marina hesitates to intervene. She, too, has suffered from the consequences of her mother's conduct: She, herself, is often forced to put up with the teasing of the local men who take her to be a loose woman. Although she is not involved in any illicit affairs, her sexual potential is seen as threatening to the community: She has rejected the marriage proposal of Christos, who is well established in the community. As mentioned above, she is further distanced from the community by her comfortable and cultured upbringing, which has made her proud

and aloof. She is frightened and disgusted by the aggression of the men who bully her, yet, at the same time, she appears ashamed of her mother's promiscuity – as it provides them with sufficient grounds to attack.

Stepping back from this flow of events, we may say that Marina's predicament is the following: She cannot pit her subjective will against the ways of the island. We can interpret her motives, in the manner of Pippin, by reconstructing her situation: Not only is she part of the community, but, as she, herself, is in disrepute (by association or guilty by proxy) for her mother's way of life, she does not have a position from which to challenge the ethical authority that castigates her mother. Marina can, still, however, forgive the moral transgression of her mother on a personal level, in that it appears justified in the latter's apologia, "Ever since your father died... I was a young woman; I was in need of some company, of a little kindness." While Marina silently accuses her mother of stooping too low, she also seems to feel compassion for her and for her loneliness. This shows in a scene taking place in the kitchen, between Marina and Froso, during which the latter tries to explain to her daughter how she lost her husband when she was the same age as Marina and has since been lonely and desperate. Marina listens silently, without having the courage to accuse, at least verbally, her mother for the family's predicament – even when the latter encourages her to do so (figs. 34 & 35). However, in spite of this personal compassion, Marina does not seem to have the force psychologically or the authority within the community to forgive the mother on ethical grounds, as opposed to personal, that is, to forgive her in the eyes of the community. For in order to do so, she would have had to find, in herself, the strength to challenge the prevailing authorities within it. As the plot will show retrospectively, it will take a radical reversal of her situation and of the structure of authority, in the community, for Marina to find such a strength and be able, as it were, to reposition herself as a subject

of agency. It is important to the dramatic perspective upon Marina's obsequiousness and acquiescence that the islanders are presented as upholding strict norms, according to which the mother's transgression is not forgivable. This strict attitude of the islanders is accentuated dramatically and stylistically in the sequence of scenes that follow upon the boys' revelation of Froso's misdemeanor.



Figure 34: Guilty



Figure 35: Too shy to accuse

The old, black-dressed widows of the island appear as representatives of family values and archaic moral authority. They encircle the scene of Mitsos attacking his mother in the manner of a chorus and glare at Froso in silence, while, paradoxically, also acknowledging her inability to remarry, as they say, due to “many debts and three children.” They admit that what has given them the “right to speak” is their sheer luck, which did not leave them husbandless from such an early age as “forty-two.” They express compassion for Froso for this reason, but this does not soften their reproach, as if Froso’s fault were an inability to live her allotted life, serenely and with dignity. All these dramatic elements conspire to accentuate the significance of Froso’s transgression and the unrelenting reaction of the community: the hurried return of the boys shouting their announcement, the gathering of the village in anxious anticipation, the silent rebuke of the old widows presented as a chorus, the physical punishment delivered to her by her own son with the tacit approval of everyone present, the failure of Marina, her own daughter, to intervene.

Both Pavlos and Antonis witness the scene of the fighting between Mitsos and his mother, and it is the first pragmatic, “non-romanticised” contact these Athenians have with the island. Pavlos, with his modern and individualistic approach to life, seems to doubt the necessity of Mitsos’ punitive act and its supposed disciplinarian role in the context of the community’s ethical norms. Marina’s embarrassment, after the incident, as she has to introduce Pavlos to Froso, and her suggestion that the two visitors should find alternative accommodation, are brushed aside by Pavlos’ open-minded attitude. During their conversation in the kitchen, he says, “I don’t know about you but I have so many weaknesses... I’ve given up judging others.”

In contrast to Pavlos’ free attitude, Marina is set, in the drama, with a role and within a context of guilt. This context involves her place within her own family, her

place in the community, as well as her own self-perception. She seems to be scarred by the death of her sister, for which she accuses both herself and the young man Christos. Indeed, as Marina narrates to Pavlos the family's past located prior to the diegesis, Christos was courting Niki in order to get close to Marina. (Which is why, upon discovering this, the sister committed suicide.) Another problematic situation burdening Marina is her relationship with her brother. On the one hand, she listens and looks up to Mitsos, for example, she consults him before accepting Pavlos and Antonis as lodgers. On the other hand, she is also aware of Mitsos' inability to defend the family within the community; his stubborn character creates even more hostile relations with the islanders. In the eyes of Christos and his friends, Marina is to blame for having rebuffed him. Finally, she is guilty by association, as I showed, for her mother's behavior. Marina is, thus, cast as guilty in multiple ways, both in her own eyes and in those of her surroundings.

We could say that the characterisation of Marina follows the same pattern that we saw in *Stella*: Even though Stella is depicted as a headstrong and free-spirited character, she is characterised through her relations to her suitors and her friends at Paradise. Here, the guilt-ridden and grieving character of Marina is depicted, in her brooding inwardness, through her relations with Christos, Mitsos, Froso and Pavlos. Like Stella, Marina emerges in her individual character only through these relations, which, therefore, also underpin the dramatic nucleus of guilt in the film. And although Stella's performative stance limits her characterisation by other characters, Marina is more directly and more concretely characterised by the entire community of the island.

Marina's meeting with Pavlos in the kitchen and their brief discussion are, for the former, a moment of revelation, as she comes into contact with a distinct and guilt-free moral attitude. As the close-up on Marina's expression suggests (fig. 36), she is

now in love with Pavlos because he brings to her life a refreshingly new perspective, a different, modern, sensibility, in which guilt does not seem to hold an inflexible claim on the person.



Figure 36: New gaze

Here, we could spell out the difference between a modern guilt-free attitude and the idea that guilt cannot easily be relativised within a conventional ethical community if we return to Hegel's reflections upon the archaic world and its ethical command. Hegel's concept of 'modern tragedy' is rooted in his reflections upon modern moral relativism. His claim that, in the archaic world, the agent cannot separate himself from his act by referring to the limiting concept of individual responsibility⁵⁹ is used to explain the ethical significance of action in ancient Greek tragedy. For example, the significance of Oedipus' actions cannot be relativised by his ignorance, cannot be limited to some individual act that he did. And, when Hegel discusses Sophocles' *Antigone*, in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, he stresses that Antigone's act of burial and

⁵⁹ "But just as, in the Heroic Age, the subject remains directly connected with his entire willing, acting, and achieving, so he also takes undivided responsibility for whatever consequences arise from his actions" (*Aesthetics* 187).

defiance of the king carry significance far beyond the limited rational sphere of her individual intensions and responsibility, as they involve the honour owed to the dead.

Likewise, in the face of her mother's transgressions and disrepute, Marina cannot merely distance herself from her mother. She has to remain answerable for her mother's acts, or she feels that she has to answer for her mother's acts. Moreover, Froso is guilty only as far as she acts out who she is: a lonely woman in need of company. Her affairs are presented as stemming from her own weaknesses, which, as the widow she is cast as by Cacoyannis, she cannot possibly run away from. The women in the island recognise as much, "with so many debts," meaning or implying that Froso should be excused.

To use Hegel's distinction between the moral and the ethical, that is, between individual responsibility⁶⁰ and communal norms, we can say that the notion of guilt upheld by the community against Froso is not merely moral. It is a guilt that stems from her transgression of communal norms, and, tragically, given who she is, Froso cannot adhere to the ethical code befitting a widow within the island community. In tragic fashion, she is set up, as a character, to fail for who she is; the tragedy is included in her role, since she is cast as that which she cannot be. 'Widow,' here, is not or does not correspond to "'good" widow'.⁶¹ And she is guilty, we might say, of carrying her own personal problems and subjective desire into the public realm. In the vocabulary of Hegel: She is not so much guilty of having done specific acts as of asserting herself as a subject, within and against the community.

⁶⁰ "But in the Heroic Age, in which the individual is essentially a unity, and the objective action, by being his own production, is and remains his own, the subject claims that what has been done, has been entirely done by him alone and that what has happened is completely his own responsibility" (*Aesthetics* 188).

⁶¹ See MacIntyre's point: "Aristotle takes it as a starting-point for ethical enquiry that the relationship of 'man' to 'living well' is analogous to that of 'harpist' to 'playing the harp well'" (69).

On the island, guilt is not, as I showed, merely a subjective moral phenomenon. Hence, Marina's brother, Mitsos, is cast as having no choice but to avenge Froso and the shame that has befallen his family. Just like Marina, he is guilty for being witness to the circumstances that cause the ethical degradation of his family, and, just like Froso, he is cast against his actual character – and this contributes to his characterisation as a semi-tragic figure. Sharing Marina's upbringing, the brother is a soft type who is not cut out for fights and is always shamefully vindicated by his opponent.

Marina, having witnessed part of the fight between Mitsos and the mother, returns home emotionally devastated. Here, we see that Marina cannot, within the *status quo* of her island life, remove her guilt and resolve the problem of her apparent entrapment. It is only, as I will next show, through the real tragedy of the drowned children and a chain of events involving the man she loves, that she acquires the opportunity to act out of her role and, hence, speak up to the ethical authorities of the island.

Thus, the tragic event offers her a surprising outlet for the unresolved tensions she has carried with her. It is the nature of this surprise that partly gives the impetus to the film's modern tragedy and its conclusion. Just as the characters of Mitsos, Christos and Froso are self-limiting, in the sense that they seem to endorse their own entrapment, Marina appears, until this tragic event that befalls outside the control of the community, to conspire in the community's annulment of her initiative. It is through an external event and, more precisely, through the transaction and exchange brought about within the drama through the presence of the modern Athenian that she is able to step out of this role, that is, out of what we now come to see as her false self-perception as a tragic figure. Despite the context of guilt in the film, in light of this external event and Marina's subsequent capacity to break her previous silence, Marina's life prior to the

event is cast in a new light: not as tragic but, as I will go on to develop, as fake tragic. Had it been actually tragic, it would not have been possible for her to break the spell and speak for herself at the last minute.

I can now show more accurately what the modern tragedy of this film consists in: It is the complex dramatic perspective, created through various framing devices, that issues in a situation in which Marina is portrayed through her relations with a number of other characters and in terms of an explicit theme of communal guilt. It is, further, a dramatic situation in which all the characters are presented as entrapped within circumstances, in such a way that the drama offers them no solutions to their dilemma or to their entrapment prior to the advent of an external element. In this film, it is the exchange that Marina enters with the foreign visitor in the context of the tragic event taking the form of a boating accident. Hence, the possibility of an exit shows an exit also from tragedy, whereas the communal reality of the characters' entrapment distinguishes this dramatic situation from the subjective perspective of melodrama.

3.5 | Confrontation and the Fake Tragic

The endorsed entrapment of these characters, theirs and, especially, the heroine's fake tragic self-perception is expressed, quite ambiguously, in the style of suspension or stasis and theatrical poses that I referred to also in *Stella*. There, I mentioned that the heroine's giving all of herself, fully in each scene, lent them and her a performative quality, which precluded an ongoing psychological reading of her motivations. Here, the heroine's passivity and tragic poses are shrouded in thematically and dramatically ambiguous situations and relationships. For instance, in the punishment of Froso, the staged quality of the islanders' gathering and the stereotypically tragic *topos* of a son beating his mother in public give expressive force to a tragic current running through the film, which becomes, however, relativised by Marina's evolution. This tragic current is echoed in the characters' posture of entrapment, and, as I have shown, this is especially true of Marina, who, from the very beginning, seems "frozen" in her role as a burdened figure. The accompanying stasis of her appearance grants continuity to her character, yet this continuity both accentuates the reversal in the plot and is relativised by it.

In the plot of the film, the tragic element and ensuing moment of reversal and confrontation that shed light on and relativise her previous fake tragic stance emerge from an intrigue, which, importantly, involves several characters of the community. This is important because this multiplicity of character relations cements a dramatic perspective, which is neither, as it were, objectively tragic nor subjectively aligned with the narrative point of view of the protagonist, as in melodrama.

Indeed, the courtship of Marina and Pavlos attracts the attention of those around them; tensions escalate in the island community, as Marina's and Pavlos' feelings are

picked up by the people in the village. Pavlos, the modern urbane visitor is, thus, seen as someone who has offended the men of the island, “messing with our affairs.” To show him his place, Christos decides, along with his group of friends, to play a prank on him. Discovering that Pavlos has borrowed a rowing boat, they make a hole in it, which he does not see. As he is in the middle of the harbour, rowing, a band of children ask him for a ride. He lets them on board, and, then, as they are further from the shore, the boat sinks and some of the children drown. Pavlos seeks to save the children but fails to save all of them. Back in the village, as in the ending scene of *Stella*, the rumour and panic of the news spread fast, immediately appearing to be the concern of all as an event that affects the whole community. We saw a prelude to this panic and ethical charge in the scene of Froso’s punishment by her son. As previously explained, the children announcing the news and the old women watching supported a tragic tone in that scene. If we now compare the reproach of Froso with the accidental death of the innocent children, we can easily measure the difference between these two moments in the drama. This is a difference both in the ethical charge of the scene and in its tragic dimension. The death of innocent children is, as an event, of course, more genuinely tragic than the promiscuous life of a widow. Furthermore, it is an event. It happens once, suddenly, unexpectedly. Third, this event befalls the whole community, in so far as the children are the future of this community. The community is afflicted by this tragedy, which, therefore, concerns them beyond their attachment to their own ethical code of behavior (figs. 37, 38 & 39).



Figure 37: Tragedy for all



Figure 38: A matter for all



Figure 39: Raising the alarm

In terms of the drama as a whole, the drowning accident appears, again, following Pippin's method of analysis, as an impetus for thought in the protagonist – and this impetus is one that has a ground and a cause, which is real, public and, to some extent, tragic. Hence, the drama is, here, revealing the changing perspectives of the heroine upon herself as she is revising a previous pose of stasis, as well as a previous stance of exaggerated tragic feelings. Yet, the crucial element, in the drama, for triggering this change is the tragic event. This event is external to herself. It is, in its nature, public, hence, transports her outside of the context of her own feelings, even if only to bring her back to herself with a renewed resolve. Returning to the punishment of Froso, that scene is, as I argued, private in its origin; the public punishment does not really alter the fact that this is a merely personal, essentially, moral incident – in Hegel's sense of the term 'moral' (*Phenomenology* 204). In the tragic scene of the drowned children, by contrast, the public nature of the scene stems from the event itself, even if the circumstances leading to the event, Christo's envy of Pavlos and Marina's longstanding feud with Christos, are also personal and psychological. Once the tragic event happens, these circumstances, in comparison, cease to matter, and no one can undo the event or make it reversible. Since the island is not, as I showed, a strictly traditional but a heterotopic place, the tragic predicament of Marina's life before the accident is somewhat overblown. In terms of Brooks' notions of the 'moral occult' and 'dramatization' (12) in melodrama, the real event, here, does not only interrupt the characters' inner feelings but changes the life of the community in its entirety.

I wish to make two further, more general, comments on the dramatic style of Cacoyannis regarding this tragic moment and its public nature. In all three films, there is a moment of conflict, which, very quickly, draws a large crowd, as if its coming together outside, in the street, would vouch for the reality of the event and guarantee

that it is not merely an expression of personal feelings or a moment within the life of a couple (as it could have been in *Stella*). It is important, for the tragic dimension of these events, that they are external: They are external in relation to the protagonists' intentions (although, out of all the films, in *Stella*, it is the most problematic to claim to identify the heroine's intentions) and external to the previous dynamic field of interaction. They are external to the character in terms of the community that she belongs to. As I will show in the next chapter, one of the most telling illustrations of this principle comes in *A Matter of Dignity*, where the culminating tragic event, which involves the death of a maid in a large household, is also a moment in which the border between the private world of the house and the public world of the community is explicitly thematised: In a fight with the mother and daughter of the house, the maid attempts to open the shutters and the windows to the street, that is, to the neighbours, in order to shout for everyone to hear the story of her own humiliation by the family.

The other observation concerns dramatic sequence. It seems that, in all three films, Cacoyannis uses a technique that I can now better describe as the 'double tragic event.' A first accident or negative event occurs early in the films, only to be followed by the genuine tragic event later in the drama. For example, in *Stella*, the gentle Alekos, who seeks to marry Stella, dies in an accident after she breaks up with him in order to be with Miltos. This death casts a shadow over Stella but does not directly cause the events that lead to her own death. As I will show in the next chapter, in *A Matter of Dignity*, the relationship between the first and the second, tragic, event is more direct. The first event is the sudden illness of the maid's son, as he becomes mute by an accident. This illness creates a specific situation, which triggers the events of the later, tragic, event: The maid, in the film, returns to her son in her village, and Chloe, the protagonist, accompanies her. When she leaves for Athens, the maid makes Chloe

promise to send her money – a promise that the latter forgets once she is back in Athens. This negligence spurs the maid's rightful anger at the family, to whom she had always been loyal, and, in her fit of anger and because of it, she has a heart attack and dies.

In *A Girl in Black*, the tragic event is clearly demarcated from the first incident, which is the public fight between Froso and her son. I talked about how this scene announces the presence of an ethical community in the film, but it does not have significant dramatic consequences. The second event, the drowning of the children, on the other hand, is momentous in that the two main characters emerge profoundly changed. They are transformed not just in their traits of character but in their very agency, that is, in their capacity to act and respond to their situation. The dramatic structure of exchange that I have talked about throughout this chapter is underscored by the fact that both Pavlos and Marina change. They change in parallel and in relation to one another, as both have to face up to the social challenge that their love entails. In fact, all the main characters, in the drama, are affected by this incident: The aftermath of the accident will open a situation, in which Marina is able to confront other characters, such as Christos, and step out of her habitual silence. This capacity to confront testifies to a change having occurred to and within the protagonist, but the act of confrontation is itself a dramatic event that cements this change. Pavlos sheds his immaturity and acquires depth as a character. After the event, Marina is able to break out of her shell, confront the clique and protect Pavlos. By speaking up for him, she finds her own voice. She is able to act by her own conscience.

Before analysing in detail what Marina says and what this new voice consists in, I should dwell on further strands in the drama, which surround the tragic event and are part of the build-up to Marina's transformation. This will show, again, that Marina is a

character who emerges as a subject of agency and reflection from her relations with other characters. It is this capacity, to emerge as a transformed subject in the wake of an unchosen tragic event, which attests to the film's quality of modern tragedy. It will also show what is at stake in her decision to change her demeanor. I can formulate this as a question of what it is that Marina is up against.

As her relationship with Pavlos evolves, she gradually finds herself in her mother's place, since the name of the family is put under renewed scrutiny – and, this time, not because of her mother's promiscuousness but because of her own desire for Pavlos. The development in Marina's feelings is grasped by Mitsos, who justifies his request to the two Athenians to leave his house by stating, "I only have one sister; I would rather kiss her on her deathbed than have her name dragged around town." Unlike Pavlos, Antonis, too, seems to appreciate what exactly is at stake here: not only the defamation of a particular woman but the undermining of the alleged universality with which the institutions of family and marriage are held by the islanders. Following this request, Antonis goes from warning his friend not to play with the emotions of "an unhappy girl" to suggesting a "return to Athens as soon as possible." His words, "You will sacrifice her," denote the seriousness of the situation. When Pavlos protests by declaring his good intentions, namely his love for Marina, Antonis mocks him that his love is similar to the one he nurtured for "Dora and Lia and Sophia and all the others," and challenges Pavlos to marry Marina. This idea has a strong impact on Pavlos and propels him into a state of disarray. Up to this point, Pavlos was both emotionally and economically dependent on his mother, "a very cosmopolitan and autarchic lady," who is described as unlikely to grant Pavlos her consent to marry Marina. Pavlos' abstract or, merely, subjective feelings for Marina, when confronted with the demands of social necessity, call for substantial action, a tangible deed that would prove the integrity of

his character. Antonis very well understands this urgency by offering Pavlos a job, adding, “*Hic Rhodus; hic saltus.*” In other words, Pavlos is called upon to love Marina without wishing to transport their affair onto another plane, where conditions would perhaps be ideal. He is to accept their love within the here-and-now, according to the rules that govern Marina’s environment. For Pavlos, accepting this “offer” is difficult, as it entails a long overdue process of him gaining maturity, attaining autonomy and adulthood, although, throughout the film, we see him as a carefree and somewhat spoiled character. Indeed, Pavlos is, initially, seen telephoning his mother in order to communicate the news of his love for Marina. Instead, he informs her of his imminent return to Athens. The staging of this scene, the asphyxiating atmosphere of the room, induced by the scorching temperature outside and the lethargic singing of the cicadas, as well as Pavlos’ clutching to a piece of tissue with which he cleanses the sweat off his face, are used to communicate Pavlos’ enormous effort to fulfill his aspirations and, then, as his call fails, to stand up to his disillusionment with himself. The body language of Antonis, standing a few meters away, watching his friend in silence, professes, too, his own disappointment.

As for Marina’s development, it is characterised in terms of a situation, which she perceives to be unchanging. It is a situation in which she comes to believe the reasons for her persecution by others to be justified. Moreover, we see that this situation has become her everyday reality: She has adopted, as already mentioned, a pose of stasis and silence; in fact, she comes across as apathetic and dejected, a shadowy figure who moves along the corridors of her house sobbing.⁶² As the drama unfolds, her changing relation to others involves getting over her inability to act. She finds a way to externalise her thoughts and voice her own claims against injustice. Most importantly,

⁶² Marcel Martin writes that *A Girl in Black* possesses “a . . . feeling of plastic stasis and dramatic tardiness” (Festival 134).

she faces the dual challenge of confronting Christos and openly declaring her love for Pavlos. In order to achieve this and, thereby, remove the curse weighing upon her and her family, she has, as I showed earlier, to acquire a position where she can forgive her mother and accept her brother for who he actually is – not measuring him by the yardstick of a man who represents the family in society. In order to achieve this change, psychologically, she will, first of all, have to look through her ambivalent and difficult feelings for her mother.

These feelings are rooted, it is evident, in Froso's own hypocritical treatment of Marina. For example, in a scene towards the end of the film, the mother tries to stop Marina from comforting Pavlos after the boating accident, fearful of what others will make of this gesture, "What will people say?" The mother grabs Marina from the arm to prevent her from going up to the room where Pavlos is kept under arrest. Marina gives the mother a wistful look, as if saying that Froso has no right to stop her by having set the wrong example with her own secret love affairs. Marina breaks free from Froso's grasp, and the latter looks down in shame. Even though the mother tries to stop Marina in order to protect her, she seeks to impose on Marina's life the same strict moral rules that do not seem to apply to herself (figs. 40 & 41).



Figure 40: Forgetting her own transgressions



Figure 41: The look that confronts

Confronting the mother is not all that Marina has to do in the wake of the boating accident. When Pavlos is wrongly arrested for the drowning of the children, Marina goes to the house of Christos, the man responsible for the prank that led to the accident. She asks him to give himself in to the police. Christos and his friends respond with hostile evasiveness. This is so, not the least, because Marina, with her visit, not merely confronts Christos regarding his role in the present situation (the boating accident), but she brings up his past role in the life of Marina and her family (his careless courtship of Niki, which caused her to commit suicide). Marina says to him,

“You destroy lives for a laugh.” Christos is certainly depicted as a sly character.

However, in this moment of confrontation, he appears to rise to the situation and face up to his responsibility. Marina challenges him at the core of his male pride, “I thought I was dealing with men.” Upon hearing this, Christos seems to bow to her demand.

Thereby, her relation to Christos comes to a head: His giving in to Marina’s request is an indirect recognition of his love, and his virile pride appears, for the first time, connected to this love. He proves his love and shows its real meaning in that he is in the position to recognise his own responsibilities. It seems that Christos is saying that, since he loves Marina and performed a series of damaging acts for the sake of this love, he is, by the same token, ready to accept to be punished for them. This structure of reversal and reciprocity becomes expressed in the following sequence, concretely and physically, in the positioning of the two characters in relation to one another. Marina is pictured either following Christos – as if his bad actions are now after him, to hunt him – or Christos is following her – as if he is now called upon to face up to his bad behaviour (figs. 42, 43 & 44). Finally, outside the police station, Christos, arrested by a police officer next to him, looks on meaningfully to where Marina stands as if to indicate the entire nexus of events. Summing up this sequence in the drama, for Christos to be put in the position of having to follow Marina, both literally and figuratively, follows directly, in the sense of responsibility, from his own contribution to the drowning of the children.



Figure 42: Facing the consequences



Figure 43: Following Marina



Figure 44: Shadowing Christos

As mentioned earlier, part of confronting Christos and saving Pavlos entails for Marina to declare her love for the latter in front of their common “enemies.” This means that Marina has, first, to overcome her tendency to accept her situation on the island as some sort of fate. Up until the film’s finale, Marina watches her brother and mother being ridiculed publicly while she, herself, endures the hostile advances of Christos and his friends. Above all, she is unable to believe in Pavlos’ love for her, considering their relationship impossible and expecting Pavlos to return to Athens for good. (I already showed how Pavlos, too, is unable to communicate news of his relationship back home and break from his attachment to his mother. He is also reluctant about getting a job.) It is, finally, the boating accident and the need to defend Pavlos from an unjust punishment that spur Marina into action. She admits to her fear and tells him, “I got you involved with these people without meaning to... because I was afraid of them.” Paradoxically, it is only now, after Pavlos has been marked by this very real tragedy before the eyes of the community, that Marina does not run away from his love and treats her relationship with Pavlos much more seriously than before. Despite still wishing to send Pavlos away, her personal vendettas with Christos and the island – even the death of her sister – no longer seem important when compared to the very real event of the drowning of the children. It is this, very real, event that breaks with her everyday reality to introduce a very different sphere of importance.

We now have the elements of a clear and, at the same time, complex dramatic structure. A tragic incident occurs. The incident has many causes, embedded in dramatic relationships between multiple characters. These relationships are, on the one hand, unfolded in the drama, that is, they take place in the dramatic present. On the other hand, the relationship between Froso and the community and between Marina and Christos refer to a dramatic past, which is only narrated – not shown. Now, the incident

has definite consequences, produces an unequivocal dramatic rupture – an event, in other words, which is not reversible. It produces a definite change in the characters and within the situation of the drama. This amounts to a reversal within the main dramatic thread of the film, which are Marina's role on the island and her perspective upon herself. This change is, itself, as complex as it is irreversible. It is this change, tied to a change of perspective and an act of confrontation, which is at the heart of what I call 'modern tragedy.' By mustering the courage to confront her mother and Christos, Marina not only breaks an external spell weighing upon her and tying her to the community, for example, regarding her silent acquiescence at her mother's punishment, she also breaks through what appears, until then, an internal and intangible obstacle or veil. The parallel transformation of Pavlos, which I described above, follows, on a smaller scale, a similar trajectory from passive submission to an authority (his mother) and from the role this submission granted him, that of a sheltered man about town, to an acknowledgement of his own responsibility in relation to Marina.

In light of this dramatic reversal of confrontation, the past of Marina within the drama can be seen in a new light. I referred above to Marina's fake tragic stance and psychological attitude. We are now in a position to see more clearly what her fake tragic stance consists in. It is an attitude whereby Marina, paradoxically, appears concerned only with the community, that is, concerned with what others think of her and her family, with reputation, while being, in fact, caught in the self-centered vice of brooding: remorse, self-pity and bitter recriminations of Christos. In the scenes where she confides her sorrows to Pavlos, we are told that these are the thoughts that burden her. In the act of confrontation, she indirectly addresses the community by addressing Christos and by referring to their shared shameful past. She refuses to maintain a decorous silence. She refuses to maintain the role of a humiliated person from an

unlucky and unhappy family. By doing so, she, by the same token, steps outside of her own thoughts. She does not relate to the community only in terms of her own feelings of shame or humiliation but in terms of an acquired right to speak. This newly acquired right to speak is Marina's own accomplishment as part of her rediscovered sense of modern subjectivity, but it is still forcefully initiated by the tragic external event she has no control over.

3.6 | Theatricality and Stasis

The attitude described as fake tragic is expressed in Marina's hyperbolic gestures and static appearance. Stasis works along with the theatricality in Cacoyannis' trilogy. In *Stella*, the protagonist's volatile, performative spontaneity masks her incapacity to change her situation and masks her motivations. In *A Girl in Black*, stasis is explicitly part of the protagonist's character traits and dramatic situation within the plot, as I have shown. This situation of stasis is underlined by an appearance of stasis pertaining to Marina's undeterred expression of sadness and emotional imprisonment. Stasis, in this dual function of expression and dramatic situation, supports theatricality in the sense that I defined in the previous chapters: Theatricality is, there, opposed to a melodramatic construction of mood in which 1) The tone of the *mise-en-scène* is aligned with the protagonist's subjective point of view and 2) Individual expressive elements function as signifiers either for this mood or, directly, for the mental state of the protagonist. Theatricality, by contrast, operates on the temporal level of dramatic suspense and obeys a logic of intransparency, which is expressed as stasis. Even if we know that Marina is unhappy, the reasons for her unhappiness are revealed only gradually. The reason why she takes her unhappiness so seriously, or why she takes it to be absolute, remain enigmatic up until the reversal produced by the tragic event. Marina's previous attitude of fatalism and brooding sadness can be described as fake tragic precisely because, in this attitude, sadness appears to serve her as a protective veil against her local enemies and the communal authorities that back them. The weight of this authority remains somewhat mysterious for the viewer. By throwing off this veil of introspection, she measures herself against the power of those authorities. We see, then, that the universe of the drama is not archaic; that the voice of the individual is not

crushed by the power of a monolithic community, and that this ethical power is partial and relative, allowing the dissenting voice of the protagonist to be heard with impunity.

At the same time, as the power of the community, thus, appears not to be without ambiguity, the stance and fresh perspective acquired by the protagonist in the film is not straightforwardly that of a person taking initiative: It is only after the tragic event that Marina is able to break the spell and step out of her role. It is, in other words, only subsequent to an external event that is unintended and has tragic consequences – the drowning of the children – that the protagonist can access her own voice and show initiative.

Hermeneutically, the question posed by this reversal of attitude, thus, concerns the relationship between initiative and tragedy. In a modern, for example, melodramatic moral outlook, categories such as choice, initiative, freedom, moral autonomy, rational decision, need no further justification. They are available in moral discourse, and they are available as themes of drama. In modern tragedy, the boundary between the modern and the tragic world is not, as I showed above, clearly drawn. Hence, these modern notions of subjective autonomy and initiative are not unproblematic. They are problematised, and this problematisation is the central question raised by the drama and by the protagonists in these early films by Cacoyannis.

Here, Marina's transformation and new stance are inseparable from the tragic event – together with all the accompanying circumstances leading up to it. She acts and speaks, and she is empowered to act and speak only in the shadow of tragedy. It is only when something irreversible has taken place, which changes the situation she is in, that she, herself, can change her perspective upon that situation. Her new stance is, in fact, a continuation of the tragic event: She comes across as someone who is able to act freely

only within the unchosen situation of an imposed tragic challenge. Hence, action is not fully action, not entirely autonomous and independent.

In the film *Stella*, I showed that Stella was only able to act in relation to what she took to be an unresolvable predicament to which she responded with a suicidal action. In *Stella*, the protagonist's confrontation with her dramatic situation and with communal expectation, thus, coincides with the tragic event of her own death. I may add that the protagonist's capacity for reflection does not really manifest itself as a force of freedom or empowerment. It can be inferred, from the plot and the gap in motivation before Stella's final act, that she must have reflected upon her predicament, but this reflection is not of a kind that opens a new perspective or allows her to change her situation.

In *A Girl in Black*, by contrast, we see that Marina, following the event, undertakes a series of actions that imply reflection in a transformative sense: She now situates and perceives herself in a different way in relation to the community. This reflection takes place between the poles of subjective initiative and dependence upon a tragic situation. It can be said that, at the horizon of the drama, we see the emergence of a new subject. This new subject is not entirely modern: It does not find the resolve of initiative within itself but through a tragic event. This ethical position that is modern tragic is paradoxical in relation to the modern notion of subjectivity. A subject reappears, which is empowered to confront the ethical norms of the community in which it lives, but this subject emerges only out of and as the result of a tragic process of transformation; it, thus, remains tied, in its very core, to this tragic context and, hence, to the community in which the tragic process takes shape.

3.7 | Reflection, Subjectivity, Modernity

In the Introduction to the chapter on *Stella*, I said that ‘modern tragedy’ is a concept that, for Hegel, implies psychological reflection, and that the ethical approach to tragedy that he establishes is based on the concept of an idealised community. I showed in the previous chapter, that *Antigone*, for Hegel, represents the essentially ethical drama. We saw that this ethical drama is exemplary for Hegel in a historical sense: It illustrates the opposition, which is at the basis of the historical process that culminates in modernity, between a cohesive community, with unquestioned ethical authority over the individual, and a process of reflection, which equals subjectivity. In the aftermath of the play, a thought emerges: the possibility of an individual becoming a subject of reflection contesting the authority of ethical norms. In short, the tragedy of *Antigone* produces, in its wake and as a historical prototype, a subject of reflection.

In *A Girl in Black*, the drama is that of modern tragedy, rather than that of tragedy, and this difference can be described aptly in relation to two aspects of Hegel’s theory of tragedy: 1) in relation to tragedy as giving birth to reflection and 2) in relation to his underlying opposition between the tragic – which for Hegel equals the archaic – and modernity – which equals reflection. In contrast to this opposition, the drama of modern tragedy, in Cacoyannis, retains elements of both tragic reflection and ethical community. It does so within a modern context, which, however, precisely because of these ethical and tragic elements, does not (as in Hegel’s concept of ‘modern tragedy’) result in a purely psychological drama concerned exclusively with the motivation and self-perception of individual characters.

A Girl in Black presents a subject of contestation, who is able to revise her own position and stance in relation to ethical authorities. This subject is born from a tragic

situation. This subject is, initially, modern in applying the possibility of reflection to itself within the drama. Yet, this subject is not fully modern in that its assertiveness and independence are limited by the tragic dimension of the drama.

In contrast with Hegel's division between ancient and modern tragedy, the drama, here, is not defined by the psychology of the protagonist: The protagonist's stance previous to the tragic event, what I called the 'fake tragic' attitude, her stance of contestation subsequent to the event, and the change itself are not intelligible outside of an ethical context in which she has to face up to communal authority.

Most importantly, the drama, in *A Girl in Black*, presents an interpenetration of subjectivity and tragedy suggesting a different, more ambivalent relationship between subjectivity and the tragic than the opposition and historical passage from community to reflection and autonomy, underlying Hegel's analysis. In bringing back the tragic element of contestation into a psychological drama or, inversely, by presenting a modern character with ethical stakes that she cannot resolve outside the context of tragedy, Cacoyannis also presents an alternative to the "modernism" of melodrama, that is, to the assurance that the subject's autonomy will not have to be relativised, that its claims will never have to be tempered as the result of having unchosen conditions imposed upon it. In *A Girl in Black*, the subject of contestation asserts itself, yet this contestation is possible only in the aftermath of an unchosen tragic event.

The subject of modern tragedy is, thus, not what modern philosophers call "autonomous." It is essentially dependent upon an external reality – the reality of a tragic event (and the ethical community that this event and its tragic significance refer to). Further, I showed that this reality is liberating to the protagonist because it allows it to create distance to its previous mode of introspective, secluded existence. We can say that the fake tragic attitude of introspection is interrupted by the external reality of the

tragic, thus, setting free a subject of confrontation, which is free only within this unchosen and imposed context.

This contaminated, partial liberation of Marina also puts the category of action in a new light in the eyes of the spectator: The hermeneutic process, which the drama invites, is, as in *Stella* and, as I will show, in *A Matter of Dignity*, anchored in questions posed by the protagonists to themselves and raised, for the viewer, by the trajectory of these characters through the drama. In *A Girl in Black*, these are questions concerning Marina's freedom: Why does she feel oppressed? Why does she not break free of the hold that the community has on her? What makes her change after the drowning of the children? As Christos is guilty of the boating accident and Pavlos unjustly accused, we may think that it is the conjunction of these two factors that motivate Marina psychologically, but it is the event itself, as it brings together and brings to the fore all the important aspects of Marina's life, which has the power to make her change. The event brings before her eyes, in the outside world, what she could only dimly perceive through the veil of fear and self-pity in her fake tragic mode of being. She finds resolve, then, through the tragic event because, within this event, she finds externalised what had burdened her as her very own problem.

Stepping back from the details of plot and motivation, we find the following structure of drama and subjectivity, which constitutes modern tragedy in this film. And we will find a similar structure in *A Matter of Dignity*. (As I have stated, this structure is only partially unfolded in *Stella*, in that reflection is reduced to a minimum, and confrontation coincides with the story's tragic event.) Late in the story, there is a sudden change in the protagonist, resulting in subjective freedom and initiative. This change implies an act of reflection, and we can reconstruct this reflection as follows: The tragic event brings to the foreground a contrast to the protagonist's past. This contrast

highlights for her that her past attitude was purely internal or self-induced. Even if caused by relations to others, the protagonist's fake tragic self-perception is coloured by her own subjective self-interpretation. The external event of the children's death, on the other hand, is not a matter of her feelings and interpretation. It does not even directly concern her. As a consequence of the tragic event and the realisation it brings to her, she now sets limits to her own feelings. This immediately enables her to relate to others, to Christos and Pavlos, openly, hence, to act towards them and confront them.

The upshot of this passage, from the fake tragic attitude, through a tragic event and an implicit process of reflection, to confrontation, is that action appears permeated by reflection, which, in turn, implies a dependence upon an external and unchosen tragic event. In other words, we are faced with modern tragedy's typical ethical paradox: Action is free and is carried by a reflection, which is conditioned by a tragic unchosen event.

The film invites us, therefore, to think of Marina, with her strengths and weaknesses, as inseparable from the dramatic context in which she finds resolve. Hence, the fact that resolve comes to her only in the context of a tragic event, this fact remains purely objective, as a fact of the drama. The film offers, then, a tragic, ambivalent resolution for Marina, but it does not propose that the underlying opposition between modernity and tradition could be simply carried by individual characters and resolved by them with their own decisions and actions (since the category of action is problematised). The resolution in the plot is, therefore, only partial; It is not a resolution that organises the plot as a whole. In other words, the conflict that opposes Marina to the community does not fully coincide with a conflict in the plot, which would oppose her directly, both thematically and in terms of dramatic sequence, to figures of ethical authority.

Cacoyannis' offering of a partial resolution to the plot is somehow expressed in the off-screen finale of the film: We see Pavlos approaching Marina, having just missed his return-boat to Athens, and Marina looking at the sea thinking instead that he has departed. But we never actually see them re-unite or speak to each other about embarking victoriously on a common life together. Even after confronting the island's community, Marina pessimistically chooses to send him away, while he remains behind, expressing a more optimistic stance. Pippin writes the following with reference to a film-noir ending: "And the movie ends with an ambiguous final choice that forces the issue of how to act in the light of greater suspicions about fatalism and that seems both liberating in a way and yet also resigned to a bleak, inescapable fate" (28). The same, of course, can be said, as I showed, about Stella's "choice" to die.⁶³

Returning to the notion of perspective, it is important to note that the tragic event, which is central to the plot as a point of culmination and reversal, is conditioned by many different circumstances in the plot, some of which, as we saw, lie outside the dramatic action of the film. The same complexity characterises Marina's subsequent act of confrontation: Christos is responsible for the accident, and Marina acts in order to save the unjustly accused Pavlos. If we recall the comparison with the Italian island films above, in which the films' own perspective on modernity and its opposites were very sharply presented, the ethical perspective in *A Girl in Black*, we can now see, is not, thus, identifiable. The film builds up to Marina's act of independence, but it does not, correspondingly, depict the island community as homogenous in the way of the islanders confronting Karin in *Stromboli*.

⁶³ The idea of ambiguity pertaining the ending of Cacoyannis' early films can be established in some of his interviews. Concerning the supposedly happy ending of *A Girl in Black*, he says: "As far as the happy ending of the film is concerned, there was a fight. Which wasn't entirely happy. I wanted in the finale for Horn to leave and Ellie to stay behind alone looking at the sea. The production pleaded with me to couple them. Finally, I left the matter ambiguous, in the imagination of the viewer" (Siafkos 93-94).

The character of Christos is a key figure in this regard. A conventional rogue character, devious and unpredictable, he, nevertheless, comes to stand, in relation to Marina, for the authority of the island community. He, himself, is not a bearer of ethical authority. The mother of Mitsos, in *Stella*, however, is such a figure, because she upholds and directly enounces conventional ethical rules. Christos possesses an authority of a different kind. He is simply a figure who is known in the community. The film does not emphasise this asymmetry between his status on the island and his role in relation to Marina. Thereby, it also moves away from the exotic gaze that was presented as a possibility in the first scenes of the film, seen from the point of view of the visitors. Whereas the exotic gaze establishes distance between the figure of modernity (who is looking) and the figures of tradition (who are observed), the film, in involving Pavlos and Marina in a process of exchange, also refrains from inhabiting the visual, dramatic and ethical view-point of exotic and moral clarity – a definite separation between tradition and modernity. This complex perspective is, then, ultimately, the manifestation, within the drama, of the heterotopic ambivalent status of the island. We may, even, say that heterotopia undermines the possibility of a genuine tragic conflict, since this kind of location does not possess the absolute closure of a tragic location. Hydra becomes, rather, a space of negotiation between tradition and modernity, between freedom, the subjective aspirations of desire, and social convention. It becomes a space where oppositions can be worked out. The theme of ambivalence, which I contrasted with the existential allegory of the Italian films, corresponds to this process of exchange: We are presented not with an opposition between modernity and community or between isolated existence and nature but with a process of exchange, in which the notions of ‘subjectivity,’ ‘action,’ ‘autonomy’ are contaminated and problematised by tragedy.

Chapter 4 | *A Matter of Dignity*

“We must prefer real hell to an imaginary paradise” (Weil, *Gravity* 53).

4.1 | Introduction

A Matter of Dignity (1958) is concerned with a less explicit problem of tradition and community than the two other films. Whereas *A Girl in Black* and *Stella* directly depict a conflict between modern freedom and conventional norms, *A Matter of Dignity* presents such an ethical conflict within a class context that initially, at least, seems far removed from any conventional community norms. As the drama unfolds, however, the values of status, appearance and loyalty upheld by the protagonists enter into conflict with other, more traditional, ethical norms, rooted outside the film's modern upper-class setting.

The film tells the story of a beautiful young girl, Chloe (Ellie Lambeti), who is the only child of wealthy parents. The father, Kleon (Georgios Pappas), owns a small factory. The family lives in an opulent house in an affluent Athenian suburb, upholding a strict social etiquette of parties and card games. They have a living-in maid, Katerina (Eleni Zafeiriou), who attends to their every need. At the beginning of the film, we are shown that the social status of the family is threatened by imminent ruin as the family company is on the brink of bankruptcy. We are also shown that Chloe, who is at a marriable age, accepts the courtship of a rich suitor, Nikos Dritsas (Minas Christidis), whom she does not love. In the course of the film, this courtship leads to an engagement. The path towards the engagement is marked by a heavy effort, on the part of the family, to sustain the illusion, in society, of their own comfortable standing. In the course of this effort, the family shows itself increasingly ruthless and negligent in relation to their maid. Working without pay for months, Katerina finally loses her faith in the family when they fail to support her during the time following a grave accident happening to her small son, Vasilakis (Vasilis Kailas). Chloe is directly responsible for

this failure. As the boy hurts his head and loses his faculty of speech, Chloe, initially, helps Katerina, taking her to the mountain clinic to see her son. As she leaves them there, Chloe promises to send money but never does. In the grip of anger caused by this omission, Katerina, later, provokes a violent dispute with Chloe and her mother, Roxanni (Athena Michaelidou), during which the maid dies of heart failure.

Interspersed with this parallel story of engagement and illness, the film presents another potential courtship story; the film introduces Chloe to another, alternative suitor: the handsome, attentive but not wealthy Galanos (Michalis Nikolinakos). He is present when the accident of Vasilakis is announced, and he drives the two women to the mountain clinic in his car. Galanos pursues Chloe discreetly, yet, insistently. We are led to believe that she loves him in return, but we are also shown that he is not eligible because he is not wealthy, hence he cannot contribute to resolving the economic situation of Chloe's family. A third potential suitor appears at the margins of the story in the figure of Chloe's best friend, the young man Markos (Dimitris Papamichael). He proposes to her, at one point, apparently, in order to impede what he sees as a purely social marriage with Dritsas. But Chloe does not accept this proposal.

Following Katerina's death, Chloe renounces her intention to marry Dritsas and leaves the family. The last scene of the film shows her fulfilling a vow on the maid's behalf, bringing the boy to a religious gathering at Tinos, so that he can be cured of his muteness. In the last minutes of the film, we hear him speak.

Much of the film is, thus, taken up with Chloe's relationship to two, quite different, suitors, Dritsas and Galanos. This story of courtship is, from the start, interwoven with the story of the family's joint efforts to avoid financial ruin and the social humiliation this would bring in its wake. Therefore, the mood and thematic structure of the film arises not so much from the context of courtship as from a situation

of false pretenses, i.e., from the family's and Chloe's need to maintain appearances.

At the centre of this decline and courtship story, I find an ethical problem of agency and choice. As the film progresses, opposing claims on the heroine's loyalty come to challenge her own certainties about herself. In the course of the story, Chloe appears unable to take up a clear stance in relation to her suitors and in relation to her mother. This vagueness and indecision point to a situation of choice. She is young, about to marry; it is up to her to make her own decisions. Yet, she appears to be so embedded in the world and views of her family that she cannot, until the end, make her own choices. On the other hand, we see her straining throughout the film to remain true to her own feelings and to brush off her mother's curiosity regarding her courtship with Dritsas and their prospective engagement. In the context of this ambivalent relation with her mother, Chloe's obligation to help Katerina or her subsequent failure to meet that obligation appear as an oblique plot line, only gradually asserting itself and, finally, occupying centre stage. The obligation towards Katerina shines, retrospectively, a light on a wider problem of ethics in the film, a problem involving, on the one hand, freedom and, on the other hand, what should be considered right or not for Chloe to do.

Thematically, the film concerns, like the other two early films by Cacoyannis, a problematic notion of individual autonomous choice. We can say about Chloe that she is what Lukács calls a 'problematic individual,' struggling to match her own inner world with the world around her. Unlike the other two films, however, *A Matter of Dignity*, which, in many respects, follows the genre of melodrama and, hence, grants much space to the heroine's feelings and actions, does not explicitly feature representatives of tradition, that is, figures of normative authority, figures who could clearly spell out the limits of freedom for the protagonist. Instead, subjective choice is, here, rendered problematic in a more subtle way.

As I showed in Chapter 2 and in the analysis of *A Girl in Black*, dramatic perspective serves in Cacoyannis' films to provide a complex and ambivalent view on the heroine: It is a perspective that is neither entirely aligned with the protagonist but nor one that merely situates the heroine within an objective social world. The technique of perspective also supports the dramatic structure of these films, as they involve the heroine's shifting or evolving self-perception, as I showed in the evolution of the protagonist in *A Girl in Black*. Consequently, the drama brings about changes in the way the heroine places herself in relation to the world around her, changes that can be spelled out in terms of agency. In this film, the evolution of the plot and the perspective we are given on the heroine also directly influence the impression we have of her family, the way that the family poses or does not pose limits to her, the way that the heroine adheres or does not adhere to the family's worldview. On one level, the nature of the loyalty that we see Chloe expressing towards her mother appears (mostly) unselfconscious and immediate, and, yet, throughout the film, she appears torn and less than spontaneous in her behaviour towards her wealthy suitor, Dritsas.

Therefore, in terms of method, and in accordance with what I have said in Chapter 2, I do not approach this conflict, and the situation of choice that it gives rise to, in social terms. The film is not a social document to the effect that certain values, belonging to a specific class (i.e., saving the appearances), are in conflict with certain other values (the ethical norm of honouring promises, for instance). Rather, the focus of hermeneutic interrogation, in this chapter, concerns the protagonist's own evolving effort to respond to the world around her. In other words, rather than seeing the film as an objective representation of objective social values, I take it to be a dramatic presentation of a character who demonstrates a problematic relation to herself, to her environment, to her options of choice and, finally, to her reasons for acting as she does.

I, thus, again, return to the problem of reconstructing motivation discussed by Pippin.

In numerous instances of conversation between mother and daughter, we see how Chloe is ready to answer her mother's every question. Yet, we also see her, unsuccessfully, in a posture of mild defiance, trying to fend off her mother's prying gaze and invasive comments when they concern her suitor. Only in some scenes, involving her prospective engagement, is Chloe able to brush aside her mother's curiosity. The other loyalty that Chloe responds to, the loyalty towards her maid, is shown, throughout the film, to be more distant, less direct and more abstract. Yet, in the course of the film, this other loyalty will turn out to weigh more heavily.

Modern tragedy is, as I have shown, a genre that offers a particular dramatic articulation of subjectivity and external necessity – or what is perceived by the protagonist to represent external necessity. I traced this complex relationship between subjective reflection (and agency) and external necessity in both *Stella* and in *A Girl in Black*. The heroines' choice to embrace that necessity as such also features as a necessary feature of the dramas. It is because Stella takes her predicament to be insoluble that she walks to her death. It is because Marina, in *A Girl in Black*, is caught in what I called the 'fake tragic' that she can only act once she has changed her perception upon her circumstances.

A Matter of Dignity differs from *A Girl in Black* in that the element of the heroine's choice to take her situation in a certain way is emphasised so as to render the very notion of external pressure ambivalent. For Marina, in *A Girl in Black*, her lover from the mainland represents the Other of communal expectations. He brings a whiff of freedom to her secluded life. As I shall show, the manners and ways of Chloe's class and the expectations of her mother are so close to her that these limits barely appear to her as external. For this reason, they come to seem part of Chloe's own inner world. On the

other hand, as she is pushed through an irreversible and negative chain of events, she is, ultimately, compelled to confront the consequences of her past decisions and, to some extent, reflect upon them. My interpretation of the film will investigate the implications of this trajectory. It will focus, in particular, upon how Chloe sees herself and how she places herself in the world.

As a starting point for the analysis, we may say that Chloe, at the end of the film, appears to realise that, by indirectly causing Katerina's death, she has crossed an ethical limit. Hence, subsequent to that, she has to acknowledge the truth or the fact of what she has done and of what it may signify to others. At this point, as I shall show, a series of shifts occur in the dramatic perspective of the film, both with regard to Chloe's position of agency and with regard to how she situates herself in relation to her family. In the following analysis, I shall discuss the significance of these shifts and compare them to, what I called, the act of confrontation that takes place in the wake of the tragic event in *A Girl in Black*. This kind of dramatic structure, in which a radical change in the protagonist's self-perception occurs towards the end of the story, is, as I have already mentioned, crucial to the dramatic form of modern tragedy in Cacoyannis. Part of this structure is the idea of a dramatic outcome ambiguously related to the heroine's wishes. Unlike the rival dramatic structures of melodramatic or tragic resolution, this structure favours the theme and form of ambivalence and, hence, a problematisation of agency, which I have shown to be characteristic of modern tragedy.

Indeed, looking at the ending of the film, it can be said that the shift in the heroine's self-perception testifies to an ambivalence. I will take this up, in the course of my analysis, with regard to the kinds of pressure that we see the heroine struggling with. Since she is portrayed in the setting of a modern affluent class, the expectations she is faced with and which she, for most of the film, embraces concern the needs of this class

– maintaining social status, keeping up appearances. The class setting and the family's concern with its own status clearly put a definite pressure on Chloe. What is the nature of this pressure? How does it differ from the sort of normative authority that is associated with tradition and community in Cacoyannis' other films and which I, here, refer to as 'the ethical'? At the end of the film, when Chloe fulfils the vow of Katerina in her place, she appears to respond to an ethical norm rooted outside herself and, significantly, also outside of her family. What is the significance of this act and of this allegiance to a traditional ethical norm? The hermeneutic interrogation of the film, primarily, concerns these two questions of agency and obligation, i.e., the nature of family pressure and the significance of obeying a different kind of norm. The normative questions of pressure and agency belong, directly, within the sphere of dramatic form. As I shall show, for much of the film, Chloe appears caught between her suitors, caught in an ambivalent loyalty to her mother, unable to take decisive action. Now, this apparent indecision does not, like the burdens of guilt weighing on the heroine in *A Girl in Black*, refer to an ethical community. Nevertheless, it takes on or appears to take on the trappings of fate within the drama. Yet, we shall have to see whether this is thematically justified, since fate implies some sort of agency outside of personal intention and affirmed by the ethics of an archaic community. The setting of the film, as I have mentioned, is a modern Athenian, upper-class family – far removed from such a community. Still, Chloe's choice, in the end, to embrace an ethical norm that is foreign to the family, fulfilling the maid's religious vow, does seem to fall upon her with a weight that is not that of her own desire or will. In the analysis, I will discuss the final moment of choice and the appearance of "fate" in the film, invoking the notions discussed, throughout this thesis, of forced choice and a self-limiting subject.

The dramatic form of modern tragedy takes shape, in this film, through the

presentation of, as I mentioned, a problematic individual in Lukács' terminology, struggling to define her agency. In order to contextualise this dramatic form, I shall situate the film both in relation to the genre of melodrama and in relation to a film that can be defined as tragic: Satyajit Ray's film, from 1958, *The Music Room (Jalsaghar)*. As I said in Chapter 2, the comparison of modern tragedy to melodrama, on the one hand, concerns perspective and, on the other hand, the concept of a response to modernity (as discussed by Peter Brooks). In *A Matter of Dignity*, modernity, understood as a situation of individual autonomy, moral freedom and ethical relativism, dominates the film until the last part. This individualism is supported by several melodramatic features of style and plot construction. However, the dramatic perspective of the film as a whole questions both. I argue that it questions the modern morality of individual autonomy, and it questions the moral implications of melodramatic devices, that is, the implication of reversibility and, hence, relativism characteristic of fictional worlds in which no event that is external to the protagonist's desires can effectively, and once and for all, set limits to those desires.

The comparison that I make between *A Matter of Dignity* and *The Music Room* is more complex than the comparisons with Varda, Rossellini and Antonioni in the previous chapters. This is because Ray, as an *auteur* filmmaker treating themes of Indian history, society and aesthetic tradition while borrowing from European cinema, appears closer to Cacoyannis than Varda, Rossellini or Antonioni. The comparisons in the other chapters unambiguously served the purpose of contrast and clarification. Stella's mode of being amongst others stands out sharply in contrast with the isolation of Cléo. The exchange and ambivalence in *A Girl in Black* stands out clearly in contrast to the exotic and existential allegory of the archaic islands of Rossellini and Antonioni. Here, the comparison is not, thus, limited to a foil. The parallels between *A Matter of*

Dignity and *The Music Room* run very deep, as they concern the nature of dramatic genre in relation both to agency and to features of style that can be called melodramatic.

I treat *The Music Room* as a tragic film. This allows me to discuss how *A Matter of Dignity* is a modern tragedy, that is, to discuss what is tragic in modern tragedy and, also, to show what is modern tragedy as a distinct type of drama. In the Theory Chapter, I stated that the term ‘modern tragedy’ is a tool of interpretation in that it is the ethical dramatic context for the questions raised by the heroines in these films, but, as I come to confront *A Matter of Dignity* directly with the dramatic form and the ethical problems of melodrama, I assume modern tragedy to be a distinct dramatic form geared towards presenting a particular kind of ethical conflict and a particular kind of ambivalence. I also discuss the use of melodramatic devices, particularly, of expressive symbolism in *The Music Room*. A comparison with the use of melodramatic devices in *A Matter of Dignity* will serve to highlight the precise points at which this film departs from the conventions of melodrama. As I shall show, the Indian film conforms very clearly, in its dramatic construction, its use of setting (and, even, in its stylistic borrowings from melodrama) to the aesthetic norms of tragedy. Ray’s film is tragic in its starkly drawn depiction of an inevitable process of decline. It is tragic, further, in its implication, which is finely expressed throughout the film, in that the social demise of the main character exemplifies the disappearance of an entire social world and historical epoch, thus, projecting the personal drama of an individual onto the grander scale of human history.

A Matter of Dignity, which is less generically pure, does not present a sharp tragic conflict in the way of the Indian film. The term ‘modern tragedy,’ here, refers to a drama of ambiguity and indecision, in which the very notion and possibility of choice is constantly put into question. Unlike the Ray film, however, the notion of choice is still

portrayed, during the first parts of the film, as something hypothetically available to the heroine. Modern tragedy is, here, the drama of a character that only asserts herself negatively by falling back upon tradition and letting traditional values fill a void that is left by its incapacity to choose. This also means that the choice that is made, at the end of the story, is discontinuous in relation to the character's past. This discontinuity is also part of the hermeneutic problem that the film poses.

My analysis of genre will be concerned with these two questions in conjunction: What is the nature of choice in the drama of *A Matter of Dignity*? How does the film differ from melodrama? I will begin with a discussion of tragedy and melodramatic devices in *The Music Room*.

4.2 | Genre and Melodrama in *The Music Room*

Satyajit Ray's masterpiece, *The Music Room*, is one of the few examples of pure tragedy⁶⁴ in film. It tells the profoundly sad story of the inability of a Bengali feudal aristocrat, Biswambhar Roy (Chhabi Biswas), to hang on to his sense of relevance in a modern world that has passed him by. The film depicts the disintegration of the landowner's family, the drowning of his wife and, especially, his son – the quintessential symbol of his prosperity – as well as his own eventual death.

Death, in this case, is not entirely personal. It is not, as in melodrama, the endpoint of a purely subjective emotional drama. Death is, here, predicated on a social group. The death of Roy's son spells the end of his family line. His own death is the final extinction of his family and, also, of its feudal estate. Death is, thus, objective, belonging to a social world. At the same time, the movement towards extinction that the story depicts is a process of decline that is both motivated by external historical forces – modernisation – and showed to be an internal, psychological process of decline. This process is, within the protagonist's perspective, an inescapable predicament that arises from what he, himself, refers to as “the blood that runs” in his veins. Rooted, as he sees it, in his bloodline and his aristocratic lineage, in the mere fact of who he is, his plight appears to him and to us to be an inescapable malady, but one that, at the same time, he cannot help reinforcing through his own reckless actions. We also see his course

⁶⁴ Darius Cooper tries to evoke Roy's “tragic condition” (70) by presenting a dramatic analysis of Ray's film through the Indian notion of ‘*karuna*’ or ‘sorrow.’ But whilst his own approach to drama analysis chiefly focuses on performance and on purely aesthetic concerns, my own approach to drama is ethical in a Hegelian sense. Cooper's analysis seeks to tie Ray with the Indian dramatic traditions, whilst my own interest, for example, in performance in *Stella*, whilst not bypassing its “Greekness” or, even, undermining other cultural/social readings, seeks to address the ethical questions facing the heroine. Ray's films have been extensively linked to a discourse on social modernity, especially his films *Charulata* (1964) and *Mahanagar* (1963), see Cooper's *The Cinema of Satyajit Ray: Between Tradition and Modernity*. A lot has also been written about *The Music Room* in terms of other aesthetic terms, such as ‘attraction,’ regarding Ray's unique use of performance and music, see Keya Ganguly's *Cinema, Emergence, and the Films of Satyajit Ray*.

towards ruin sustained and, indeed, amplified by the course of history as it unfolds around him, as he participates in a process of momentous social change.

Stepping aside from this plot and thinking about the film in terms of genre, I wish to note this strict correlation between the predicament and historical fate of an individual and the world around him. This correlation will be the focus of my analysis, as it constitutes, I will argue, the tragic dramatic form of this film: In such a correlation, there is no room for sudden reversals. Individual choices and feelings confirm a tragic course of events that, only in part, concerns an individual, since it is embedded in the movement of History. Against this background, I would also like to stress, at the outset, how this version of filmic tragedy differs from the premises of melodrama that I discussed in Chapter 2, with reference to Peter Brooks. The grand vision of a fatality that encompasses both the self and society is diametrically opposed to a melodramatic form, in which the purpose of the drama is to exhibit and to enlarge personal feelings and moral dilemmas.

Within the context of dramatic form, Peter Brooks refers to modernisation as an “epistemological shift” and as a “‘fall’ from tragedy” (15). In his account, this fall shapes his conception of melodrama as “a response to the loss of the tragic vision” (15). The slightly odd term ‘epistemological’ signifies, in the terminology of Brooks, an invalidation of the established literary forms, tragedy and comedy and, further, a transformation taking place within the society that these forms refer to. Tragedy is perceived, by Brooks, as the by-product of a world still pervaded by traditional imperatives of truth and ethics. Melodrama is seen as taking place within or as a response to a world where such imperatives have been thrown into question, while remaining, in their very absence, a matter of constant, daily concern. Melodrama is, in this sense, both a dramatic form and a cultural stance or, even, a strategy of

compensation, seeking, as it were, to make amends for the loss of stable ethical norms and of the tragic form that they make possible. To say that this shift is epistemological underlines its pervasive effect on the whole dramatic world depicted in melodrama, implying an alteration of moral preconceptions, including the perception that the characters have of their own predicament and opportunities. As I shall show, this change in perception also involves the meaning of gestures in melodrama.

In Chapter 3, on *A Girl in Black*, I showed that modern tragedy consists in the transformation of a purely tragic conflict through the ambivalent presence of obsolete ethical norms and the dynamic relationship between these older norms and modern values of subjectivity and freedom. In *The Music Room*, tragedy arises from the impossibility of such a dialectic or negotiation between old and modern values. The film depicts both the eclipse of old, substantial ethical imperatives and the impossibility for such imperatives to pass into the modern age. In metaphorical terms, whereas modern tragedy is a dialogue, pure tragedy is but a monologue.

In *The Music Room*, we begin at a point of crisis: As Brooks writes referring to melodrama: “In distinction to tragedy, we do not begin at the point of crisis” (29). The aging nobleman, Roy, is introduced at the moment when his demise is about to unfold. We do not get a preliminary snap-shot of harmony or a state of grace from which he, subsequently, falls. Rather, the film, in its exposition of his family situation, Roy’s lavish lifestyle and refined taste, introduces, from the start, a note of decline. Thus, aside from a series of flashbacks, during which the seeds of his destruction are already present, there always seems to loom, to hover over his world, a threat to his situation that casts his very survival into question and obscures the relevance and purposefulness of his identity. In all his actions, through an ongoing assertion of his style of life and his place in the old social hierarchy, he seeks both to demonstrate before others the

presence and dignity of his world and to delay his own demise. Roy fights to assert his values and his world against the tide of change, and he is only able to stem the tide for a brief duration. There is no prospect, in this drama, of a final redemption or reconciliation or triumph against time.

However, in spite of the starkly tragic and non-melodramatic premise of its plot, the film's immediate plunge into a state of crisis is achieved and signaled through recourse to, what I perceive as, the employment of melodramatic devices: A superficial symbolism, on the level of style and imagery, that comments on and anticipates the film's underlying tragic drama. We witness a bug drowning in Roy's glass, a spider crawling on his portrait, a violent storm approaching his, once, grand mansion. The disintegration of the house becomes Roy's eventual demise. This symbolism works as omens, as signifiers for the tragic end that is to meet the landed aristocracy and, with it, Roy himself.

The film's symbolism includes gesture: for example, Roy's gesture of extending his hand to a dancer, Krishna Bai (Roshan Kumari), in order to award her for her skilled performance and thereby demonstrate his own wealth before the eyes of his guests and, according to the tradition, claim his right as a host "to pay first." This gesture is so charged with meaning that it achieves the fixity and transparency of a symbol. The scene takes on a melodramatic quality of dramatization, at this point. It, therefore, also, comes to express, along with the protagonist's tragic decline, a sense of symbolic excess and of compensating for a lack (here, of actual social status) – both characteristic of melodramatic dramatization (6) according to Brooks. Following his argument, this structure of dramatization involves a certain complexity of meaning and reference in comparison with other established genres, such as tragedy and classical comedy. In these old genres, gestures are supposed to be directly correlated with a norm; their

meaning is clear, in so far as the norm they express is not in doubt. The modern genre of comedy of manners, on the other hand, does not involve norms of this absolute kind, but gestures, there, invoke social rules, which, nevertheless, form a stable code of meaning.

In melodrama, by contrast, gestures are signs pointing beyond any ethical or social universe of norms, towards a substratum of lost values, the moral occult (see Chapter 2). In melodrama, gestures are neither merely social markers of conduct nor do they carry a universal meaning. Instead, they point to and reveal a moral substratum, a substructure of moral choice in an age bereft of absolute moral authority. In the tragic mode, on the other hand, moral authority is asserted objectively, without reference to individual moral choice: Here, the narrative point of view, in the film, is entirely associated with Roy's plight. One can even say that his rival and newly-rich neighbour, Ganguly (Gangapada Basu), represents, allegorically, the sort of modern historical compromise theorised by Brooks: Ganguly is, thus, a melodramatic figure in a tragic setting, contrasting to Roy's grandly ceremonial and self-consuming gesture a new type of modern gesture, merely imitating its ancient model. The film, thus, dramatizes gesture as the limit between these two worlds, the feudal world of formal rules and the new world of money and social mobility. At the same time, Roy's gesture of asserting his right to reward the dancer appears, within the arc of the plot, as genuinely tragic: The gesture constitutes a climactic moment in the dramatic conflict between the two men, and it is given weight by invoking the whole social world of feudal norms that is about to eclipse.

In Ray's film, and, hence, according to the tragic mode, moments of isolated dramatization are, thus, not used to "spice-up" everyday moral reality, as we may say is normally the case in melodrama. Dramatization is, here, the employment of isolated devices of melodramatic expressiveness, such as gesture and symbolism, within an

otherwise tragic drama. The stakes of the drama and the social, historical and ethical world that inform the drama are posited by the film as an objective reality existing independently of the dramatic conflict and subsisting beyond what happens to its protagonists. Hence, ethical reality is presented, in the film, objectively and already fully invested with meaning. The plight of Roy is, in this sense, absolutely real. In *The Music Room*, the ethical stakes of the drama are fully present and explicit.

By contrast, in melodrama, as theorised by Brooks, quotidian actions acquire significance, and the stakes of those actions become evident only through a process of aesthetic transformation. Brooks writes that, in melodrama “the world of reference – ‘real life’ – . . . live(s) up to the expectations of the moral imagination” only “if properly considered” (54). This, in essence, means “that the ordinary and humble and quotidian will reveal itself full of excitement, suspense and peripety” (54) only as part of what we may call an aesthetic venture. The aesthetic venture is a transformative achievement on the part of melodramatic works. It is embedded in and supported by a technique of heightened expressivity. Thus, the moral imagination that lends significance to quotidian action is sustained by a specific style, which Brooks calls “expressionist” (56) and which the aforementioned symbolism and language of gesture are part of. Melodrama is, thus, according to Brooks, “an expressionist form” (56), meaning that its drama and style infuse “the banal and the ordinary with the excitement of grandiose conflict” (40). This is an aesthetic of heightened significance, which implies that “reality properly represented will never fail to live up to our own phantasmatic demands upon it,” and “that the world can be equal to our most feverish expectations about it” (40). In melodrama, the drama, along with eclipsed ethical forces, are projected through this aesthetic venture. Melodrama, thus, acquires dramatic force only stylistically, through expressionism and dramatization, in a process whereby “man

becomes his own maker: he creates himself ‘a second time’” (114). Brooks writes, in a similar vein, that man, in melodrama, “is the dramatist of his own existence,” and, most importantly, that “he lives beyond the quotidian . . . overcoming the repressions of the ordinary” by living in a “constantly heightened drama,” which is “beyond his means” (114). Drama is described, here, as inhabiting a realm beyond man’s means because, thematically, it is created out of ordinary reality, yet it is not confined within the prose of everyday confusion and banality. By contrast, tragedy already contains, in the ethical reality it refers to, the sufficient stakes and credentials that high drama is made of.

In *The Music Room*, the (superficial) melodramatic devices of the film consist, aside from symbolism, first, in Roy’s seclusion within his mansion. Roy’s moods and frame of mind become magnified in this closed space. Even though Roy is repeatedly invited to grace the neighbour’s house with his presence, he refuses to attend. The mansion, then, becomes the perfect exaggerated setting for the film’s melodramatic employment of symbolism and gesture.

The violent and causeless drowning of Roy’s family could also be seen as a melodramatic event, due to its suddenness and lack of motivation, but it is, essentially, a metonymy, a microcosm for the tragic state of the protagonist, since Roy, as the film progresses, is gradually robbed of his entire world. The event of his family’s death is an ingenious plot development that both isolates and entraps Roy in his mansion, thus, diverting our attention from external social reality. The melodramatic event is, here, used to concentrate and bring into focus the simple and tragic predicament of the protagonist; a condition that is not melodramatic in that it is not merely grounded in his own feelings and motivations but directly refers to a reality that is larger than him.

Roy’s plight is not exactly one played out in front of the eyes of society, but it is pitted against Ganguly, the character who, instead, represents the whole modern world.

The house is not just a house but stands for Roy, his generation and his aristocratic class. Roy's destruction is irreversible and relentless, although it is also expressed in a subjective and expressive mode. On the other hand, the drama of the film can be contrasted, too, with that of modern tragedy. The protagonist refuses to enter a space of negotiation with his surroundings, for example with Ganguly, the representative of change in the film. Roy's subjectivity remains unchanged; if anything, his subjectivity is his epoch, the spirit of that age, the old world he stands for and belongs to. Modern tragedy entails, on the other hand, a much less clear-cut opposition between modernity and tradition and, hence, a problematic, not fixed, position of subjective agency.

4.3 | Tragedy and *The Music Room*

The tragic in *The Music Room* is always pitted against the modern. The representative of an almost eclipsed world, Roy, is constantly compared to and contrasted with Ganguly, the representative of new money. In the film, this opposition runs through the entire story and is communicated at various key points of the narrative. The film begins with a request: Ganguly wishes to use some of Roy's land to develop his business. Roy is clear and firm about drawing up very strict rules for the use of his land, since he is aware that this is more than a simple request. The new man needs Roy's approval and, therefore, defers to him, but the mere fact of making his request means that times are changing: An older world gives way to progress. The opposition continues with Ganguly inviting Roy to attend parties at his house so as to honour him and transfer some of Roy's prestige to him. These invitations are the backbone of the film's drama. Each time, Roy finds a way of declining the invitations and, thus, maintains his distance and social superiority.

The opposition between these two characters and the values they each represent is also expressed in various simple visual emblems that surround and spell out what is at stake in their rivalry: the beautiful white horse owned by Roy's son and the elephant that the household uses instead of a truck to perform daily tasks. The elephant is an emblem of Roy's status,⁶⁵ as it takes a lot of upkeep. He is fed and watered; he comes with elaborate jewels and garments. Roy often commands to have the elephant brought out, so he can make house visits whenever he wishes to. The elephant is a counterpoint to Ganguly's truck, which has its own company logo written upon it. A concrete

⁶⁵ Cooper, referring to the names of Roy's elephant and horse, 'Storm' and 'Wealth,' argues that "both animals function as empty symbols of a glorious past that has ceased to have any value or meaning for the grieving man" (71).

manifestation of Ganguly's industriousness is his specialised and agricultural machinery. Roy shows but contempt for this modern technology, specifically the truck that drives by his house leaving a huge cloud of smoke behind it. Much to Roy's dismay, Ganguly's machinery can be heard through the windows of Roy's mansion.

The opposition is further mirrored within Roy's own world and in the depiction of his only son. Instead of being groomed to take up responsibility for the running of the estate, the boy is tutored in what are, essentially, Roy's own favourite pastimes: lute playing and singing. This is, of course, an education proper to aristocrats, but, as the plot progresses, we realise that Roy spoils his son beyond the requirements of his class and, even, beyond his economic means and beyond what is rational. This excess is loosely pointed out by both Roy's wife and by Roy's strict and moody servant, whom we see constantly glaring at Roy as in disapproval of his actions (fig. 45).



Figure 45: The joyful and the stern

Modernity does not enter Roy's house by causing a change in what he does or believes but by spurring him on to indulge even more in his usual pastimes, his aristocratic and wasteful ways. When Roy loses his son in the storm, one can draw a

parallel to Roy's loss of his land due to flooding. These losses are more than isolated facts. They come to represent Roy's loss of his entire world. Similarly, these oppositions are not drawn merely between people but serve to separate two historical epochs from each other. What is tragic, in the unfolding of this story, is the inflexibility and predictability of the narrative universe to which each character belongs, implying, thus, their inability to move beyond their allotted role in the plot: on the side of Roy, his effort to change the course of events and, on the side of his neighbour, his steady climbing of the social ladder. Roy's role, particularly, is tragic because his effort is executed with a certain fatal self-consciousness. In all that he does, Roy merely goes through the necessary motions, but, at no point, do we believe that any tangible outcome could spring from his actions. Roy mostly enjoys defying his rival. In a rather aristocratic fashion, he does it for the sake of doing it. In other words, even in his undoing, he is proud and generous. The way that Ganguly engages steadily in the pursuit of his social advance fits perfectly the way that he, never, in his direct dealings with Roy, signals to him directly any lack of respect. His behaviour, on these occasions, appears as an example of modesty, yet his proposals are increasingly aggressive. In essence, Ganguly does not require Roy's assent because, in the long term, he knows that he will, eventually, take his place in the social hierarchy. His politeness, then, is a matter of patience. It does not reflect Ganguly's endorsement of the hierarchical relationship that Roy seeks to uphold. This attitude of patience is put into perspective by his increasingly brazen manner with Roy's servant. Thus, behind Roy's back, Ganguly shows his true feelings: his contempt for Roy's decaying house and seclusion from the outside world, as well as the pride he takes in his own achievements. Ganguly does not possess the sophistication or cultural values that would have put him in a position to admire Roy and the tradition he upholds beyond their situation of rivalry. Rather, his

behaviour suggests that he believes, somehow, to have to emulate Roy. This is the reason why Ganguly strives to organise musical events similar to those of Roy and to celebrate his son's initiation in the same extravagant manner. Roy is a *connoisseur* and master of appreciation; Ganguly is, by contrast, an emblem of aspiration. Here, we come close to Brooks' notion of an 'epistemological shift' but within a tragic universe: Fundamentally different conceptions of the world are implied in all the utterances and actions of these two characters, and these differences are taken to embody a historical transformation of society.

The unbridgeable social (and cultural) difference between them shows itself most clearly during the film's final music performance. Ganguly enters Roy's music room with a critical pose, examining the decoration of the house and the level of service, at one point exclaiming, "Is there anyone to fan us?" He appears surprised by the ability of Roy to organise the event. Simultaneously, he complains that "the atmosphere is strange." Whereas the rest of the guests are humble and seem to accommodate themselves with ease to the atmosphere of the music room, quietly asking Ganguly to sit down, he refuses and appears uneasy, fidgeting, twisting his head in all directions. In his nervousness, he carelessly drops some of his coins on the carpet, clearly a juxtaposition to a cross-cut of Roy seen wistfully removing a sachet of his last money from his safe in order to pay the dancer. Whereas Ganguly can easily afford to lose part of his money, for Roy this expenditure is beyond his means but, to him, absolutely necessary. When Roy, at last, enters the room, whilst the rest of the guests bow and make way for him to pass, Ganguly offers him a seat as if it were his own house. Ganguly quickly addresses Roy by asking him familiarly how he is and referring to him as "grandpa." To show Ganguly that he behaves without tact, Roy refuses to answer him and, with a shake of his hand, orders him to be silent.

The performance commences with Ganguly not seeming able to concentrate or to appreciate the skill of the dancer, let alone the quality of the music, while Roy is completely absorbed by both. Ganguly looks around to find out how the others perceive the performance and, hence, know how to act. As soon as the dancer has finished, Ganguly grabs for his money and shouts, “Hurray for the dancer!” Roy, then, interrupts him by blocking his hand with his walking stick. For a moment, neither of the two men speak, but, in the ugly stare of Roy, we clearly see Roy’s intention. He, then, says, “The host reserves the right to the first gift.” In the background, the faces of all the other guests seem to approve of his gesture and share his sense of shock at Ganguly’s behaviour, while the latter is (momentarily) humiliated.

The entirety of the performance and, in the end, the gesture of Roy paying the dancer carry a significance beyond their place in the plot. As I mentioned in the previous section, gesture is the symbol of a world that manifests itself in rules, which clearly dictate manners and ways of conduct; these rules are norms that are known and shared by all the members of the social group. These rules are, in turn, dependent upon a world of clearly defined ethical commands. This is the world that Ganguly cannot fully enter. While Roy knows how to go through the liturgy of paying the dancer, ceremonially awarding her in front of his guests with an entire sachet of coins (figs. 46 & 47), Ganguly artlessly extends his hand behind his back, reaching for coins, which he means to throw at her as if she were in the street, as if he, himself, doesn’t appreciate the value of his own gift (fig. 48).



Figure 46: Highlighted



Figure 47: Difference



Figure 48: Out of place

What is tragic, then, in *The Music Room*, is not only the eclipse of an old world, Roy's, by a newer one, Ganguly's, and that Roy's plight is inevitable and his demise final, but the way in which the style and ways of this old world are minutely and despairingly described in all of their glory. An example of the precise characterisation of this entire world is the patronage of the performances by people such as Roy, as well as the rendering of the dancer's entire performance, in the film, in all its subtlety and delicacy. The film dwells, for much longer than is usual in narrative film, on the dance and the music; the film follows Roy in his complete immersion in the spectacle and invites the viewer to do the same – and this quality of immersion is essentially what “makes” the film. The dancer herself is a creature that defies categorisation; she is both sensuous and not quite of this world. In many of her movements, she exudes cheekiness, playing with her eyes but only to invite the men into a state of trance that resembles something religious. She is simultaneously hinting at the idea of seduction and remaining unreachable (figs. 49 & 50). This complexity is an accomplishment that can only take place, the film suggests, within such an old and aristocratic world.



Figure 49: Cheeky



Figure 50: Mesmerising

The descriptive mode of analysis that I have adopted here seeks to do justice to the clarity of vision in the film; this is a vision that expresses itself in the perfect coherence of all its elements. It is, finally, this coherence and this simplicity that seals the tragic nature of *The Music Room*.

4.4 | Characterisation, Confrontation in *A Matter of Dignity*

Throughout this thesis, we come to see that Cacoyannis employs a number of devices to construct a dramatic perspective corresponding to the films' presentation of heroines, which, as I have mentioned, can be characterised as problematic, that is, neither they nor we are able to have an immediate understanding of their motives. In *The Music Room*, point of view is aligned throughout with the character of Roy. Further, the tight structure of the film, defined by the opposition between the two protagonists, implies both a clarity and an objectivity of dramatic perspective. Such dramatic clarity is alien both to the dramatic use of perspective in Cacoyannis and to the genre of modern tragedy. Character relations and character motivation, in these films, are complex and ambivalent, as I have shown. There, the problem of agency, at the centre of the drama, is embedded in the complex relation that the protagonist has to her environment and to other characters, as she only gradually comes to act in her own name, and, when she does, she is never entirely aloof from that environment. It's now time to trace Chloe's said relations, in *A Matter of Dignity*, to those characters that surround her, in order to analyse how her agency, just as Marina's agency, takes shape in response to a tragic event within the plot (here, the death of the maid).

For much of the film, Chloe seems hesitant and passive. She courts Dritsas but has second thoughts. She accepts the advances of another man, Galanos but does not, in spite of her declared feelings (Chloe allows these feelings to surface as the film progresses), run off with him. At the background of this hesitation, we are repeatedly reminded of the overbearing figure of Chloe's mother. Yet, as I argued in the Introduction to this chapter, there is nothing straightforward about pressure, authority or class identity in this film. Chloe grows up in the context of very precise expectations

relating directly to class identity: She must make a good marriage to sustain or, even, save the family, but this sort of ever-present pressure is not ethical in the sense of tradition or conventional normative authority, which exists in *Stella* and *A Girl in Black*.

The analysis that I propose focuses, instead, on the problem of imagination and fantasy. An opposition between truth and lies or between sincerity and hypocrisy is recurrent, throughout the film, in the plot, as well as in the dialogue. Yet, truth is not only opposed to lies but also to the dreamy secluded world in which we see Chloe enveloped, that is, her family home. As I will try to show, the film depicts this family world as a continuum, within Chloe's mind, of the pressures exercised by her mother and her own feelings, dreams and aspirations: Nothing that would be purely external, i.e., outside the family, comes to challenge this continuum until the tragic event of the maid's death. The events surrounding Katerina take place against this background of her dreamy family seclusion.

In *A Matter of Dignity*, Chloe is courted by two very different men: the handsome and mysterious Galanos and the wealthy, mature Dritsas. Her best friend, Markos, seems more than protective of Chloe and follows her love life very attentively. Well into the plot, Chloe meets the man who captures her heart, Galanos, who flirts with her aggressively. He is dashing but not wealthy. Prior to the arrival of this suitor, she appears at ease with the idea of courting Dritsas, and she does so, we are lead to believe, for the sake of his money and in order to please her mother, rather than because she is genuinely charmed by him. From the start, we also see Chloe having doubts about her relationship with Dritsas. At the same time, she seems to take pride in her ability to capture his heart so easily and to become the object of his fascination. Hence, the night of her first outing with him, she wears a beautiful gown and basks in her own beauty. Just before she leaves the house, she asks her mother confidently how she looks. In fact,

in a still for the DVD release of the film, Chloe looks arrogantly at herself in the mirror, obviously proud of her good looks. Chloe is aware of the influence she has on men; her mother knows this, too. This is why the mother enters Chloe's room, at the night of her outing, and tries to approach her in order to persuade her to court Dritsas. (The mother even calculatedly proceeds to turn off the music in Chloe's room, so that the latter can pay better attention to her.) Still, Chloe's courtship with Dritsas appears, at first, with a tone of lightness, evoking the idea of a game. In the absence of any strong erotic infatuation for another man, Chloe does not actually sacrifice anything in order to be with him. I will analyse her motivation and indecision in detail below.

As we learn gradually through the plot, Dritsas is one of the men who had hoped to capture Chloe's heart in the past. Chloe herself paid no attention to him. Judging from her beauty and her confident manner, both in her family and with her wealthy friends, we can only guess that she had no reason to fear a lack of potential suitors. However, with the financial situation of her family in a ruinous state and succumbing to pressures from her mother, Chloe comes to re-evaluate the courtship of this man who could well save the family from scandal. Her acceptance of his courtship is, therefore, also tainted with an underlying sting of corruption and of Chloe taking advantage of him without him knowing. Gradually, however, while Dritsas is blissfully happy that his luck has changed, Chloe is struck by guilty conscience. In one of her last outings with Dritsas, in a scene in an outside restaurant, Chloe is seen laughing in a drunken fury at Dritsas' joke that she is penniless, opening her purse to reveal its empty contents. She asks Dritsas if he would love her if she were poor, and, then, burns away his money for a joke, suddenly murmuring to herself another thought weighing her guilty conscience: She has forgotten a promise made to her beloved maid, Katerina (fig. 51). At this point, she seems concerned not only with her hypocrisy directed towards the fooling of Dritsas

but at the human cost incurred by her family's love for money. This guilty conscience is, as I mentioned previously, more accentuated after Chloe accepts the attention of Galanos. In the film, this parallel story of her falling in love with Galanos serves as a point of comparison for her feigned feelings towards Dritsas.



Figure 51: Her true self

Galanos is a man with whom she seems ready to fall in love. In the presentation of the two courtships, Galanos is introduced quite early, during her first evening with Dritsas, but, as I mentioned, it is only quite late in the film that Chloe begins to reciprocate his feelings openly. In the plot, Galanos appears unexpectedly, barely connected to the other characters, and he appears almost simultaneously with Dritsas. He immediately declares his feelings for Chloe to her face. She mocks him and appears to brush his advances aside, but she does not seem indifferent. Then, like Stella, she engages in a sort of dancing trance, barefoot, as if wanting to dispel her feelings or give in to some sort of emotional outburst (fig. 52).



Figure 52: Before his eyes

Despite Chloe's own plans for her future and her life, the film presents her, in the figure of Galanos, with a different life option. To delude herself after having been presented with this different possible love, to persuade herself to marry Dritsas, become for Chloe, gradually, more difficult, as her feelings for Galanos become more manifest. At the same time, the love between Chloe and Galanos, which seems to hit them both as a passion, is also shown as unpromising in the context of Chloe's life: Such a love would lie outside Chloe's own horizon of control. In the abrupt way she talks to him, during their first meeting, it becomes obvious that Chloe is threatened by the different ideas of life that Galanos introduces and seems to embody. To run off with Galanos would mean, for Chloe, to betray her loyalty to her mother, give up her style of life. Furthermore, although this is expressed only indirectly but can be inferred from the depictions of Chloe in her family, a relationship with the serious and sincere Galanos would imply for her the need to step outside of her realm of fantasy and private emotions. Her love for Galanos appears, I might say, "real" (as opposed to imaginary), because it would require for Chloe to make herself exit this dreamy and familiar life context, the limited horizon provided by her family and her life there. As a symbolic and

accompanying act, such a love would entail that she cut ties with her entire social class and with her past.

Markos, Chloe's friend, can, to some extent, see through Chloe's scheming plans regarding Dritsas. In a scene in a café, where he has arranged to meet her, he attempts to stop her from proceeding with the marriage. In order to go on with the wedding, then, Chloe has to also pretend to her best friend that she, actually and genuinely, is in love with Dritsas. Right next to them, we see a mirror, baring whiteness to Chloe's lies (fig. 53). Even her friendship with Markos appears, thus, as a superficial relation, a feature of the life she leads at home and the class status it implies. In the scene of the café, where Markos meets Chloe to talk openly about her life, she shamefully lies to his face. This vicious fight between appearance and honesty, which Chloe has to win, constitutes the core of the film. This fight in her is more significant, as I shall show, than the events taking place between Chloe's different lovers or the outcome of the story.



Figure 53: Invisible judge

At the end of the film, Chloe does not embrace her love for Galanos and run away with him, even when her own ties to her family have been broken. Her ethical

problem, throughout the film, arises from hypocrisy and her seclusion within her family. For part of the film, Galanos appears as a moral antidote to her family and its hypocrisy. He, thus, represents a certain outside perspective. However, later, subsequent to Katerina's death, the "outside" of her family and contrast to her mother will be represented by the maid, by her death and by what this death entails.

In plot terms, the character of Galanos, thus, has the function of presenting Chloe with a first alternative to her life and to introduce a first external perspective upon herself. This perspective is opposed, we may say, to her own imaginary world. We may say, even, that the very idea of reality, which Galanos represents in the plot, is accompanied with an idea of truth. Towards the end of the film, when Galanos and Chloe dance for the last time, she mutters, "What has happened to me today, and I speak the truth?" At certain points throughout the film, the characters' voices change from social convention to that of an honest and direct exchange between lovers. It is evident that Chloe admits Galanos to the reality of the events in her life to a greater degree than she admits Dritsas or even Markos, her friend. In the scene on Dritsas' yacht, she has to pretend that his lavish gift of jewellery – an entire set – does not really impress her. She thanks him dryly and almost without paying attention to the gift. Later, she departs with Galanos and asks him to evaluate certain pieces of furniture that she needs to auction off. Even though, at this point, she does not reveal much to him in what she explicitly says, it becomes clear from this action that they share a certain understanding. Chloe allows Galanos to see the dire situation of her family. Markos' efforts, on the other hand, to penetrate the veil of Chloe's appearance and make her tell him the truth fail completely. At the end of their café meeting, Markos has a disappointed look, as if he had expected more from their friendship than Chloe's performance of dishonesty.

In close proximity to Chloe, the family maid is always present. From the

beginning of the film, Katerina is portrayed as a second mother to Chloe. She is also aware of – and complicit in – the family's complete state of affairs, their financial ruin and their effort to keep up their status in the eyes of the world. For example, during the film's party scene, she warns Chloe about the family's inability to purchase on credit more goods from the local shop. She is also seen passionately defending the family's character and their inability to pay the store's owner. Later, and in front of Galanos, she pretends to have forgotten to buy the costly bottle of whiskey needed to serve the customary drinks. She knows that the family can no longer afford this luxury item, but she wishes to give a different impression to Chloe's guests.

Above all, the maid seems worried about Chloe's emotional well-being, asking her if she is pressured by the family to marry Dritsas and whether she is happy with him. She seems to take pride in Chloe as if she were her own daughter and advises her not to marry out of need, adding that Chloe has all the skills needed to find a husband she loves. Katerina's love and care, both for Chloe and for the entire family, give weight to the latter's failure to sustain her when her son falls ill from the accident. At this point in the film, Katerina relies on Chloe's help, and she naturally expects the support of the whole family. Initially, as I have mentioned, Chloe does take Katerina back to her village, where her son is hospitalised, but, later on, she simply forgets to wire her the money needed to pay the doctor. The family also fails to pay her several months' wages owed to her. The maid is, thus, left stranded, and this omission is highlighted, in the plot, as more than mere forgetfulness. Despite Chloe's supposed (but unproven) love for Katerina, the fact that she is able to forget her at this crucial point reveals, on Chloe's part, some sort of lack of concern for others. On the basis of this incident, the film constructs a thematic opposition between the maid and Chloe, based on the opposition between the latter's personal and, in some sense, imaginary worries – and seclusion

within her family – and Katerina’s very real, pressing and concrete difficulties, which lie outside of the family and, importantly for the development of the plot, are also outside Chloe’s sphere of control.

While Katerina is away, the family prepares the engagement between Chloe and Dritsas. A series of parties take place in Chloe’s home, so that her subsequent engagement with Dritsas will come to seem spontaneous and natural, and, in the meantime, a number of personal items from the family’s home have to be sold off to fund those parties and outings. It is during this period that Chloe has the misleading meeting with Markos referred to above. In other words, instead of reaching out to Katerina, Chloe is very much concerned with keeping up appearances.

Soon, Katerina arrives back at the family’s home, on board a lorry that carries wood, only to find the house of the Pellas family in a state of complete disarray. By confronting the mess in the house, Katerina also finally confronts the truth about her employers: They appear locked in an emotional state of their own, worrying about their financial problems and seem to have forgotten entirely about her person. In a telling scene, she lifts to check, one by one, some whiskey bottles found on a mini table and, then, looks at one of the walls of the house where a painting used to hang. Immediately, she understands that the selling of the painting has financed the parties instead of the repayment of her salaries. She murmurs, then, while stroking her son’s hair, “Only us they forgot.”

Having arrived at the Pellas house along with her son, Katerina first enquires after Kleon, the head of the house, but he is not in. Soon, Chloe appears, and Katerina asks her, only half-bitterly, why she has forgotten her promise to her regarding the money. She adds that if Chloe had been in her place, she wouldn’t have forgotten. However, still drawing on her love for Chloe, Katerina shakes off her complaint,

congratulating her with a kiss for her engagement. Chloe checks on Vasilakis and asks how he is doing. Katerina confesses that the child has a problem speaking, caused by the shock of his accident. She adds that she will be departing at one o'clock for the pier in order to take him to the church in Tinos and thank the Virgin Mary for saving him. Chloe supports Katerina's decision and exits the scene.

Katerina is now left with the mother, who has, in the meantime, made an appearance. She is still her usual kind-hearted self, shy and apologetic, as she announces her intention not to resume her services to the Pellas house but return to her village for good. The mother refuses to accept this decision, and, soon, the situation gets out of control. Roxanni walks away and closes the French doors to the dining room, shutting the maid out and, thus, ending abruptly their conversation. Seeing the mother's reaction, Katerina is almost tempted to give up her travel plans and, out of respect, end their argument. She turns away from the dining room doors, looking emotionally beaten, but, suddenly, looks at her child asleep on the couch and regains her strength. Decisively, Katerina walks into the dining room, where Roxanni has shut herself in, and closes the French doors behind her, as if knowing that what is to occur – reclaiming her money – is something sensitive, symbolic and not to be witnessed. The mother has, in the meantime, turned on the radio so asks Katerina aggressively what she wants. The maid answers bitterly, “my money, Madam!” This demand is, in many ways, the invisible line of power crossed between the maid and the family. The maid's behaviour, namely her blind eyes regarding her unpaid wages, has been a manifest proof of her devotion. To ask, now, for her money means that the maid's feelings have changed drastically.

At last, the disappointment felt by Katerina leads her to seek to expose the family's financial secret to the neighbours. She proceeds to try and open the house windows and shout out the truth. Chloe now enters the room where the two women are,

and, together, mother and daughter struggle to hold Katerina back away from the shutters, while she screams with rage. The anger with which she confronts both of the women has two sides. It expresses her need to get back at them, but it also reflects her reaction towards herself, and, hence, towards the love she has had for the family, but which they betrayed. The family's neglect and her own, belated, realisation of it fuel her rage. In this confrontation, the class difference separating her from Chloe's family, suddenly, becomes very explicit. Despite their implied affection toward their maid, from the family's point of view, the urgent problem of the maid is negligible in relation to their own concerns.

As mentioned previously, the issue at the heart of the film – the real life of Katerina versus the private drama of the Pellas family – becomes evident in a line spoken by Katerina. When the mother accuses her of ungratefulness, the maid retorts, "I? Who was leaving my child hungry for your fantasies?" Immediately, the maid demands that, at least, the mother has to call Chloe's fiancé and borrow the necessary amount from him, but this request is unimaginable for Chloe's mother. We may say, in other words, that Katerina asks of Roxanni that she faces the truth and reality of her actions, that she allows some truth to enter into the closed world of her own social dreams. For Roxanni to inform Dritsas of the family's predicament implies, therefore, to break the spell, the cycle of hypocrisy and lies within the family and to let the truth, literally, come out. Of course, Dritsas is only symbolic of this corrupt situation, the tip of the iceberg of the family's lies. When Chloe tries to plead with Katerina, grabbing her by the arm, she later pushes her away by telling her, "You are not any better!" Katerina, hence, at this climactic point in the drama, accuses Chloe of being just like her mother. This is an interesting charge, as the accusation is correct, given Chloe's neglect, and it runs counter to the characterisation of the two women throughout the film: The mother

has been shown, consistently, to be cold, concerned only with appearances and being manipulative towards others, whereas Chloe has the outward appearance of gentle charm. This accusation, thus, also cements the theme of Chloe's own hypocrisy and lying that I referred to above.

As I showed, in the midst of the physical fight between the mother and Katerina, Chloe's first reaction is to cover up the truth, so she joins her mother in trying to move Katerina away from the windows. Still, as Katerina falls lifeless on the floor, struck by a heart attack, Chloe's reaction is to call the doctor. At this moment, the mother reveals herself to be both more ruthless and more dishonest than her daughter. She tells Chloe, "It is not our fault; she slipped." She then goes on to cover up what happened even to her own husband. Chloe, on the other hand, is increasingly mortified by her mother's initiative and scheming and reluctantly participates in what's going on. In the aftermath of the fighting scene, the difference between Chloe and her mother, in terms of character, becomes crystallised. This aftermath to Katerina's death has several further moments, which are significant both for the plot and for the stance that Chloe will subsequently adopt.

First, when the two women return to the living room after the maid's death, they confront Katerina's child sitting on the couch. For Chloe, seeing the child is shocking, as it stands for innocence and further highlights her inability to carry on lying and hurting those around her who are innocent.

Second, we see that the telephone rings. Galanos calls, as he has promised, in order to persuade Chloe to elope with him. Chloe's answer to him is, simply, that the call has come too late. Indeed, the viewer can understand her sentence to be true, since Galanos' plan seems to have been to save Chloe from the hypocrisy of her family and, thus, to protect her. However, with the maid's death, he has, of course, failed to protect

Chloe, and a worse disaster than we could have envisaged has occurred. Katerina's death is now a fact, overshadowing the two lovers' dream and the possibility of a common future.

As the mother seeks to enlist Chloe's help in moving the maid's body, Chloe resists. It seems that the presence of Vasilakis represents an antidote to their morally corrupt situation and actions – not only for the viewer but, we are led to see, for Chloe as well. As the father returns, and the mother skilfully manoeuvres him through the house in order that he comes to believe that he is the one who discovers the maid lifeless on the floor, Chloe's expression is one of increasing shock: She is hiding behind a wall, eavesdropping on her mother and her schemes. Not long after, Chloe returns to her room, where she writes a letter to Dritsas revealing the truth about her family and, thus, breaking off the engagement. We may say that, in spite of Chloe's moral failure in relation to Katerina and in spite of her consistent effort at keeping up appearances, she actively begins to break the spell of hypocrisy and steps back from misleading Dritsas into a fraudulent wedding. She calls Markos to ask him for money, putting, thus, an end to the falsely light-hearted and untruthful manner she had with him previously. Chloe, during the aftermath of the scene of Katerina's death, confronts with honesty, for the first time, the people who surround her.

Additionally, as her short telephone conversation with Galanos shows, she manages to re-assess the role that their fleeting affair has had in her life. I mentioned that Galanos was not a realistic love prospect for the duration in which Chloe was tied to her wish to save the family. Why he does not become one now presents an interesting question regarding Chloe's motivations. While she accepted his attentions in the context of her courtship with Dritsas, he could appear as the romantic antidote to the cynical realism of that courtship. Perhaps, she even sustained the prospect of this romantic

liaison in order to maintain her role as a victim within the family, caught between duty and desire. This imaginary situation is, now, as if blown away or rendered irrelevant by the maid's death.

Subsequent to these actions, Chloe, as in *A Girl in Black*, now confronts the mother, who, in the plot of the film, is portrayed as the fulcrum of dishonesty. Confronting her mother is, therefore, an act, which carries the highest significance in the entire drama. Only by this act can Chloe break the cycle of hypocrisy in herself (fig. 54).



Figure 54: Facing Chloe

As in the previous scene before Chloe's outing with Dristas, the mother follows Chloe into her room, after the first shock of the incident has passed, to check how she is doing and, also, to check on what she is doing. This is not merely motherly concern. She wishes to avert any unreasonable behaviour on Chloe's part, and, as it becomes clear, she is also concerned with maintaining her control over Chloe. During the confrontational scene that follows, Chloe reveals exactly what she thinks about her mother and about both of their involvement in the maid's death. This is a highly

emotional, dramatically charged scene. When the mother tries to underplay their responsibility and involvement by explaining that the doctor had called Katerina “doomed” (because of the poor condition of her heart), Chloe wisely retorts, “doomed by God, but executed by us!” She brands this “the last lie,” after the original title of the film in Greek, which will cost both of them dearly, implying that Katerina’s death has now changed their lives irreversibly. It is a lie that has cost Katerina more than it has cost them: life itself. The mother is, of course, unable to respond to these rightful accusations. She grudgingly accepts Chloe’s plan to leave for Tinos with the maid’s son. The mother cannot, at this point, see what this decision will entail; she is not aware of the magnitude of Chloe’s decision. When, however, she opens a letter meant for Dritsas that Chloe gives to her, she sees that it contains Chloe’s returned engagement ring. The mother turns and screams to the camera, “Chloe, no!”

In what are the last scenes of the film, Cacoyannis cuts to a boat full of people, most of them poor and shabby, on the way to Tinos. Amongst them is Chloe, who now no longer seems to be shocked by their presence. This scene is clearly juxtaposed to the earlier, bus-to-Athens scene: Chloe returns from Katerina’s village in a bus full of peasants, obviously intimidated and threatened by their presence. The crowd scenes continue with Chloe in Tinos, struggling to reach the icon of Virgin Mary to pay her respects and fulfil the wish of Katerina. As she tries to move between the people, she calls Vasilakis her own son and holds him in her arms. In her embracing of the maid’s child and her mingling with the people she previously so feared and avoided, a sort of miracle occurs. Vasilakis speaks.

Moving away from plot, we can see that the discontinuity of this dramatic ending poses a hermeneutic enigma, much like the choice by Stella to walk to her death is the riddle at the heart of the drama in that film. In accordance with the method of

interpretation that I have adopted throughout the thesis, I do not, like for instance Brill, whom I discussed in Chapter 2, analyse drama from the point of view of its outcome. In order to spell out the difference between these two approaches to interpretation and plot, I quote a passage by Brill from the opening of his book on Hitchcock's romantic plots. In this passage, he states the principles of his method and makes a claim concerning the underlying unity of genre in all of Hitchcock's films:

They may be seen as a series of rich rotations and recombinations of relatively few central themes and aesthetic preoccupations. The actions of loss, search, and recovery that provide a deep structure for *North by Northwest* underlie all Hitchcock's films, albeit sometimes chiefly as dreadfully disappointed and mocked possibilities. The outcomes of these actions provide the standard to measure human success and failure, as well as the temper of the universe itself.
(4)

As I discussed in the theory chapter, Brill's hermeneutics of genre developed from Northrop Frye's mythical theory of literature.⁶⁶ Here, I wish to focus, in particular, on the category of action and its implicit structure of purposefulness (not in terms of intentionality but in terms of teleology), since this idea of a goal-directed, purposeful, unified action is the core of what Brill thinks of as plot. The plot is defined by the action it represents. Again, this action is goal-directed and unified. If the plot finds a satisfying conclusion, this means that the action it represents is also accomplished. There is, thus, here, an implicit principle of ethical and aesthetic evaluation in the correlation between represented action ("standard to measure human success") and the reference to the wider fictional world ("temper of the universe"). This correlation is substantiated, in terms of fiction, when Brill specifies that romance is a category drawn from fairy tale, and that it involves the presentation of fictional worlds in which "the ordinary constraints of natural law are loosened" (6). If action is closely linked to the temper of the universe, the possibility of "true" action is limited. Moreover, according to the

⁶⁶ See Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*, Chapter 3.

passage quoted above, fiction is able to suggest a link between human action and this general sense of possibility because the actions that it represents have outcomes: It is the outcomes of actions such as loss, search and recovery, which provide the sense – within Hitchcock’s fictional worlds – of human possibilities not being constrained by the ordinary weight of natural law.

Reducing action to plot and vice versa entails a further thing: In calling these three terms – ‘loss,’ ‘search,’ ‘recovery’ – “action,” Brill implicitly reveals that he writes not only with reference to Frye but also on an Aristotelian basis. For in the *Poetics*, there is a double meaning behind the word ‘*praxis*’ (action), as it refers to intentional deeds, and to the content of plot: According to Aristotle, *mythos* (plot) in tragedy is a *mimesis* (rendering) of one action (*praxis*).

The term ‘search,’ in Brill’s formulation, could be taken to mean an intentional deed, but the terms ‘recovery’ and ‘loss’ imply that something befalls the protagonist without him fully being in control. One sees how this sense of the protagonist being involved in an action that outstrips his intentions is coherent both with Frye’s mythical understanding of narrative and with Aristotle’s idea of unintended consequences in tragedy. Here, I wish to highlight that plot, for Brill, makes sense only in terms of an implicit teleology. It is only at the end of a quest, in which something has been lost and recovered, that the other elements within the fiction take on meaning. Brill’s understanding of plot and action as dependent on outcome is an extreme and, also, very well stated formulation of a kind of narrative teleology that my hermeneutic interrogation of questions seeks to distance itself from.

What seems to matter in these early dramas of Cacoyannis is a point of crisis or radical reversal, which is more than a mere plot peripety, since it radically changes the premises of the story in relation to what went before and, especially, changes the

heroine's self-perception. Thus, rather than looking at the maid's death and Chloe's ensuing action from the point of view of a *telos*, I am looking at these events as reflecting a change in the premises of the drama surrounding Chloe's positioning of herself in the world. After the maid's death, she not only confronts her mother directly, but she does so on the level of the distinction between truth and lies, which has run through the whole film, separating the family from their surroundings.

Confrontation, thus, entails a freedom not to lie, but this freedom is given by the maid's death. As Chloe says, she paid a price for the lies that she can never repay. The tragic event thereby comes to signify a rupture on the level of speech. A line is crossed, which, from then on, separates Chloe from her previous compulsion to lie. The tragic event thereby implies a question, which is different from that concerning what the heroine does afterwards. It raises a question retrospectively as to Chloe's previous need to lie, like in Pippin's search for motivation.

A social interpretation would be that Chloe lies in order to keep up appearances. She does so in order to obey her mother and out of complicitness with her sense of shame befalling her family. She lies about the family's wealth, and she lies about her feelings for Dritsas, all for these reasons. But such a simplified reading makes it difficult to account for the subtlety of dramatic presentation in the film. Chloe is never seen to be able to lose herself completely and convincingly in her courtship with Dritsas. More importantly, a social perspective, suggesting that Chloe acts for reasons dictated by class (and as interpreted by her mother), would suggest that she is active, rather than passive. Yet, throughout the film, we see her going through the motions of courtship, banter and lying without exercising much initiative. This impression of her as an, essentially, passive character, as someone who is incapable of taking initiative, is strengthened by the parallel story of her courtship with Galanos. As I just showed, this

asymmetrical courtship consists in her accepting and giving room for his declarations of love. She accepts listening to his questions and advice, perhaps even in the assumption that he calls her bluff but still loves her. She allows his involvement in selling off the family patrimony; he knows of her financial situation. In their moments of conversation, she, at times, shows herself open or unguarded, but she does not openly engage him, challenge him or expose herself. Her involvement is limited to her conceding to his love, and this, in turn, means that Galanos is not presented in the plot as a genuine alternative to Dritsas.

Looking at the drama as a whole and returning to the question of Chloe's reasons for lying, we can note that Chloe does not lie actively to pursue a goal, to achieve something. Rather, she appears to lie to fend off a truth or a possibility. She lies almost blindly and by instinct to buy time. The time she then gathers is not devoted, on the other hand, to making a choice: Galanos is not a full-blown rival of Dritsas. Lying is the vehicle of a condition of stasis. By lying, Chloe can avoid other actions or choices. It is this stasis that is broken by the maid's death, since this irreversible event lies beyond the reach of any new lie. In talking about film-noir, Pippin describes a similar stance: "Even doing nothing about what one feels (in Chloe's case, realising that she cannot go on fooling Dritsas forever, and that she loves Galanos) still alters everything, because doing nothing now becomes a fateful decision, an event that then shadows everything else one does" (30). For Chloe, this is Katerina's death and her own responsibility in it.

Within this stasis, Chloe also postpones any realisation as to her own place in the world. The plot does not offer her any prospect of combining love and saving her family; behind this impossibility, lies a question of her own position and agency within her family. Until the maid's death, we see her asserting independence from her mother

only in brief moments of mild defiance. The confrontation with her mother and the subsequent act of fulfilling the vow, thus, marks a newfound nerve and power of choice. Yet, this forcefulness bears no actual relationship to the problems of love and family status that she battled with until then. It is, thus, not as if she were caught in a dilemma for which a return to religion and tradition would be the solution – this would be a social reading. Rather, the tragic event sets free a power to act – yet, this freedom comes with a break from the certainties she had lived by until then. It is, thus, also the sign of a new state of disorientation. If, in her stasis, Chloe appears devoid of purpose, her resolve, after the confrontation with her mother, appears devoid of reason in the context of her previous life. At the same time, it is not as if we see her actually making a choice. Rather, just as Stella, she appears to make a forced choice or enact a non-choice, to act according to what seems to be the only thing she has left to fall back upon: a conventional normative authority. The way her action is portrayed, further, makes us perceive a gap between her and her act: The act implies a turn to communal ethical norms. There is no indication that or whether this return also implies or engages Chloe as a person.

4.5 | Genre in *A Matter of Dignity*

In this section, I will pursue the hermeneutic question regarding motivation, ambivalence and discontinuity, which I discussed above, by dwelling on the question of whether *A Matter of Dignity* can usefully be understood as a modern tragedy according to the conception of genre outlined in Chapter 2. I will also discuss how and whether modern tragedy, then, in this film, differs from melodrama – this is especially relevant given that the film does exhibit clear melodramatic traits: the domestic setting, the emphasis on emotions within a family setting and so on. The argument is based on the reflections in the previous chapter concerning indecision. It takes shape against the background of *The Music Room* and involves discussion of Brooks' theory of melodrama. Further, it draws on the claim made in Chapter 2 to the effect that the category of 'modern tragedy,' in the case of Cacoyannis, involves an ambivalence between modernity and tradition. Finally, I argue that this ambivalence of modernity and tradition arises in the presentation of agency.

In contrast with the sharply drawn tragic universe of *The Music Room*, *A Matter of Dignity* presents an ambivalent world, in which motivation, social expectation and moral imperatives are hard to disentangle. As I argued in the last section, *A Matter of Dignity*, presents a protagonist caught in indecision; this indecision is not itself made sense of in clear terms. The heroine is not indecisive between two terms – a or b – between two prospective loves or between loyalty to her mother and sincerity with regard to her feelings. Any attribution of such a clear-cut thematic structure to the film would seem to miss the focus of the drama and, hence, the sense of its ambivalence. This focus is, as in the other films, on the question or the questions that the protagonist poses to herself and to us regarding her own agency. Modern tragedy in the film is the

context for this question.

In *The Music Room*, fate works within the context of a clear-cut opposition between tradition and modernity; it is Roy's tragic destiny as an older world is necessarily eclipsed through its replacement by a newer one. In *The Music Room*, the opposition is, foremost, communal, and fate is played out on a larger scale such as to reveal its unavoidability.

As I shall show, instead of fate, in *A Matter of Dignity*, we have stasis, that is, instead of a dramatic perspective objectively presenting the protagonist's trajectory (*The Music Room*), we have a dramatic perspective that focuses on repetition, indecision and a sort of narrative unfulfilment. Stasis is a quality of the drama, its progression or lack thereof. It is also a quality of the heroine and of her motivation. Further, it is an aesthetic or theatrical quality, as the emphasis on poses and postures, not issuing in action, present the heroine as being, to some extent, inscrutable. This effect of stasis in the heroine is supported by an inconclusiveness pertaining to her prospective relationships.

I have shown how, from Chloe's point of view, these relations seem at one remove from her – not able to command her full attention. Now, looking at them from the point of view of the plot and the film as a whole, we can note a source of inconclusiveness also in the attitudes of Galanos and Dritsas: Much like Chloe's father, who remains passive throughout the protagonist's plight and allows himself to be controlled by and included in all of his wife's schemes, her lovers remain, too, to some extent, distant. Thus, we do not get the impression that Galanos really understands the nature and magnitude of Chloe's situation; his ready and helpful advice seems oddly ready-made and external. Nor do we have the sense that he understands Chloe's character and personality well enough to assist her. This matches the way Chloe's fiancé

loves her rather blindly. Dritsas does not suspect that Chloe is using him solely for his money. (He even jokes about this idea several times.) Both men are, further, generally distant in relation to the female protagonist, although the fiancé's distance stems from something less abstract than that of Galanos: He lacks charm, and he relies solely on his material assets to woo Chloe. (She jokes that Dritsas goes nowhere without his yacht, which acts as a substitute for his manhood.)

Chloe is, then, both asphyxiatingly courted by these two men and, simultaneously, left unaided by them, both trapped in the eyes of a society that dictates and foresees her options and actions and, at the same time, exposed to an apparently fated condition that seems bigger than and external to that very society and the characters it is comprised of. Within this plot situation, we see her as torn and dissatisfied, yet we are not presented with scenes that clearly express her feelings or desires nor with dialogues in which she would have put her predicament into words.

Hence, corresponding to the inconclusiveness of plot progression, the heroine or, better, the motivation that we may attribute to her, gradually, acquires the quality of an enigma, as if that inner core of desires, which film narrative often purports to express, is, here, replaced by a sort of void: We are presented neither with any overriding desires, on her part, nor with definite obstacles or ethical commands; her indecision does not speak of or refer to a definite set of motives. This appearance of a void is supported and given weight by the abstract, unrealised quality of all the major relationships that Chloe is involved in, even including her relations to her mother and father. We never understand why the father does not seek to help her, and we can never measure the degree of defiance and obedience in Chloe's replies to her mother. Thus, in the absence of completely developed dramatic relationships and with the character of Chloe at its centre, whose motivations are never clearly expressed, the film circles around a void of

motivation, which takes on an appearance of necessity.

Yet, we are not invited to place the action and inaction of the heroine in the tragic register of fate. Chloe is not faced with an ethical imperative or an overwhelming force of history. As in *Stella*, the appearance of necessity, of a situation that seemingly admits of no change or resolution, is rooted in the perspective that the heroine takes on her life. Whereas in *Stella*, we find an ambiguity in the characterisation of Stella – independent, yet, shaped by her friends and relationships – here, we find an ambivalence in the sense of a pressure that compels Chloe to lie. Somewhere mid-way between a self-imposed state of mind and a social, familial requirement to maintain appearances, pressure is, here, aligned with her dreamy seclusion within her family. The apparent absence of other options, rendered claustrophobically tangible by the gradual narrowing of her horizon as the plot progresses, has the definite appearance of an unavoidable situation. This is, however, a necessity, which shows itself not to be or not to be all that there could be once her whole situation (including her compulsion to lie) is broken by the maid's death.

All of this – the compulsion to lie, the ambivalence of pressure, the heroine's inaction and the liberating force of a tragic event – point towards the structure of modern tragedy. In the absence of an objective ethical command, yet, without the resources of subjective agency, the heroine is neither framed in a tragic universe of necessity nor set within a melodramatic universe of autonomous choice.

Whereas *The Music Room*, then, could be described as a tragedy that makes use of melodramatic devices, *A Matter of Dignity* is a modern tragedy. However, just as Ray does, in *The Music Room*, Cacoyannis relies on certain melodramatic devices. It would, therefore, be useful to compare their use in the two films. For example, in *The Music Room*, melodrama first enters with the unmotivated drowning of Roy's wife and son (as

an event). Unlike in tragedy, where every disaster is tied to the arc of the plot, this is a catastrophe that happens without a definite prior motivation within the story. It is, however, tragic in its implications. It stands, as I have shown, metonymically, for Roy's gradual loss of his entire world and for the whole course of the story. What is also melodramatic, in this film, is the varied and pervasive symbolic imagery, which functions as omens within the plot. However, this imagery always entails a reference to the film's tragic dramatic structure.

The most salient example of this kind of symbolism – apart from, of course, the film's opening scene of Roy's chandelier rocking erratically back and forth, suspended in space (fig. 55) – is to be found in the final moments of the film, when Roy retreats into his music room, having just hosted the final performance. Drunk and rumbling, he eloquently praises both himself and his forebears portrayed on the wall, toasting each in turn as if they were live members of his family. Suddenly, as reflected in his drink in the cup between his hands (fig. 56), the lights of the room's grand chandelier begin to flicker. Then, the mere sight of all the lights dimming frightens him unjustly, spurring him into a state of delirium, and sends him mumbling, "They are gone; they are all gone, one by one!" (fig. 57). In this unreasonable, yet, insightful frame of mind, he gains knowledge of his impending tragic death. The approach of Roy's good-hearted servant, his explanation to his master that the lights of the music room have simply gone out and his assurances that "the sun is coming up," momentarily, question Roy's point of view and, hence, the tragic nature of the plot. However, as soon as Roy becomes aware of the new day and regains his positive spirits, he asks for his horse to be brought out. At first, to ride again, after his long period of seclusion and depression, is almost a victory against his opponents, a ride into the continuation of his grand family line. Yet, Roy's ride turns out to be a reckless and, also, fated ride he makes towards death.



Figure 55: Setting the tone



Figure 56: Constant reminder



Figure 57: Watching the end arrive

Melodrama, in the Ray film, works mostly on the level of expression and in isolation from the film's tragic dramatic structure. There is a quality of extreme symbolism in the chandelier scene, meant to render the protagonist's tragic fate in a melodramatic manner and, hence, to represent it psychologically. The scene's drama does not, therefore, derive directly from the dramatic situation depicted by this scene (the lights have simply gone out; there is nothing dramatic in this development per se); it derives, rather, from a moment of isolated dramatization. Previously, Roy had been mortified by spotting a spider crawling on his portrait, but, soon, he forgets the spider by removing it with his walking stick (figs. 57 & 58). This is what Brooks calls, in his discussion of melodrama, a "dramatization" of reality. He mentions this as a trademark of melodrama and a device often employed by this genre. Whereas, in *The Music Room*, moments of dramatization do not make up for the reality of the tragic with which the film is invested, in *A Matter of Dignity*, moments of dramatization serve to highlight and amplify a much less tragic reality.



Figure 57: Real?



Figure 58: “Cracks” in his universe

Thus, in *A Matter of Dignity*, melodramatic devices are used, mainly, in a superficial and expressive manner. First, on the level of its Hollywood-style *mise-en-scène*, we see the shots of Chloe and her mother on the house’s grand staircase, the nervous and constant rubbing of the latter’s hands as she worries about their future, as well as the film’s domestic setting itself. The images involving whisky bottles, during the party scenes in the beginning of the film, are a reference to those in American film melodramas: They are not signifiers of the easy lifestyle of affluent Americans but connote, within the historical context of the film, a rarefied and hard to achieve cosmopolitanism. There is a colonial feel to this imitation, which refers, first, to the family’s elite status, its class and, second, more specifically, to a lifestyle within the exceedingly “Americanised” northeastern suburbs of Athens. (Residents, at the time, could well be employed at the American airbase or by the Greek military, working for organisations like NATO, their children attending private foreign schools in Athens.) The whisky prop, then, acquires a melodramatic emphasis; objects are, here, highly charged with meaning.

Second, one can, nevertheless, define the dramatic structure of the film in

contrast to melodrama. This is not so in the case of *The Music Room*. In *The Music Room*, melodramatic techniques of expression are subservient to the development of tragedy, and there is no tension or opposition between tragedy and melodrama. In *A Matter of Dignity*, by contrast, we only understand the nature of the drama by opposing it to the genre of melodrama. In one case, we have a uniform dramatic structure; in the other, we have a dramatic structure that is striving to assert itself against a melodramatic background. An example of the way in which drama, in *A Matter of Dignity*, strives to assert itself against a melodramatic framework is the final, climactic scene of the fighting between Chloe, Roxanni and the maid.

After Chloe and her mother have struggled in the dining room in order to prohibit Katerina from opening the windows and reveal the truth of her unpaid wages to the neighbours, the telephone in the other room rings. There is, here, an obvious construction of a melodramatic temporal structure of co-existence, consisting of the loose overlapping of the shouting, music coming from the stereo (whose volume Chloe increases in order to cover up the cacophony) and the ringing of the telephone. Furthermore, the scene reveals the plot's tendency towards melodrama. Galanos' expected phone call comes too early and too suddenly, after the tragic event, for Chloe to be in a position to act upon it. But it offers the viewer an idea of what could have been a different conclusion, of what could have been a "way out" from the film's drama and its tragic plot. Running off with Galanos would have meant that Chloe is able to recast her involvement in the maid's death; it would have introduced a melodramatic universe and a turn of events, in which actions are reversible, and characters are able to change. Instead, the scene focuses on the irrepressible tension between the two moral forces that structure the drama, located, respectively, in the mother and in the maid. We see the situation from Chloe's perspective and come to understand that there is no

choice available to her that would reconcile her debt to her mother and her debt to the maid. The phone call, which is not carried through to its conclusion, is, in this regard, an extradiegetic element in the film's overall dramatic universe of modern tragedy. Such a use of melodrama can be contrasted to that of *The Music Room*, where symbolism, like the omens discussed above, is used, on the contrary, to reinforce the film's tragic dramatic unity from within. The omens are intradiegetic, pointing to subsequent tragic events from (within) the film, providing no sense of escape for the characters and a clear-cut tragic reading of the story.

On the level of the drama and, again, in my reading of the film's effort to place itself within a particular genre, *A Matter of Dignity* continuously presents situations in which there is a possible melodramatic line of action, which the film, then, negates. In the film's beginning, Chloe appears as a subject capable of making a definite choice according to the melodramatic framework of the plot: marrying Dritsas and saving her fortune. She struggles, however, when she has to carry this through. She accepts the advances of Galanos and, throughout, appears reluctant, worried, unhappy. What gives away her struggle is, precisely, both her efforts to appear happy or in love to her friends, especially to her childhood friend, and, at the same time, the scheming and ruthless play in which she partakes with her mother. Despite her reservations, Chloe's line, "Don't worry, mom, they will soon come begging," refers to the prospect of her re-acquiring the family's status and denotes her unstable but sacrificial alliance with her mother's values.

Another manner in which melodrama enters *A Matter of Dignity* is the way in which Chloe and her family initially confront their financial ruin. In general, to lose one's social status can never be fully tragic; Chloe's world is not so much a world of its own, threatened with destruction, but a "bubble" surrounded by a much less confined

world outside. We get to witness this other, larger, world throughout the film, for example through the character of the maid. Thus, unlike Roy, whose existence is tragic because he remains one of the last representatives of a world that is about to disappear in its entirety, being, to a large degree, destined to die because he becomes devoid of this world, Chloe loses only her own world. Whereas Roy faces a matter of survival, Chloe faces a matter of personal identity. Chloe can and cannot survive away from her class, since, if she were to do so, she would lose her identity. Up until the completion of the dramatic conflict of the film, then, trapped within their class and social world, the plight of Chloe and her family becomes claustrophobic, exaggerated, magnified, that is, it becomes even more dramatic than is called for.

On that note, what is a further melodramatic feature of the film is that we come to know the family's problems by means of following the characters' subjective point of view and, hence, through having a part in their imagination: We follow their imaginary relation to class as they are about to lose their status, as they start selling their expensive belongings, as they risk losing their home. Each moment does not simply occur; it is also anticipated and visualised in relation to how the characters feel, the characters of the film all the while dreading what is about to happen next. The texture of melodrama surrounding the characters stems from their desperate effort to steer through their situation and avoid destruction. Their financial predicament is not, literally, catastrophic, but it is sufficiently so to dissolve the family as they know it. What is characteristic of modern tragedy, in this outcome, is that their response to the loss of their fortune, no matter how exaggerated, appears to be unavoidable and crippling. The film moves from a subjective and internal point of view to that of an objective and external point of view, where class, from being all the while exaggerated, turns out to be, indeed, something defining. The characters' ties to their social world are, then, both

something to look through and something that possesses its own hard edges. Class appears as something half-way between the real and the imaginary. The arc of this development is defined by the successive actions, on the part of the family, to save their status. In this effort, Chloe becomes trapped in a predicament similar to that of the protagonist in *A Girl in Black* and which I defined as fake tragic. Caught in a no-man's land, between a real and an imaginary conception of her own class and class identity, it appears impossible for Chloe to find a way of measuring the seriousness of the situation her family is in. However, it can be said that the fake tragic, in *A Girl in Black*, is more explicit than in the Chloe film, as tragedy, there, is engendered by the plethora of islanders and the community who frame Marina. We can also see that, in *Stella*, the tragic element is more explicit than in all three films, since it leads to the protagonist's own death.

Within the space of this ambiguity, Chloe does not possess the requisite "tools" to cope with her actual life problems. Where Roy's world is simple and straightforward, hers is filled with complexities that are difficult to look through. She has to deal with real social problems with the instruments of morality and fiction. Unlike Roy, whose actions are symbolic but, at the same time, real in that they are carried through with dignity and determination and are respected and allowed to be played out with a sense of deference from his neighbours, Chloe can only engage in incomplete and erratic acts of trickery. She does not possess the ground from which to make her own designs and act upon them; hers is a mediated individual's response to social reality.

What distances *A Matter of Dignity*'s drama from melodrama, however, and profoundly sets it apart as modern tragedy is that "fate" enters the dramatic structure of the film in a way that, as I will show later, ultimately restricts the characters' ability to make a personal choice according to a melodramatic framework or, at least, a choice

that expresses the protagonist's own identity. As I have established by now, *The Music Room* exhibits the tragic but rather straightforward fate of a once wealthy and powerful landowner now doomed to obscurity and death. In *A Matter of Dignity*, the tragic element in the plot is much more complex and sophisticated. Chloe's inability to choose one of her two suitors and the enigma behind her refusal to opt for happiness at the side of the antiques seller, even when she is freed of her engagement, makes the film quite different from melodrama and melodrama's reliance on individual choice, but this indecision equally removes the film from a clear tragic predicament.

The choice that Chloe faces, in the arc of the film, can be phrased in different terms, as it is articulated in relation to other characters, in relation to her social situation and in terms of her own process of reasoning and feeling. Her choices are played out on different levels: which of the two suitors to choose, whether to trust herself or her mother in making her decisions, whether to fight to maintain her fortune or step out of her social situation. Lastly, her choices evolve her own agency. What makes the film non-melodramatic is that these different aspects of Chloe's choices do not make sense in terms of a clear structure; the alternatives are not sharply defined with reference to the protagonist's thoughts and feelings. Hence, in spite of the film not presenting clear moral and sacred norms (as in tragedy), the character of Chloe does not, on the other hand, belong within the melodramatic register. As a modern, yet, also tragic subject, Chloe refrains from precipitating actions. Her decisions take the form of indecision, deferral, non-commitment.

The film's theatricality adds to such a non-melodramatic reading: Characters look detached, devoid of will because they are not torn between clear moral alternatives. They are, however, at the same time, shown to be aware both of the superficiality of their own dilemmas and, also, aware of the tragic weight they can attribute to them. This

superficiality is rooted in the film's depiction of the story's social situation. As I have shown, the tragic "fate" of the family is not dictated by strict and unsurpassed ethical norms that would be rooted in a community but by Chloe's fluid sense of class identity and moral standards.

Unmelodramatically, the heart of the film's drama is preoccupied with challenging the protagonist's subjectivity. Chloe's outlook is modern because, as a subject, she is given the illusion of choice, but she is a tragic character because she can arrive to these, so called, "solutions" only retrospectively and only after irreversible acts have been committed. In other words, the options and solutions her character arrives at are far from sufficient for solving her moral dilemma. Chloe's inability to make a truthful choice, that is, to live by a choice expressing her own personality, rather than to live by a choice based on a promise made by her maid and her maid's own old-fashioned relation to tradition and religion, denotes Chloe's ambivalent and unsettled relation to herself but, also, an unsettled relation to modern morality. If in tragedy, tradition is an overriding principle under which subjectivity is crushed, and, in melodrama, tradition is the obstacle that the individual should (and will) overcome, in modern tragedy, tradition is a factor that both appears to control the individual and to leave him or her unaffected. In *A Matter of Dignity*, modern tragedy entails the absence of a rigid, all-defining tradition but, at the same, the presence and influence of a class that pushes Chloe towards producing her own irreversible mistakes.

The film's original title in Greek, thus, "*To Teleftaio Psema*" (*The Last Lie*), does not solely refer to Chloe's final lie regarding her role in the death of her maid, which Chloe, indirectly, swears to be the last by revealing the truth. The title could also refer to Chloe's own ultimate act of lying to herself regarding the pseudo-solution that she embraces, in the end, as the way forward in her life (her visit to Tinos, her

momentary espousal of Katerina's child as her own). In a bid to find her place in the world, Chloe makes a decision that does not seem to express her personality and which confirms further her status as someone caught in between the modern and the tragic.

Chloe ends up making, essentially, a choice informed by modern tragedy: a choice for the sake of choice, which expresses her ability to choose and reasserts her existence as a modern subject. Yet, it is one that redirects her back to the past; this is a past that still makes itself felt and which denotes the modern subject's inability to escape it – both ideas are characteristic of the universe of Cacoyannis' early films. Her turn to tradition does imply a break with her family, and, in this sense, it signifies a new beginning. Yet, the fact that she can only escape her family and her predicament by wearing the trappings of conventions, which she has previously not lived by, situates her in a situation of knowledge regarding the reality of the ethical problem that she has to confront. This is a problem that is real in the sense of not admitting any solution of the kind that she has used previously. No trick or stratagem will bring the maid back to life. Hence, Chloe, at the moment of bringing the maid's son to Tinos, cannot fail to be aware that even her gesture of atonement is an insufficient response to the tragic consequences of her actions.

At the same time, we may note that this is not a positive knowledge of the kind that provides positive good reasons for actions. This tragic insight does not open up a trajectory where she can decide on the strength of this insight. Rather, she is set in a situation in which, on the one hand, she is compelled to act – confront the mother, break with hypocrisy, leave the family – but, on the other hand, this is a situation in which she is stripped off of all the reasons that have guided her actions up to this point. Hence, her action is doubly constrained or forced: It comes out of an unchosen situation, caused by a tragic event, and it follows a need to act, rather than any positive reason that would

make sense in terms of her previous life. We cannot say, as in *Stella*, that the heroine's action is a non-action, because it is not as self-destructive, but it is, certainly, a forced and not freely chosen action; it is an action from which we cannot fully assess the agency of the heroine.

4.6 | The Theatrical Aesthetic of *A Matter of Dignity*

I have discussed the theatrical aesthetic of Cacoyannis in terms of stasis and performance (for the latter, see especially *Stella*). In *A Matter of Dignity*, theatricality and the effect of stasis are developed, largely, through subtle and recurrent devices of framing, which I will now discuss in some detail. At this point, then, I would like to move from the concept of ‘modern tragedy’ and its uniqueness in relation to both tragic and traditional melodramatic genres in order to explore, in more depth, the theatricality of Cacoyannis. This is a stylistic and dramatic mode which, to begin with, can be described as a certain kind of dramatic emphasis.

In *A Matter of Dignity*, dramatic emphasis is expressed, first of all, through the manner in which location in the film appears as a stage. This is achieved through careful use of framing devices, such as doors and heavily underlined shot-reverse-shot sequences, in which the perception and dramatic discovery made by one or more characters is highlighted. I mentioned above how the sliding doors between the dining and living room are used in the climactic scene with the maid's death. I also mentioned the dramatically significant sight of the maid's son, by Chloe and her mother, as well as the cunning way in which the mother leads her husband through the house so as to make him believe that he is the one who discovers Katerina's body. I will return to these devices below.

In order to situate the film stylistically, both with regard to the tragic symbolism of Ray and in relation to the discourse on melodrama, I shall, as in the chapter on *A Girl in Black*, focus on perspective. In the analysis of that film, I showed that the film develops a dramatic perspective of exchange, which supports the ambivalence that is at the heart of the drama. This analysis of perspective was grounded in one specific

aesthetic element: the island location. The comparison with the Italian films served to show how this location was not used as an exoticising allegory but as a setting directly supporting the ambivalence of the drama. I analysed this feature of the location as heterotopia. In each of the two previous films, I showed that the drama and the aesthetic fabric of the film are supported by a specific extra-filmic element from which it develops its aesthetic texture and dramatic perspective. In *Stella*, this element is performance and the world of the *bouzouki* bar, which serves to obscure Stella's motivations. In *A Girl in Black*, it is the heterotopic island, which helps to portray Marina in more explicit terms. *A Matter of Dignity* stands out in relation to these other films by displaying a self-contained fictional universe in which one of the few significant extra-filmic elements, inserted into the film image, is a view on the Acropolis – and even this element does not, arguably, carry any structuring force in the way that performance, in *Stella*, for example, informs the way the heroine moves through the stages of the drama, maintaining, as I showed, an essential opaqueness.

The structuring aesthetic element that supports dramatic perspective, in *A Matter of Dignity*, is internal to the fabric of the film. It derives from patterns of framing and editing and a certain use of leitmotif in dialogue. I have noted six such patterns. Together, they form a kind of matrix supporting the film's dramatic perspective. I will first go through these six elements, and, then, show how they inform perspective. Then, I will return to discussing how this influences the relationship that we may find between this film and the discourse on melodrama. It is important to note that these elements form systematically organised patterns, which cannot just be seen as features of *mise-en-scène* simply adding emphasis in the dramatic presentation within individual scenes. Detaching these elements, from their place in the individual scenes, allows us to see how they build a consistent perspective throughout the film as a whole.

First, all the three members of the family, Chloe, her mother and her father, are, at certain significant moments, framed against doors in medium shots (figs. 59 & 60) and, in one instance, a curtain, such that they appear flat against them. In some of these scenes, the mother, the daughter or a third party is also shown through a small opening in the door in a shot from another room (figs. 61 & 62). These framing devices isolate and objectify the characters. The two most symbolic and least narrative of these moments are the initial moment when Chloe parts with the guests and stands close to the curtain separating the entrance room from the living room (fig. 63), and the moment when the father, having just returned home, is shot from the back, in medium close-up, against the background of a door as he hesitates to enter (fig. 64). This hesitation is motivated by his subsequent discovery of the dead maid, but, taken together, these two scenes also frame the drama, as they picture these characters in isolation from everyone else against a flat surface.



Figure 59: Together apart



Figure 60: Seeking help



Figure 61: Spied upon



Figure 62: There



Figure 63: Exiting her “stage”



Figure 64: Suspense

Second, the two most important events in the drama, apart from the maid’s death, the engagement and its annulment by Chloe are shown in a sort of distance montage of two close-up shots echoing each other. The first shows Dritsas putting the ring on Chloe’s finger, but we do not see him or her: We only see the hands (fig. 65). Finally, we see Chloe and Dritsas standing together, on the balcony of the family home, with Chloe’s parents visible through the balcony door (fig. 66). The second shows a ring falling out of the envelope that Chloe hands to her mother as she decides to leave the house following the maid’s death. In this echo of the two shots, both detaching the

seal of the act from the characters involved, the film emphasises the social, ritualistic and objective nature of these acts.



Figure 65: Sealing the “deal”



Figure 66: “Happiness”

Third, at two significant moments showing the relationship between Chloe and her mother, we see them framed together without looking at each other, while being, simultaneously, caught in the gaze of a third person, who may or may not question their truthfulness. The first of these scenes shows an art dealer about to buy one of their paintings. Chloe and her mother disagree in a separate room whether to sell the painting

at the price offered or to sell it to Galanos for a better price. Chloe solves the situation by exiting the room and opening the doors so that both of them have to face the gaze of the art dealer who calls their bluff of pretending not to care about the price (fig. 67). The second moment occurs just after the maid's death. The maid's mute son waits on a sofa oblivious to what has just happened. As the mother and Chloe see him sitting there, Chloe seems shocked, as if reminded of their guilt. Then, we see them both framed in his gaze, standing nervously by an open door, holding hands, looking frightened and in turmoil (fig. 68).



Figure 67: Team play



Figure 68: Guilty

Fourth, Cacoyannis tells the story elliptically, often cutting from or into a dramatic situation without dwelling on circumstantial detail. This ellipsis we see, for instance, in the sequence around the pretence of the whiskey bottle: Chloe pretends to smash a bottle, in fact, not containing the whiskey, which the family cannot afford. The cut follows immediately after the bottle hits the floor, leaving the viewer to draw his or her own conclusions. And in the cross-cutting between the engagement drama and the maid's drama, as Katerina seeks to cure her son in the mountain clinic, the film displays a use of ellipsis to form a thematic montage. The maid awaits money from Chloe to pay the clinic. Chloe's failure to honour her promise causes the quarrel, which leads to the maid's death. Hence, the shots of the maid waiting, asking at the post office, are crucial to the unfolding of the drama. This significance is conveyed in the way of a repeated montage between Athens and the panic-stricken face of the maid, accompanied by ominous music. Again, a detachment from the significant element serves to emphasise its significance. Throughout, these devices of symbolic summary, detachment, isolation and objectification interrupt the flow of narrative *mise-en-scène* and underline the overall dramatic stakes of each moment.

Fifth, a number of crane and long-distance shots markedly establish camera perspective outside character point of view. There are two dance scenes that are framed by a distant camera, making the dancers appear as a choreographed arrangement. One occurs in the beginning, at the evening when Galanos first courts Chloe. The second occurs towards the end, at the engagement party. In parallel with these distance shots, a number of crane shots are used inside the house. Most markedly, after the maid's death, we see from above the three women sprawled on top of and next to each other (fig. 69). An earlier moment shows the mother, from the top of the stairs, in a sort of spying perspective, which is not shown to be the point of view of any other character (fig. 70).



Figure 69: The tragic locus



Figure 70: Who's there?

The sixth point arises on the level of dialogue. Throughout the dialogue, the words ‘truth’ and ‘lie’ are woven into the story as leitmotifs until the final show-down, in which the maid shouts to the mother that she should tell no more lies. Then, following Chloe’s confrontation with her mother, Chloe claims that the truth is that they are guilty. Additionally, these moments are preceded by the exchange between Galanos and Chloe the day before he leaves, asking her to come with him. As she tells him more than she had intended, she comments that she cannot believe that she is, for the first time, telling the truth. In a less verbal form, the opposition between truth and lies is accentuated by the two scenes late in the film, where Chloe jokingly pretends to be

poor, and where she pretends to Markos to be rich and in love with Dritsas.

Together, these points contribute to a dramatic perspective that shows Chloe to be involved with a sort of objective drama larger than her, a drama in which the terms are, on the one hand, the transgressive act of making an engagement based on lies and, on the other hand, the ethical consequences of lying to/betraying her maid. The long-distance shots, the framing against and between doors and the detachment of the ring and the maid's panic-stricken face all serve to isolate and objectify, hence, spell out, the terms of the drama from a perspective that is not, cannot be, that of any character, that is, one that is not even possibly aligned with or is an externalisation of the protagonist's subjective point of view.

Thematically, this objectivism emphasises the ethical stakes of the drama, which informs my interpretation of the film in the generic framework of modern tragedy. If we seek to determine the function of melodramatic stylistic and dramatic elements in the film, this objective perspective is equally important.

There are, thus, on the other hand, three salient melodramatic elements in *A Matter of Dignity*: the dramatic excess of the maid's death scene, moments of emotive or visual emphasis and sudden peripeties in the plot. The screaming and shouting of the maid's showdown and death are melodramatic in their dramatic over-explicitness. In terms of purely visual emphasis, the visual trope of the staircase, as a locus of significance, is a *cliché* in classical Hollywood melodrama and follows naturally from the dramatic setting common to this film and many American films of the 1940s and 1950s set in large two-storey houses. The sudden appearance of Galanos, the sudden death of the maid, the unexpected turn of events, at the end, when the maid's son regains his faculty of speech as Chloe takes him to Tinos in place of his mother, all these events, which shape the plot, could well feature in a melodrama.

Why, in my own reading, the film is, nevertheless, not a melodrama we see if we return to the category of the ‘ethical image,’ which I introduced in Chapter 2. The ethical image, as defined by Deleuze in relation to Rohmer, serves to present an analytical distance to the film’s alignment with the protagonist. Here, the objectifying perspective serves in a similar way. Hence, the drama of the film is not merely or entirely Chloe’s own; it is not the drama of her choice, her regaining moral conscience. It is the drama, rather, of her grappling with the ethics of lying, and this grappling is not, as in melodrama, only a matter of making choices. It is, most of all, a question of which authority the protagonist shows herself to be responsive to. This ethical question is played on, in the temporal arc of the drama, on the level of Chloe’s dissatisfaction with the lies her loyalties compel her to make.

Thus, what is, instead, theatrical about, for example, the opening credits scene of the film is the powerful manner in which the latter works as an establishing shot. It is a panning shot that glides from the Athenian skyline to the grounds of Chloe’s house and its garden, suggesting, in a very self-referential way, that the city and Chloe’s environment are something more than the locus of the action. They are the setting of our story treated as a stage. It is characteristic of this treatment that location almost establishes its own “agency”: Location is treated, unlike conventional cinematic location, theatrically, as if the immediacy of this stage and its physical demarcation highlight and fetishise it as the location of the drama.

For location to be treated theatrically means also that, in the film, it does not exist solely to describe character, but that character psychology derives from an interaction between the characters, and, thus, action is shown mainly to be the result of an interaction between characters (as the interaction between guests during the film’s early party scene proves or during the outdoor restaurant scene featuring Chloe and

Galanos). The aesthetics of interaction does not, in the way of subjective point of view or alignment with the principal characters, refer the action to one character and his or her thoughts.

This brings us to an additional characteristic of theatricality. In melodrama, we find a focus on an individual character's personality and his or her own magnified drama, hence any effects of theatricality are associated with the predicament of this individual character and are, therefore, presented in partial isolation from the overall structure of the drama. In the modern tragedy of *A Matter of Dignity*, by contrast, we can never isolate Chloe's ethical dilemmas, concerning truth and lying, from the structure of the drama as a whole.

Furthermore, the dependency of the individual character upon the structure of the drama is expressed, as I showed in my analyses, through a kind of passivity or indecision on the part of the heroine. This passivity leads, in terms of the story, to a sort of narrative opacity and, even, narrative unfulfillment. Going back to the Acropolis scene, for example, we see that, apart from being a carefully staged scene (chosen for its romantic connotations, taking place at dawn amidst the melancholic ruins of old Athens), it is not melodramatic because, despite being a scene that is significantly important to the progress of the film's plot – Dritsas finally gets his chance with Chloe, and Chloe commits her first mistake in allowing the courting of Dritsas – it is understated. It is understated in the sense that it does not strive to establish a mood, and, through this resistance, the scene's overall effect eludes our grasp. What keeps the scene's mood from arriving at completion is a way in which characters do not easily fit into the physical setting, which is simply too imposing for them and their personal concerns. Unlike melodrama, considered as a sense making system, characters, here, look detached, mysterious, confused, simultaneously at odds with and in harmony with

their surroundings. Any elements of narrative and aesthetic control of the image (the integration of all elements of *mise-en-scène* in terms of the characters), which in melodrama serve the purpose of illustrating the characters' feelings, motivating and explaining their actions, here, serve the different drama and the different aesthetic of theatricality. This style of theatricality lacks the psychological staginess of melodrama by not giving ground for how the characters act and feel; ultimately, it contributes, as I argue, to a narrative unfulfillment or opacity in the rendering of the heroine in this film. Any elements of aesthetisation, stylisation, calculation or excess, which are used in the construction of theatricality's staginess, are never meticulously mobilised to render an atmosphere or psychological mood. Chloe's face is often blank; she seems lost in her own thoughts, hence we cannot read her.

What we have, instead, is a sense of suspension – just as with Stella's indecision whether to marry or not. For example, when Chloe gives in to Dritsas' advances at the end of their evening, it is both with a sense of will and a hint of unavailability; her expression is caught between recognising the mistake she is about to commit, and, at the same time, waiting for it. Chloe is "suspended" between watching herself doing something she regrets and, simultaneously, consciously choosing that very thing. Dritsas, on the other hand, is both the source of pressure for Chloe (he pursued her for years) and the innocent, surprised "victim" of her schemes. (She ignored him for years.) Suspension involves the concepts of apathy and "fate" mentioned earlier. To be suspended means that characters are trapped between inadequate solutions; options do not offer them clear-cut resolutions, and the choices the characters end up making do not necessarily express their subjectivity. Thus, Chloe, in her courtship with Dritsas, does not appear to be apprehensive of the fact that the secret of the family's misfortune and their poverty should eventually be discovered by him and by others, as it would be

bound to happen if she were to marry him. She does not, in other words, seem concerned with the truth and with the future. Instead, she acts as if in trance or in a state of suspension, entirely absorbed in the present tense of parties, flirtation and confusion – just as Stella does during her dancing/trance scene with the young man. This immersion in the present expresses, one may think, an underlying sadness, on her part, for being constrained, or for thinking that she is compelled to marry this man that she does not love.

As I mentioned previously in reference to *A Girl in Black*, on the level of visual narration, suspension takes the form of an interruption or stasis of the natural flow of action and reaction. Because we do not read the characters, the drama becomes slow. Dramatic action lacks a purposeful forward-moving flow, in the sense that this is not the focus of the film; its drama is concerned with providing obstacles instead of solutions. In *A Girl in Black*, stasis is visualised very directly in the poses of the female protagonist, as she moves slowly along the corridors of the family home, stands sobbing in corners and takes long time to answer questions, speaking only with difficulty. Her static persona expresses a situation of suspension within the drama: Harassed by the men of the island and by her own family, she does not strike back; she patiently receives their attacks, storing them inside herself.

Under theatricality, working alongside the non-psychological aspect of the characters, is what I have called an element of performance. Performance refers both to how the characters simply act in terms of their social role, which is often exaggerated and rendered as a type, and how they are not easily readable because they are in essence “performing.” For the role to be exaggerated means that the characters are, both, always devoid of a clear inner reference point and appear to act in excess of themselves and their intentions. Stella’s excess consists in acting the artist, the independent woman, to

the extent that she exaggerates her role: She crosses a line and dies for it. In her effort to perform the role of the artist and of a modern woman, we are, in the end, unaware of who she really is, and her excess, on the level of performance, turns into a lack on the level of identity. This is not to say that something is lacking from her character, but that this is an aesthetic in which all we have is the performance, that is, the real identity that lurks behind is partly obscured. Her death is not so much a choice expressing a conviction but a development to which she is led through a succession of events in the drama. Chloe, similarly, acts the rich girl until she realises that she is unable to go through with her wedding plans. Then, she takes up another life stance, that of tradition, again, going beyond the parameters of her apparent social role. Again, we remain unaware of who the protagonist really is.

This social performativity of Chloe is embedded within a mode of social commentary in the first scenes of the film, which depict the family home as a place where upper-class couples meet. The film, here, parodies hypocrisy in speech, rendering the high pitched tone of upper-class female conversation of that time. At one point, the film switches abruptly in register, from this kind of polite chatter to a rapid, low voice and down to earth exchange between family members, once the guests have gone. Chloe and her friends are seen showing off their cosmopolitan breeding as they use foreign terms like '*au revoir*.' In these moments of social commentary, the film shows an element of hypocrisy in the way the family performs their class on a par with other members of that class, yet, as we come to realise that their position in that class is threatened, this kind of performance, and the high pitched tone that expresses it, take on a shrill note of false pretention.

In Cacoyannis' early films, performance, as I showed in *Stella*, does not only serve to express dramatic conflict or to render emotion, but, just as often, it stands in the

way of or replaces a direct expression of feelings and motives. In the interpretation of *A Matter of Dignity*, too, performance concerns the heart of my argument, the genre of modern tragedy. Performance, in modern tragedy, has the function of presenting the main character so that she does not express her own self and, more importantly, her own feelings directly or transparently (as in melodrama).

Where performance and the non-psychological (void) nature of the characters meet, we come, paradoxically, to a notion of 'subjectivity.' The void insures that, when catastrophe strikes, the characters are unable to fall back upon a conscious self or an individual choice. Subjectivity, hence, is doomed not to express its own nature but to represent something beyond itself: The self of emotion, motivation, desire, intention remains obscure in the characters' performative opacity. We move from one moment to the next, and all we have is the situation that suspends the character and, then, the character's performance. The agency of choice that, in both tragedy and melodrama, refers to an underlying continuous self of motivation, now appears, from nowhere, slightly detached from what we know about the character but also at one remove from the character's own resources. Hence, choice involves a subject that finds the power of its agency beyond itself, beyond its past experience. In *A Matter of Dignity*, this Other beyond itself is tradition. The ideas of performance and void entail that this tradition is not just another option, another role to choose, as in a melodramatic scenario, because this Other beyond itself concerns the very status of the subject and is not just presented to it as something it might undertake. In modern tragedy, there is, thus, no underlying continuous subject that would be able to think through its options. Instead of such a subject of consciousness, accompanying a continuous self made of feelings, modern tragedy presents a subject of ethical awareness that is directly born from the dramatic conflict.

After the maid's death, Chloe is compelled to take up a new stance of reflection in relation to her past actions, her moral values and the secluded moral and psychological world of her family. The break in her life produced by this event, thus, situates her in a position where she cannot rely on her past values. This is a situation in which she cannot avoid being aware of the wider ethical implications of her actions. This awareness is not conducive to new values or moral actions that would redeem the past or resolve a problem or absorb a problem within a pre-existing system of moral beliefs. This is a subject of knowledge and of acute ethical awareness that emerges directly from the tragic nature of the events within the drama.⁶⁷ After the tragic event, even if Chloe does not identify with her forced choice of a return to tradition, she doesn't seem able to go back to her past life. Again, Pippin describes this, in his discussion on film-noir, as such:

One *cannot* now act in complete indifference to how one's fate has been altered, where "cannot" in this one of its many fatalistic senses means that such indifference would make no sense in one's life. The depth of the feeling is such that one could not recognize oneself in any such picture of indifference and so cannot act indifferently. (30)

With regard to melodrama and, hence, more specifically, the idea of the 'moral occult,' which I referred to in Chapter 2, modern tragedy is not a generic form that grants compensation. The cultural value of the drama is not that of a lack of moral significance that is compensated by a heightened drama, by a dramatization of everyday problems. The fundamental aesthetic and ontological premise of modern tragedy is the opposite of compensation; it is the premise that the drama is real, that the ethical problem that it opens up for the subject and that the subject has to respond to is not a projection of the subject's needs and inner conflicts. It responds to this reality, first, through a mode of fake tragedy and stasis – the inability to act within the given

⁶⁷ Alan Stanbrook writes that "[i]t takes the intrusion of tragedy into her life to awaken Chloe to her mother's avarice" (18).

parameters – and, then, when the situation changes through an external tragic event, the heroine responds to her situation and the ethical stakes of that situation through reflection and confrontation. She acts in a way that implies that she confronts herself with the ethical problem, and she directly confronts those who are bearers of normative authority: in *A Girl in Black*, the men of the island, in the case of *A Matter of Dignity*, the mother.

Conclusion

I set out to interpret the motivations and agency of the heroines in three early films by Michael Cacoyannis: *Stella*, *A Girl in Black* and *A Matter of Dignity*. I wanted to situate the interpretation of the protagonists within the dramatic form characteristic of each film and establish the relationship, in each case, between this dramatic form and melodrama, although this problem came sharply into focus only in the third film, *A Matter of Dignity*. I also intended to discuss the ethical stakes of action in each film and discuss these ethical implications of the drama in the context of a theory of modernity taken from Hegel and a range of other philosophers and literary theorists from the 20th century.

This enquiry has resulted in two separate but related findings: one concerning dramatic form and one concerning agency. The interpretation of the dramatic form, in each of the films, showed that they all exhibit an intricate but intrinsic relationship between dramatic perspective, plot development and character motivation, such that the protagonist's agency comes to appear both embedded in her evolving relations with other characters and, at the same time, to crystallise in response to external normative authorities (in the two latter films, tied to a tragic event).

The interpretation of the protagonists' agency as it unfolds in the course of the drama, marking the drama's end, in *Stella*, or in response to a tragic event, in *A Girl in Black* and *A Matter of Dignity*, exposed a problematic subjective stance, the stance of a subject that appears endowed with agency only at the point of its own self-limitation. This act of self-limitation, in turn, retains an opacity and ambivalence, in each of the films, as it appears both to be chosen by the heroine and to be imposed on her by external events or normative authorities, at least in the sense that we must assume that

she has chosen to acknowledge the external event to be significant or to take the ethical archaic authority to exercise a binding command. For nowhere are we given to understand that these heroines move within a fated universe, the universe of tragedy, where they would not themselves – according to the Hegelian interpretation of ancient Greek tragedy, which I use as comparison – be able to question the normative authority of the norms they endorse. In these films, we see protagonists for whom no desire, norm or course of action seems self-evident or unproblematic. In their doubts and hesitations, they manifest a reflective distance to the norms they have to choose from, but this reflective distance does not itself appear a sufficient ground of motivation or agency. This agency, on the other hand, is triggered, *in extremis*, when options are running out and the protagonist has to choose not only in terms of her own desires and preferences but in terms of what has impressed itself upon her within the drama as an external and binding norm.

The term ‘modern tragedy’ encompasses and describes both of these parts of the enquiry: the interpretation of dramatic form, as well as the interpretation of problematic agency. The term is almost an oxymoron and describes a set of tensions, both on the level of dramatic form and on the level of subjectivity. The dramatic form is neither fully nor subjectively aligned with the protagonist’s point of view, hence it attunes the viewer to the notion that her dilemmas are played out on a stage larger than her own mind. The drama is never closed in its plot development in the way of precluding choice. Hence, the form circumscribes a middle ground between psychological subjectivity and an objective, already fated universe. This notion of a middle ground, where elements of objectivity and elements of modern subjectivity come to set limits to each other, is even more salient on the level of agency: Here, I found that the heroines are tragic to the extent that they can never appear fully autonomous and modern, to the

extent that they can never take any norm for granted. The new stance of subjectivity and agency that these heroines display and which emerges in the context of a tragic event, involves an ambivalence that concerns both freedom and modernity. In so far as this new stance emerges from the heroines' acts of confrontation and reflection, it implies a modern, i.e., reflective, stance in relation to external normative authority. The use of Hegelian vocabulary, in the thesis, partly has served to spell out this point. On the other hand, however, in so far as this stance also seems to tie the heroines to their circumstances and, thus, to obliterate any sense that they could make choices that are entirely free or entirely subjective, this stance also involves, as I have argued, a tragic self-awareness, in each of them, of the limitations of their own agency.

A further development of this thesis could be to look at other Greek international *auteur* filmmakers, such as John Cassavetes, Costa-Gavras and Elia Kazan, to see if we would find, in some of their films, a similar dramatic form and a similar problem of mitigated tragedy or self-limiting autonomy.

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