



Alice's Academy

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When History Becomes a Story: Loty Petrovits-Andrutsopulou's *The She-Wolf's Kiss*

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Editor's Introduction:

In "When History Becomes a Story: Loty Petrovits-Andrutsopulou's *The She-Wolf's Kiss*," Konstantinos D. Malafantis offers a generic consideration of a Greek novel that metafictionally considers the role of both the Nazi occupation of Greece during the second world war and its seven-year military dictatorship of 1967-1974. Malafantis explores Petrovits-Andrutsopulou's narrative structures that intertextually blend historical, fictional, and generational perspectives to make sense of both national and family histories, bringing to light the complex relationships between literature, history, and culture. Malafantis dextrously follows multiple threads from both *The She-Wolf's Kiss* and Petrovits-Andrutsopulou's larger literary corpus, revealing the many layers of meaning employed by this truly masterful writer.

The relationship between literature and history, that is, the association of "mimetic genres" (e.g. fiction) with "non-fiction genres" (e.g. history, biography), has become the focus of interest of philologists, theoreticians of literature, and historians. The distinction between "fiction" and "history" corresponds with Plato's division (in *Ion* and *The Republic*) between "mimesis" ("imitation", "representation," "enactment") and "diegesis" ("narrative," "narration"), as well as with Aristotle's interpretation which somewhat neutralized this contrast by making pure narrative ("diegesis") and direct representation ("mimesis") two varieties of mimesis (*Poetics*) (Halliwell; Genette, *Palimpsests* 163). The main difference between the two kinds of genres is that the "non-fiction genres" obligate the writer to narrate real facts and obtain a more objective speech through "pure narrative," which is more distant than "imitation" as it says less, and in a more mediated way (Genette, *Palimpsests* 163). On the contrary, "the mimetic contract" enables the novelist to reconstruct the historic events as the writing of fiction is a "playful pretense", and corresponds to pretend-statements (Searle 324-325).

This kind of intervention is evident not only in speech but, even more, in the plot, as facts and heroes are invented and interweaved into fantastic "intrigue". In contrast to the historian, the novelist produces a well-constructed text, with all the advantages of a work of literature (Daniel). Thus, the historic events are presented in association with fictitious persons or fictitious narrative events. In fiction, the writer intervenes in historic events through the plot. In this way, events are not simply narrated or reenacted, but are also reconstructed, re-conceptualized and integrated into the writer's mythic universe.

The creative reconstruction of history is utterly indispensable in literature for children and adolescents; not only events of global and national history are illuminated but also the critical thought of young



readers concerning the historic events is promoted. Although the events, the adventures and the protagonists in a novel with historic references could be fictitious, the world into which they are assigned is real because the historic novel is consistent with life in the past and the era with which it deals (Butterfield 50). Frequently, the authors of historic novels refer to concrete historic periods of a nation, to hostilities between neighboring countries, and to their disastrous consequences upon humans.

Greek author Loty Petrovits-Andrutsopoulou, well-known for her intense activity in developing children's literature and her rich work, belongs to that generation of children's literature writers, such as Alki Zei, Georges Sari, Manos Kontoleon, and Aggeliki Varela, who contributed both to the resumption of the topics of Greek children's book and to the use of more complex narrative techniques since the 1970s. Greek children's literature at that period penetrated into social space hoping to confront current problems which preoccupied children of the contemporary era. The approach of the topics follows an unadorned language familiar to the young readers without the ideological loading and the didactic treatment of the works that were published by the end of 19th century and the beginning of 20th from writers such as George Vizyinos, Leon Melas, and Penelope Delta.

In this renovating framework, Petrovits-Andrutsopoulou uses elements from modern Greek history in connection with elements of contemporary life. In her novels, the relationship between history and literature is particularly close, with references to wars which have taken place in Greece or worldwide. Petrovits-Andrutsopoulou confronts history as "literary artifact" (White 199), with the intention to elevate the historic events through "fantastic reconstruction" and at the same time to depict her contemporary reality (Ricoeur 59). The author focuses on fictitious characters, which usually interact with one or more well-known historic personalities. In a real geographical environment, she describes the consequences of a chain of real events in the character's life.

Such a relationship between history and literature is observed in Petrovits-Andrutsopoulou's novel *The She-Wolf's Kiss* (2016). The writer holds a peculiarly significant position in Greek Children's Literature as she has contributed with her stories for children and adolescents to the evolution and renewal of literary topics and narrative techniques. Petrovits-Andrutsopoulou served as Secretary General of the Circle of the Greek Children's Book branch of IBBY from 1984 till 1990 and President of the same branch for the period 2000-2008 has been honored with many awards and distinctions for her contribution to children's literature.¹ This prolific and widely acknowledged writer creates one more reading for children and adolescents in which her artful ability to converse with historic material transpires through an elaborate inter-textual and narrative web.

According to the well-known and award-winning writer of Greek children's literature Manos Kontoleon,

Petrovits has created her own literary world –not a fantastic but a realistic one with historic roots. [...] as the author observes the life and the adventures of her heroes, she describes the Greek history almost since the beginning of the Greek state [1830]. In this way, we have an interesting conjunction between social and historic novel. [...] Loty Petrovits-Andrutsopoulou is the most interesting (and maybe the most significant) delegate of Greek children's literature [and how] it has been formed since the years of political changeover [1974] and forth in Greece.

The She-Wolf's Kiss retains two basic individual features of the writer's work: the precise symmetry and disciplined systematicity in the presentation of the narrative material as well as the reappearance of familiar characters from her earlier books. These characters are now encountered at different ages and in different roles. Thus, the author manages to transform her overall work into a modular narrative of family stories that essentially compose a brief history of Greece itself.

In this novel, the author presents the relationship between a grandfather and his twelve-year-old grandson – a familiar theme in Petrovits-Andrutsopoulou's work. The dialogue between these two

¹ Loty Petrovits-Andrutsopoulou has been honored with awards and distinctions by the Women's Literary Team, the Circle of the Greek Children's Book, the Academy of Athens, the University of Padova, etc. She is correspondent of I.B.B.Y.'s journal *Bookbird* since 1982, sending articles, presenting Greek writers and constantly informing the international audience about Greek seminars, conferences, awards, etc. Moreover, from 1981 till 1987, she collaborated with *Phaedrus*, another international journal in the field of children's literature. Recently, she was awarded the title of honorary member of I.B.B.Y. for her contribution.



generations is reflected in the intersection between the two literary genres, namely historic novel (on the grandfather's side) and *Bildungsroman* (on the grandson's side). This relationship is enriched by the life stories which the adult hero narrates to the child. The stories depict historic events which have taken place in Greece, such as the Nazi Occupation (1941-1944), upheaval during December 1944 ("Dekemvriana", i.e., the beginning of the civil war) and the seven-year military dictatorship (1967-1974). Petrovits-Andrutsopoulou has dealt with the issue of World War II and, especially, with the Nazi Occupation in other novels (for example in *Wrong, Mr Neuger!* [1989] and *A Song for Three* ([1996])). As an author for children and adolescents since the early 1970's, she has always considered important to recall her own expectations from a book when she was a child "in those nightmarish years of the Second World War" (Petrovits-Andrutsopoulou, *Children's Literature* 122). With the end of the Nazi Occupation in Greece, a period of armed, anti-guerrilla clashes followed between the Greek Army and the rebel forces of the Democratic Army of Greece (under the control of the Communist Party of Greece), which lasted from March 1946 to August 1949 and resulted in the defeat of the Democratic Army of Greece.

The consequences of Nazi Occupation and the civil war in Greece are depicted in *The She-Wolf's Kiss* through grandfather Peter's stories. He tells grandson Francisco that his "father secretly left for the Middle East when the Nazis invaded Athens [in 1941]. He returned after liberation, but the years after the occupation continued to be very difficult for the family. During the fratricide on December 1944, the capital was steeped in blood, just after its liberation from the Nazis. And when the Greek Civil War was over [in 1949], Petros Digkos' father traveled to Amfipolis in Northern Greece to see what had happened to his land and what he could salvage from it" (67).

The Hellenic Civil War caused severe political instability in the country and led, a few years later, to a seven-year military dictatorship (1967-1974). The author broadens the historic background of her story with references to international historic events, which had similarities with the Greek ones such as the crucial military coups in Chile (1973), Argentina (1976), and Poland (1981) that marked the history of other countries at the same period.

The recounting of grandfather Petros Digkos' life becomes in fact an account of the history of Greece and of the whole world during the past century, starting from the year of Digkos' birth in 1939. The grandfather's narratives join international history with Greek historic events. Grandfather not only narrates his own life, but also naturally teaches a lesson about the interaction between politics and economics within an international context. This narrative brings to mind today's multi-page type of adult literature called *ROMAN-FLEUVE*, like Daniel Mendelsohn's work *The Lost: A Search for Six of Six Million* (2007), in which the author, motivated by the style of his grandfather's narrative, attempts to investigate the conditions of his parents' death as well as the similar tragic fate of the six million victims of the Holocaust:

"Similar divisions, my little boy", [grandfather] said at the end, "one unfortunately finds in other countries, too. With these and that, such hate ends to clashes most of the time. And then arms traders rub their hands. They gather money which could have been used for the benefit of any country and the prosperity of its people. And then there would be no poverty." (*She-Wolf's* 114)

Furthermore, through this narrative, Petrovits-Andrutsopoulou recalls popular heroes from her other works, with the aim of composing a mythical world in which fictional and real events are blended. According to Gérard Genette, the association between the novel *The She-Wolf's Kiss* (hypertext) and earlier novels (hypotext) by the same author forms a palimpsest, namely hypertextuality. Palimpsests suggest layers of writing and Genette's use of the term indicates the existence of literature in "the second degree", its non-original rewriting of what has already been written. Hypertextuality marks, according to Genette, a field of literary works the generic essence of which lies in their relation to previous works:

Above all, hypertextuality, as a category of works, is in itself a generic or, more precisely, transgeneric architext: I mean a category of texts which wholly encompasses certain canonical (though minor) genres such as pastiche, parody, travesty, and which also touches upon other genres – probably all genres. (Genette 8, Allen 107)

In *The She-Wolf's Kiss*, Petrovits-Andrutsopoulou exploits hypertextuality and recalls characters from her previous novels, such as Alexis Neuger (*A Song for Three*, 1996) and Daphne (*Wrong, Mr Neuger!*, 1989), who enjoy their family life with their two children, Olga and Francisco. Daphne's turbulent relationship with her father Petros Digkos, who is absent and distant from the family environment as a



result of his divorce from Olympia, her mother, disturbs the peace and quiet of the family. This relationship will be restored with the intervention of Francisco, who will record his grandfather's life at a later date. Francisco, who becomes the narrator-hero of the novel, turns the story into an autobiographical type of subsequent narrating (Genette 215, Martin 123-126), in which the events have already occurred, and the narrator returns to tell the story:

"I remember it as if it were yesterday! I knocked the bell three times and, almost immediately, the outdoor of the block of flats opened. I walked up stairs two at a time to the second floor... From the half-open door of the small apartment, which had been closed for five whole years, a piece of magnificent music which I adored since my childhood flew to meet me! [...] My grandfather was waiting behind the door ready and dressed for a walk." (9)

This type of narrating is designated directly through metafictional function, that is, through the last chapter which serves as an epilogue: the narrator Francisco Neuger, now an adult, visits the author of the story and asks her to write the story of his grandfather: "Only you will achieve exactly what I want, because only you know me from my childhood, know all my family well. We may not [...] be related either by blood or law but we are more than friends; we are 'relatives in imagination'" (222).

Petrovits-Andrutsopulou's text is metafictional, as it draws attention to its status as an artifact in order to pose questions about the link between fiction and reality. The novel is constructed on a fundamental and sustained opposition: the construction of a fictional illusion and the laying bare of that illusion. In other words, the lowest common denominator of metafiction is to create a fictional world and, at the same time, to make a statement about the creation of that world. These two processes are held together in a formal tension which breaks down the distinctions between "creation" and "criticism", and merges them into the concepts of "interpretation" and "deconstruction". Such writings not only examine the fundamental structures of narrative fiction, but also explore the possible fictionality of the world outside the literary fictional text (Curie; Hutcheon; Waugh). Petrovits-Andrutsopulou employs these processes as the narrator explains how his book came into being:

Next day I read carefully all [Francisco] had written in the copybook that he had left to me. Again, I listened to his recorded narration, I re-read the notes I had taken down, I looked again at the photographs, the newspaper cuttings... And the following morning, I started to write the story just as he himself had told me, but also as his grandfather, Peter, would definitely have preferred: in first person narrative.

At the top of the page, I wrote the title that spontaneously came to my mind: *The She-Wolf's Kiss*. (224-225)

The metafictional function of the novel, aided by a mixture of inter-textual references where a large number of texts, voices or codes coexist, creates a dense material or a palimpsest (Riffaterre, *Fictional Truth* 54). This passage also recalls Michael Riffaterre's assertion that "the text refers not to objects outside of itself, but to an inter-text. The words of the text signify not by referring to things, but by presupposing other texts" (Riffaterre, "Interpretation" 228).

Petrovits-Andrutsopulou's text is offered to the reader as a multi-dimensional place in which an endless inter-textual game takes place. The core of all this verbal and inter-textual game is built on the relationship with the wolf cub Kaly, which is adopted by the grandfather when it is found exposed on Paggaiou mountain in Amphipolis, an ancient city in the area of Macedonia (Greece). The main characters of the story are connected in various ways with the wolf cub Kaly, as their names indicate. Grandfather Petros often hears his favorite musical composition "Peter and the Wolf" by Sergei Prokofiev, in which Petros saves the wolf from the hunters' lethal attacks. Furthermore, the grandfather's name is spelt by mistake "Lygkos" (i.e., lynx) instead of "Digkos" on the list of wanted criminals which was issued during Greece's seven-year dictatorship. This misspelling of this surname will mark the beginning of the grandfather's life misfortunes and will continually keep him apart from his precious daughter, Daphne. The latter becomes suspicious of her father's role in the resistance to the dictatorship (1967-1974) and of his frequent travels to foreign countries as a result of his participation in international organizations for the protection of refugees and immigrants. In addition, Francisco, the name of the grandson, who is a Cub member in the Scouts, brings to mind Saint Francis of Assisi, who preached equality, peace, and love of all God's creatures, animate and inanimate.



Later in his adult life, Francisco will form a relationship with his fellow student Rea Argyraki, whose name recalls Rea Sylvia (Sylvia: Argyro in Greek), the mother of Romulus and Remus, the mythical founders and the first kings of Rome. Moreover, Angelina Lupa, the old, dear fellow-pupil and eventual devoted companion of the grandfather, brings to mind the name of the She-Wolf surrogate mother of the mythical founders of Rome (Lupa):

"All coincidences may finally have their own meaning, Francisco!", he whispered to me as I was inclined next to him. "Did you say that Rea Argyraki was the girl's name? Rea Sylvia, that is Rea Argyro in Greek, was also the name of the priestess, the mother of Romulus and Remus – I guess you remember it. Well, if you get married, my Lupa [Angelina] can help you nurture your children."
(215)

Petrovits-Andrutsopoulou extends the inter-textual game to include in the "repertoire" of the text, as Wolfgang Iser (1978) would say, excerpts from her own fairy tale *The Green Beret Boy and the Angry City*, which is a reversed version of *Kokkinoskoufitsa (Little Red Riding Hood)*. The writer reverses the folk tale of "Little Red Riding Hood" and creates a new hero, Green Beret Boy (Prasinokapelakis). *The Green Beret Boy and the Angry City*, which is in publication, belongs to the category of adaptation from the collection *The Philosopher and the Wolf* (2008) by Mark Rowlands as well as from the *Cry of the Wolf* (1994) by Melvin Burgess. The author also mentions the novel *God's Pauper* (1964) by Nikos Kazantzakis, written about Saint Francis of Assisi. At the same time, several references to literature, myths and legends of other nations about wolves and their importance for humans are mentioned in the text. The inter-textual use of other authors initiates a game of intellectual coexistence of different linguistic, social and cultural codes. The references are linked to the narrator's voice and are fully subjected to the "fonction de régie"; in other words, the narration introduces, adapts, and in the end justifies the use of these references. The links between primary and embedded texts (or primary fabula and embedded fabula) exceed the boundary of maximum intensity as they obscure the plot or put back the solution of the riddle which every story is. The classic example is the story cycle of *The Arabian Nights*, where narration extends at several levels. Scheherazade's primary story is enriched with new stories which cause the necessary delay so that, night after night, the heroine escapes from being put to death by her own husband, the king. The primary fabula of Petrovits-Andrutsopoulou's story, that is, the relationship between grandfather and the She-Wolf Kaly, is embellished not only with a vast variety of myths concerning wolves and their relations with human beings but also with historic or daily events. In this way, two possibilities emerge: the embedded text can explain the primary story, or it may resemble the primary text. In the first case, the relationship is made explicit by the actor narrating the embedded story; in the second case, the explanation is usually left to the reader, or merely hinted at in the fabula (Bal 52-53). These theoretical positions correspond with Roland Barthes' terms "lisible" (readerly) and "scriptible" (writerly). Readerly texts limit interpretations and impose hierarchy on the structure of the text, implying that there is only one way to look at a text and not allowing for multiple, competing interpretations. Writerly texts are self-conscious and resistant to reading. According to Barthes, the aim of literature should be to turn the reader from consumer to a producer of texts (Barthes 3-4). Petrovits-Andrutsopoulou enlarges the linguistic, the acoustic and often the false etymology game of the word "wolf", by associating it with a range of brainwaves which structure, vary, and deepen the narrative text. Thus, the main topic of the book –the relationship between humans and a "wild" animal, which is now a protected species– becomes the base of a multidimensional work.

The author is always playing with the narrative levels in order to actuate readers to pursue the meaning of the text. The construction of meaning consists of a process of naturalization that is based upon what Jonathan Culler (140-160) calls "vraisemblance": the reader naturalizes a text by establishing its relation with "realities" that can be empirical, cultural, and/or literary (Malmgren 53). The structure of the narrative of *The She-Wolf's Kiss* in relation to this inter-textual mixture of references deepens the narration and clearly conveys to the reader the meaning that the exact relationship between man and a wild protected animal is but the catalyst to create a firm narrative world with a variety of additions and references to events, not only of the imagination but mainly of reality. With her narrative and inter-textual findings, the author succeeds in narrating the history of modern Greece in parallel to that of Europe and Latin America, as the grandfather's tales spread geographically from the cotton fields of Macedonia and the secrets of Amphipolis to other countries of the modern world which have suffered violence from autocratic dictatorial regimes.



Amphipolis was an ancient Greek city built in the region of eastern Macedonia. It was founded by the Athenians in 437 B.C., with the aim of controlling the mines of Thrace, and was closely linked to the history of the Kingdom of the Macedonians and especially to its King Philip II, the father of Alexander the Great. Today, this area is a prominent archaeological site that continues to help shed light on the Greece's historic past through the ongoing excavations which are taking place there. The author places the starting-point of her story in Amphipolis, and, from this place, she travels in space and time throughout Greek and global history. Amphipolis, a place of great significance for Greek history, is grandfather's birthplace, where he found Kaly, the newborn cub, at the moment when the She-Wolf mother was dying beaten by a local hunter:

"I bent, I took it carefully in my arms, I caressed it [...] The She-Wolf mother looked at me with gratitude. I bent again, I caressed her own head too... And then she turned and licked my hand with the little strength left in her –or better she kissed it– I felt it as a kiss, for real! "I will take care of it, my lady, I swear!" I whispered. She looked at me for the last time, turned to the side and passed away in my hands." (38)

The she-wolf's kiss obtains symbolic meaning, just like Kaly's presence throughout the text. The reader is called to decode the symbolism and delve deeper into the meanings of the story. Only at the end of the narration does the author reveal, through Francisco's own words, that the She-Wolf has three different meanings: "'Grandfather's She Wolves came to my mind', I whispered to her.

'The real, the allegorical and the symbolic. He loved all of them so much – Kaly, Angelina and Greece'" (219). These varied reports form a network of relationships and emotionally charged meetings and confrontations. The reader observes the encounter of different generations, the reconsideration of family and interpersonal relationships, the confrontation of the elderly grandfather with his past, and the boy's confrontation with the world and family history. The hero present is constantly connected with the historic past and, thus, crucial contemporary problems in both the local and the global level are portrayed. Although superficially simple, it is a deep, multi-level project, a product of mature art.

Loty Petrovits-Andrutsopulou's book, artfully worked with her refined language, the delightful narrative, the dynamic scenes, the substantial dialogues, and the subversive plot, articulates existential problems independent from the specific time-space frameworks and social changes. Most of the essential human matters, from the simplest to the most complicated ones, are dealt with in the book, such as interpersonal and family relationships, dreams for the future, the consequences of war, the dissolving of Democracy, and the devaluation of human rights, values and ideals. The writer captures the deepest urges of the soul, the passion and substance of human life, and thus creates for adolescent and adult readers a work full of introspection and sensitivity. Petrovits-Andrutsopulou succeeds, with her artful narration, to surpass the conventional limits of time and space, the moral and local qualities of a specific society, and to rise from the individual to the universal level, from singular events to the complexity of human life.

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