

The Suicidal of Modern Greek Poet Napoleon Lapathiotis (1888-1944) and the Ancient Greek Mythological Symbol of Narcissus and Rose**

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Abstract:

The poet Napoleon Lapathiotis (October 31, 1888 – January 8, 1944) belongs to the global category of intellectuals who turned their lives into a work of art. Napoleon Lapathiotis, one of the cursed and “ideal suicidal autographs” of modern Greek literature, is considered one of the most important poets of the neo-romantic school of the literary generation of the 1920’s. In this article, the causes that pushed the poet to suicide and the two poetic symbols that the poet adored the mythological face of Narcissus and the rose. Both the narcissus and the rose symbolize the fragile human existence that is doomed to destruction and annihilation. The suicide was finally proved for the poet as an act of freedom and of shaking off any tyrannical bond and imposed exterminating compromise. The sensitive heart of the poet Lapathiotis could not accept the cruel blows of fate. The death of his mother worsened his fragile psychological state and the loneliness he felt in his daily life finally pushed him to commit suicide. He is a charismatic personality with high intelligence and not even time itself or God can destroy him. Lapathiotis can and does teach through his poetry the feeling of love and a deep tenderness in an inhumane world. His poetry constantly emits a complaint about unfulfilled dreams and unrequited repressed feelings.

Keywords: Greek Poet, Napoleon Lapathiotis, Suicide, Narcissus, Rose.

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Introduction

The poet Napoleon Lapathiotis is one of the most important representatives of the neo-romantic school of the literary generation of the 1920's in Greece. The Neo-Romantic poets of the interwar period who wrote in the period 1910-1930 have common characteristics that differentiate them from the earlier poets who appeared after Kostis Palamas. The main representative of this literary generation is the wonderful poet Kostas Karyotakis. Basic characteristics of this literary generation are the following: pessimism, melancholy, a sense of unsatisfied impasse, absence of ideals, mourning for their loss, turning to the interiority of the individual, refuge in daydreaming and escape, contempt for inhumane society. Lapathiotis could never come to terms with a society of people who did not understand his intense and rich mental world, completely alone and isolated he devoted himself to poetry and finally unable to bear this unbearable loneliness he committed suicide. Through his poetry, Lapathiotis teaches the rapid passage of youth that leads directly to decay and ultimately death. The beauty of youth gives way to the curse of old age. In addition to poems, he also wrote over 100 prose pieces, several dozen short stories, as well as pamphlets and critical and aesthetic texts. His work is scattered in magazines and newspapers. His only poetry collection was published in 1939, while after his death, Aris Diktaios published his poems in 1964.

Anxious souls with a bottomless spiritual world and so much loneliness, they went down in history through their writing, and no one knows if they finally shared with us even a small part of their mind and soul. Escape was not a solution, but it might have been redemption. Death, suicide, and literature. Through the different manifestations of art, we see the artists' perspective on death. The same is found in literature. Many poets and writers of both Modern Greek and European literature write about death, how they deal with it, if they fear it, if they reconcile with it and if they accept it. Apart from their great works, there are also cases of writers and poets who for some reason choose how they will end their lives. Most suicidal writers experienced a mental disorder or depression. In the whole spectrum of the so-called literature of despair, suicide holds a prominent place. Whether as the culmination of a heroic conception of things, either as an expression of a life impasse, or as a moral gesture, or even as the ultimate manifestation of an autonomous administration of justice, suicide appears as the supreme act of purification and emotional discharge. Suicidal writers around the world are the people who proclaim that nothing is clear, everything is chaos,

and that human maintains only the insight and accurate knowledge of the tragic walls that surround him¹.

What drives many people of art to commit suicide? More specifically, as far as the great writers are concerned, there are many cases of writers and poets who ended their lives, even at a young age. Most of the suicidal writers were stricken with depression or some kind of mental disorder before committing suicide as several of them had been admitted to psychiatric institutions. But the poems have remained unchanged over time, brilliant evidence of their genius, of their artistic flame. Does coexistence and survival become unbearable for these people in the end, in the cumbersome machine of a world that is built outside their personal measures, outside their own sphere of view of things? It is very possible. These suicidal writers represent all the tragedy of the human race, embody the drama of Sisyphus whom the Gods had condemned to push a rock incessantly and eternally, and thus live a meaningless life.

The Life of the Poet

Napoleon Lapathiotis was born in Athens on October 31, 1888. His father, Leonidas Lapathiotis (1854-1942), of Cypriot descent, was a mathematician and senior military man, who served as a Parliament Member in 1903-1905 and became Minister of Defense in 1909. His mother, Vasiliki Papadopoulou, was the niece of Charilaos Trikoupis. Lapathiotis started writing poems as a child. He officially appeared in letters in 1905, in the magazine *Noumas* with the poem *Ecstasy*. In 1907, together with nine other young writers, they founded the magazine *Igiso*². He studied at the University of Athens where in 1909 he received a

¹ Albert Camus, *O Mythos tou Sisyfou, Dokimio gis to Paralogo*, (Athina: Ekdoseis Kastanioti, 2007), 163.

² "Igiso" was an ancient Athenian, a virgin daughter of Proxenos who went down in history known for her relief on a tombstone of special beauty and aesthetics found in Kerameikos in Athens. The tombstone is on display at the National Archaeological Museum in Athens. One of the oldest literary magazines in Greece was published under the name Igiso. The monthly literary magazine Igiso was founded and began to be published in Athens in 1907, publishing exclusively poetry. This magazine was published by a group of young writers of the time. The first issue was published in May of that year, and the last in February 1908. The founders of the magazine were Fotos Politis, G. N. Politis, Costas Varnalis, Leandros Palamas, D. Evangelidis (Mitsis Kalamas), N. Karvounis, L. Koumarianos, Napoleon Lapathiotis, Romos Filiras, and N. Hatzaras. Also contributors to the magazine were Ioannis Gryparis, Giannis Vlachogiannis, Lambros Porphyras, Paulos Nirvanas, Rigas Golfis,

law degree, but never practiced the profession. He lived for more than 40 years in his family's two-story neoclassical building in Athens. There he wrote most of his poetic work but also there he committed suicide on the night of January 7 to 8, 1944 at the age of 56, poor and exhausted from drugs. His funeral was funded by his friends and the literary magazine of Nea Estia. In addition to poems, he also wrote over 100 prose, dozens of short stories and reviews and texts. His work is scattered in magazines and newspapers. His only poetry collection was published in 1939, while after his death, Aris Diktaios published his poems in 1964³.

In the history of Modern Greek Literature, Napoleon Lapathiotis has been classified exclusively as a poet, and in fact of low voice according to the eloquent assertion of Manolis Anagnostakis⁴. Napoleon Lapathiotis belongs to the group of poets who were born in the last decade of the 19th century or even shortly before and appeared in the literary life of Greece in the 1910's under the name Generation 1920. These Neo-Romantic-Neo-Symbolist poets of the interwar period who wrote between 1910-1930 they have common features with the Athenian romantic poets. Indicatively, we should mention that poets such as Kostas Karyotakis (1896-1928), Kostas Ouranis (1880-1953), Napoleon Lapathiotis (1888-1943), Tellos Agras (1899-1944), Romos Fyliras (1889 - 1942), Fotos Giofyllis (1887-1981), Mitsos Papanikolaou (1900-1943) and Maria Polydouri (1902-1930) turned their attention more to the inner world, their lives had been stripped of ideals and themselves mourned this loss. The main characteristics of the so-called generation of 1920 are lyricism, the sense of bitterness for the loss of ideals⁵. For all these poets, the life they had to live had been stripped of ideals and their role was to precisely mourn this loss. In this way, they either confirm the existence of such ideals in an elusive transcendental sphere or contemptuously accuse the society that ended them with its destructive pettiness⁶. These poets convey in their lyrics the surrounding atmosphere of dissolution and

Aristos Kampanis, etc. This magazine published exclusive poems, and its publication had provoked favorable criticism from not only Greek but also foreign writers.

³ Giorgos Balourdos, "Napoleon Lapathiotis - O Chronos kai Thanatos," *Odos Panos* 79-80 (Maïos-Augoustos 1995): 58-68.

⁴ Manolis Anagnostakis, *I Chamili Foni. Ta Lyrika mias Perasmenis Epochis stous Palious Rythmous. Mia Prosopiki Anthologia tou Manoli Anagnostaki*, (Athina: Ekdoseis Nefeli, 1990), 22.

⁵ Euripidis Garantoudis, "I Poiisi tou K.G.Karyotaki," in *Grammata II: Neoelliniki Filologia (19os & 20os aionas)*, (Patra: Egcheiridio Meletis, Elliniko Anoichto Panepistimio, 2008), 320.

⁶ Roderick Beaton, *Eisagogi stin Neoteri Elliniki Logotechnia*, (Athina: Ekdoseis Nefeli, 1996), 109.

pessimism, despair, and disbelief as well as a general feeling of fatigue from life⁷.

The poets of Lapathiotis' generation are confronted through their poems with the human fate that is, after all, the main material of their inspiration:

*"The subject of each poem is not a specific event but the human fate. The only freedom that the poet has is the choice from this material to express his relationship with the world that is always the same: it is a feeling of disharmony with the world and things, a taste of cutting off from an ideal balance, more precisely for the desire to eliminate a disharmony. All poems - optimistic or pessimistic - are aimed at satisfying this desire"*⁸.

Aestheticism was also one of those literary movements that had a great influence on Lapathiotis who was an ardent lover of the Beauty. Aestheticism has as its main axiom the conception of beauty, which is traced to an absolute and unique ideal of life, to a supreme value higher than any other. The value of the work lies in its beauty and the Aestheticism pleasure it offers, regardless of its moral usefulness⁹. Greek "esthetes" declare, like the Europeans, beauty as the supreme ideal and insist on the cultivation of form. Their art becomes an obsession, and they serve it completely devoted to it. In fact, their lives copy their art. They are elite people of spirit, aware of their pioneering work and value¹⁰. Lapathiotis, according to Stergiopoulos,

*"was particularly associated with the cursed poets of French symbolism and English aesthetics such as Poe. But the one who had a dazzling effect on Lapathiotis' life and art was Oscar Wilde, the demonic author of Dorian Gray's Portrait"*¹¹.

⁷ Kostas Stergiopoulos, *I Elliniki Poiisi - I Ananeomeni Paradosi*, (Athina: Ekdoseis Sokolis, 1980), 123.

⁸ Nasos Vagenas, *I Esthita tis Theas, Simeioseis gia tin Poiisi kai tin Kritiki*, (Athina: Ekdoseis Stigmi, 1988), 21-22.

⁹ Tzina Kalogirou, "I Zoi os Techni," *Diavazo*, Teuchos 349, (Athina 1995): 95-96.

¹⁰ Agathi Georgiadou, *I Poiitiki Peripeiteia. Mia Peridiavasi sti Neoelliniki Poiisi mesa apo tous Kyrioterous Stathmous kai ta Logotechnika Reumata*, (Athina: Ekdoseis Metaichmio, 2005), 156.

¹¹ Kostas Stergiopoulos, "Enas Athinaios Ntorian Grey, o Napoleon Lapathiotis kai I Poiisi tou," *Nea Estia*, Teuchos 881, (Athina 1964): 145.

Napoleon Lapathiotis committed suicide at his home with the pistol of his father, who was in the military and died at the beginning of the German Occupation (1942), about four years after the poet's mother (1937), leaving him thus orphaned and financially unprotected. The bitter truth was that Lapathiotis never managed to become independent from his parents. The death of his mother, when the poet was in his fifties, caused him so much despair and embarrassment that for some time he was seriously concerned with the idea of suicide¹².

The almost daily nights out and the long-term use of drugs have really exhausted him. The sale of the property of his dead parents and his rich library begins¹³. Extremely revealing are his own words about the degradation of his life:

“And my life goes on. I confess that I am tired, sad, frustrated, not that I had created many dreams that it scattered or denied: I was always conservative, and my chimeras were limited. Nor did I ever have ambitions, which I could not satisfy. They did not even have ambitions. I asked only for peace, quiet life, contemplation. And these, I can almost say that I managed. And I'm sure that some good people, confronting my life like this, would probably have the foolish naivety to think of me as very happy and 'privileged' who knows! This is how things look from the outside. And yet I am tired! 'And my life goes on'”¹⁴.

Lapathiotis struggles every day to conquer the space of a lost harmony that is the permanent object of nostalgia of every person:

“The value of a poem is measured by the degree to which it is able to distract us from what we believe we are and lead us to this lost area of harmony. Like the religious experience, the poetic experience is a cut from ourselves that allows us to unite more deeply with ourselves”¹⁵.

¹² Petros Chartokollis, *Idanikoi Autocheires, Ellines Logotechnes pou Autoktonisan*, (Athina: Ekdoseis Vivliopoleion tis Estias, 2003), 74.

¹³ Napoleon Lapathiotis, *Poimata-Apanta ta Eurethenta*, Eisagogi-Filologiki Epimeleia Giannis Pappas me ti Synergasia tis Marias Fotiou, (Athina: Ekdoseis Taksideutis, 2015), 37.

¹⁴ Napoleon Lapathiotis, *I Zoi mou, Apopeira Synoptikis Autoviografias*, Filologiki Epimeleia Giannis Papakostas, Ekdoseis Stigmi, (Athina: 1986), 153-157.

¹⁵ Nasos Vagenas, *I Esthita tis Theas, Simeioseis gia tin Poiisi kai tin Kritiki*, (Athina: Ekdoseis Stigmi, 1988), 49-50.

The well-known writer Paulos Nirvanas likens Lapathiotis to the ancient teenager Antinous who committed suicide never to grow up and not lose the beauty of his youth. Lapathiotis impressed his surroundings with his external presence and his behaviour. The poet and critic of the time Kleon Paraschos writes characteristically:

“The poet Lapathiotis embodies the image of the beautiful, young, elegant man in a very convincing way. And with what pride, with what coquettishness, with how much pleasure he attracted attention. Every night he walked on Stadiou Street in Athens in his black hat, in his middle coat, with a fancy flower in his boutonniere. He was a strange figure but also highly poetic and aesthetic, with skin as thin as a woman and blue eyes”¹⁶.

His childhood friend Takis Papatsonis confesses that Lapathiotis radiates an inexhaustible spiritual beauty and does not hesitate to compare him with the ancient Greek god Apollo: *“The charm exerted by his literary and secular appearances in the world, were catalytic. It is as if the young Apollo reincarnated and came to walk among us”¹⁷.*

The famous Cavafy’s scholar Timos Malanos obtained the following wonderful image of Lapathiotis:

“Out of a thousand, ten thousand Napoleon Lapathiotis stood out. He stood out with his manners, with his brevity, with his speech. Like another Alcibiades, he liked to get people’s attention and comment”¹⁸.

Lapathiotis never stops expressing his deep despair for his physical and mental humiliation, his deep despair now looking forward to death as a redemption that would give him his old youthful beautiful self:

“And I will be gone my God leaving this meaningless and horrible and terrible thing, the torn and bloody thing that I might never have been. But I will be an escape from it, I will be an escape from everything and from me and I will have become the One I was first, the big one I was first. I wait for it overnight and every day to come I

¹⁶ Kleon Paraschos, “Napoleon Lapathiotis,” *Nea Estia* 35 (398), (1994): 91.

¹⁷ Takis Papatsonis, “O Lapathiotis: Metaioro kai Skia,” *Nea Estia* 35 (398), (1994): 89.

¹⁸ Timos Malanos, *Anamniseis enos Aleksandrinou*, (Athina: Ekdoseis Mpoukoumani, 1971), 234-236.

feel this as a terrible end, an end that might be a Brilliant and Unimaginable Beginning!"¹⁹.

In the years after the loss of his mother, the poet often thought of death as something that would solve his existential problem:

"What completely despairs me is that I have spent almost my whole life, without being able, even for a moment, neither to adapt to it, nor to tolerate it, nor to explain it, nor to justify it. Something separates me from it irreparably. And so I constantly feel like a huge dissonance, within a whole, that others may find excellent and harmonious. (...) Does the same happen to other beings, from those around me? I can not even know that. Maybe, in my physique, there is something left unfilled, - and this something, the undefined is the whole cause of evil... However, as long as I live, in this horrible and deadly thing I see no trace of cure. Only death, as I reckon, will free me from it once and for all"²⁰.

Death as something threatening has become his obsession, an idea that he can not get out of his mind and haunts him at every step:

"There are times, especially when I wake up, that my mind reaches such views about life and death - moments of dizziness, terror, despair that far exceed the limits of tolerance and endurance of the soul - and I wonder with which strength to be able to maintain my balance in this daily life. These moments must have led me to suicide or, at least, to insanity. What we call death is something much bigger, the infinity. It is something the Most Apocalyptic, the Countless and the Amazing, the radically Different that is impossible to comprehend and imagine with our human intellect"²¹.

The writer Alkis Aggeloglou, who visited the poet in his paternal home shortly before his suicide, states characteristically: *"His dysthymia was infinite, the words he uttered here and there by force dripped bitterly unbearably. To the point Lapathiotis had reached he could no longer live"*²². The idea of death from threat becomes redemption, a redemption from the

¹⁹ Giannis Kairofyllas, *Autoi oi Oraioi Trelloi*, (Athina: Ekdoseis Filippotis, 1986), 183-220.

²⁰ Aris Diktaios, *Napoleon Lapathiotis (I Zoi tou kai to Ergo tou)*, (Athina: Ekdoseis Gnosi, 1984), 78-79.

²¹ Tasos Korfis, "O Napoleon Lapathiotis mesa apo to Anekdotο Prosopiko Imerologio," *Nea Estia* 115 (1362), (1984): 432-433.

²² Kleon Paraschos, "Mnima Lapathioti," *Nea Estia*, 75 (881), (1964): 352-358.

mental and physical collapse to which he was led by the liberated life he led²³.

One of the main characteristics that distinguished Lapathiotis from his youth was the feeling of coquettishness and narcissism. The idea of the wear and tear of time and old age was something that frightened the poet, something that haunted his mind, and he could neither conceive nor accept. Remarkable are the words of Tellos Agra on this subject:

*“Lapathiotis was at war with Time. What else did he want? Stop him. The old man Lapathiotis? Who could have imagined that? Even less himself. Everything else could be done by art. But he did not know the art of old age”*²⁴.

Lapathiotis’ suicide is a cornerstone of his poetic art since in it (suicide) all his lessons about the aesthetics of life are realized. Lapathiotis aimed with his suicide to return to reality, thus satisfying his unbridled narcissism²⁵.

The Poet’s Love for the Mythology of Ancient Greece

It should be noted that Lapathiotis was a lover of the ancient Greek literature and especially of the mythical hero Narcissus. The mythical figure of Narcissus fascinates Lapathiotis and thus dedicates a poem to him entitled *Narcissus*, which we will analyse later. But let us see in detail who Narcissus was in ancient Greek mythology. One of the most characteristic figures in Ancient Greek Mythology was Narcissus. Narcissus, who was one of the most characteristic figures in the Ancient Greek Mythology, was the son of the Nymph Ourania and the river Kifissos, thanks to whom many traditions and myths developed.

Some important traditions are as follows:

- One day while sitting near a spring, the beautiful Narcissus saw his face in the waters of the spring. He was fascinated by his image reflected in the water and wanted to

²³ Petros Chartokollis, *Idanikoi Autocheires, Ellines Logotechnes pou Autoktonisan*, (Athina: Ekdoseis Vivliopoleion tis Estias, 2003), 90.

²⁴ Tellos Agras, “Ergon Technis,” *Nea Estia*, 35 (398), (1994): 97-99.

²⁵ Marios Vaianos, “Enas Thanatos. Mia Pikri kai Thliveri Istoria,” *Nea Synora*, Teuchos 7, (Ioulios-Septemvrios 1970): 92.

capture it by dipping his hand in the water. But because despite his efforts he did not succeed, he remained in this position, admiring himself until he withered and died. In that place after a while the homonymous flower sprouted as a symbol of the decay of youth and the chthonic deities.

- Narcissus, indifferent to love for him, of the also handsome young man Ameinia, eventually became the moral perpetrator in the suicide of the second. Nemesis then decided to punish him severely with the same passion, inciting him to see his image in the spring water and fall in love with it so much that he died from his unsatisfied love for himself.

- But the best known and most widespread tradition about Narcissus was the following due to Ovid (in his work "Metamorphoses" III 342). One-day Echo saw Narcissus wandering in the woods and began to follow him. Narcissus, who was hunting deer, heard a noise and turned to look at her. He shouted at her to approach him, but when Echo approached him, he pushed her away. Echo, unhappy about her unfulfilled love and Narcissus' behaviour, cried incessantly. Narcissus continued to cross the forest, until he found a lake on a glade and stopped. When he leaned over it and saw his image in the water, he was fascinated by his own beauty. He stayed like that for days, looking only at himself and ignoring the call of Echo. When Narcissus tried to touch the beautiful face he saw in the water, he fell and drowned. Echo after the rejection of her love by Narcissus hid in the forests and mountains where no one saw her again, using the caves and ravines for her residence. During this adventure Echo became weaker and weaker, so much so that in the end her body disappeared and only her voice remained. Such misery could not go unpunished. When Nemesis, the goddess of revenge, learned the story, she decided to punish Narcissus whom she dragged to a lake. Narcissus in absolute calm, enchanted by his reflection reflected in the water of a spring, is left to look at his idol in the lake, indifferent to the love of the nymph Echo. There he marbles in despair, as the love he feels for himself is not fulfilled until he dies. Nevertheless, the gods took pity on him and in the place where he died, Narcissus grew, a flower that would henceforth bear his name²⁶.

²⁶ Grigoris Vaslamatzis, *To Antikeimeno tou Narkissou, Mythos kai Kliniki Psykhanalytiki Theoria*, (Athina: Ekdoseis Idryma Goulandri Chorn, 1996), 88.

Narcissus falls in love with his idealized image, but he cannot really love himself, nor can he direct his love outward. He is deceived by the reflection of his image, since it shows only his perfect, wonderful face, and not his inner world, his existential depth. The myth of Narcissus essentially tells the tragedy of the loss of ourselves. Narcissus' death, on the other hand, is a consequence of his fixation on a false self. A self that is unfamiliar with emotions that are not at all acceptable to it such as pain, jealousy, sadness, anger, lack, loss of beauty and youth. Although the myth has its origins several centuries ago, the figure of Narcissus remains very close to the alienated modern man of Western civilization. After all, we will always love the other to the extent that we face our image in him. Unfortunately, this is never enough for anyone, since the "I" will always raise the index of our expectations for the other, in order to fulfil his greedy needs²⁷.

The mythical figure of Narcissus has always fascinated Lapathiotis and this emerges from the poem dedicated to him with the title *Narcissus*. The mythological form of Narcissus contributes to the formation of the erotic atmosphere of the following poem. Like another Narcissus, Lapathiotis confesses through his lyrics that he is in love with his idol: "*Tonight I loved my eyes, looking at them in the mirror*"²⁸. The use of the mythical form of Narcissus by Napoleon Lapathiotis is not accidental: what he wants to trap in his poetry is eternal youth; that is why, even in his most pessimistic poems, we have the impression that a man speaks and writes without age, forever trapped in youth -even imaginary- even if his real age is far advanced²⁹. This sensual atmosphere of the poem is intensified through two fixed motifs of Napoleon Lapathiotis' poetry, the fluctuations of light and the poetic use of the fragile rose, par excellence a symbol of the fast passage of life and time:

*"If the rose had been the April rose,
that I had put in the corner
I wish not would see it surrender
to the night agony?
If this rose that died in the glass was true,*

²⁷ Pierre Dessuant, *Narkissismos*, Metafrasi Paulakou Dimitra, (Atina: Ekdoseis Khatzinikoli, 1992), 123.

²⁸ Napoleon Lapathiotis, "*Narcissus*," *Poimata-Apanta ta Eurethenta*, Eisagogi-Filologiki Epimeleia Giannis Pappas me ti Synergasia tis Marias Fotiou, (Athina: Ekdoseis Taksidoutis, 2015), 219.

²⁹ Vaggelis Psaradakis, "*Peninta syn kati gia ton Lapathioti*," *Odos Panos*, Teuchos 79-80, (Maios-Augoustos 1995): 49.

*-or some desires that tormented me
And which had remained sterile?"³⁰.*

The rose has a special place in Lapathiotis' poetry and becomes a favourite poetic theme of the generation of modern Greek poets of 1920. The rose represents an anthem and lament at the same time in life, love, and youth. The form of the volatile rose (*rosa mutabilis*) is used as a symbol and motif by many poets and writers around the world who want to compare in this way the fragility of the flower with the rapid passage of human life. Characteristic is the case of the famous choral song from the play of the great Spanish playwright Federico Garcia Lorca: *Donia Rosita the Elder* or *The Language of Flowers* (*Doña Rosita la Soltera o el lenguaje de las flores*) which masterfully describes through a red rose the birth, the beauty, the radiance and finally the decay and the end:

*"When it opens in the morning,
It glows as red as blood.
The dew won't touch it
Afraid of being burnt.
Open wide at noon
It's hard as the coral.
The sun leans through windows
To gaze at its gleaming.
When the birds begin
To sing in the branches
And the afternoon faints
In violet light, off the sea,
It turns white, as white
As a grain of white salt.
And when night chimes
Its white horn of metal
And the stars all appear
As the breezes die,
In a ray of darkness
It starts to fade"³¹.*

³⁰ Napoleon Lapathiotis, "Narcissus," *Poimata-Apanta ta Eurethenta*, Eisagogi-Filologiki Epimeleia Giannis Pappas me ti Synergasia tis Marias Fotiou, (Athina: Ekdoseis Taksidoutis, 2015), 219.

³¹ Federico García Lorca, *Doña Rosita la Soltera o el lenguaje de las flores*, Edición Luis Martínez Cuitiño, (Madrid: Colección Austral, 1999), 76.

The rose, queen of flowers, is an allegory for human existence, the withering of beauty and the loss of happiness over time. The rose, and all the above poetic symbolisms of it, was especially praised through the Ancient Greek Lyric poetry of Sappho, Iykos and Anacreon. Ancient Greek mythology connected the rose with the Goddess Aphrodite who represented beauty and love. In fact, it is the only creation of nature that can compete with her in beauty and mitigate her arrogance and incomparable beauty. But the relationship of the rose with the goddess Aphrodite does not stop here. The rose will become the living memory of the unfortunate love affair of the goddess with the beautiful mortal Adonis who was a ferocious predator. This momentum towards dangerous hunting often forced Aphrodite to scold him for fear of his physical integrity. Adonis once came face to face with a massive and powerful pig that with a lightning movement mortally injured the young Adonis. As soon as Aphrodite realized this shocking event, she hurried to help her protégé. Out of panic and agony she forgot to put on her shoes and stepped on a thorn from a wild rose as she ran to find herself next to the handsome young man who was mortally injured. The blood of the Goddess Aphrodite flowed and fell on a wild rose, the blood of the goddess transformed the white rose into red. When Aphrodite arrived at the scene, she saw with great sadness that Adonis was lying dead. The goddess was inconsolable about this ending and cried constantly. Her tears rolled down her cheeks and ended up on the ground, permeating the ground. But the tears of a goddess and even of Aphrodite were not ordinary like the tears of ordinary mortals. In the places where her tears fell, beautiful flowering plants appeared. The place around the killed Adonis was filled with amazing flowers that were none other than the anemones. One of the most famous Greek myths is that of Rodanthi. The young Rodanthi once lived in old Corinth. The gods had given her rare beauty and wisdom. The wise men of the city often gathered in her house to admire her beauty and intelligence. One day Rodanthi invited some friends to her house to spend some pleasant hours eating, drinking, and talking together. But the wine she offered them was plentiful and her guests got drunk. One to tease her told her that a woman can never compete in intelligence and wisdom with a man. She replied that wisdom is not a privilege of men. Her response infuriated some of her guests, who considered her words an insult to the gods. *"Such an insult to the great Zeus is punishable only by death!"* Someone shouted. Rodanthi realized that there was no way to calm her friends down and because she was afraid for her life, she ran to the door to leave the house. The enraged guests shook off the table and ran after her to catch her. Desperate she rushed into the temple of Artemis to be saved. She hoped that her

persecutors would respect the sanctuary and not dare to harm her. Terrified, she frowned at the statue of the goddess, but they did not hesitate at all, the wine had blurred their judgment. The first one who went to touch her let out a scream full of surprise and pain. The beautiful young woman had disappeared and, in her place, there was now a plant with beautiful flowers, but with branches full of pointed thorns. The goddess Artemis transformed Rodanthi into a flower to save her from the rage of her drunken friends and filled the branches with thorns to protect herself from his enemies³².

Narcissus and the fragile rose are two basic elements in the poetry of the sensitive Lapatiotis. Lapatiotis' wounded soul, his inability to adapt to the demands of a cold and highly inhuman society that does not easily forgive the poets' intelligence and sensitivity pushed him even faster into the desperate act of suicide. How can a sensitive soul withstand the futile roar of the world? And the famous verse in the form of a question by the tender German poet Hölderlin from the poem *Bread and Wine* always appears so relevant in our difficult times and wanders forever without anyone being able to answer it with certainty:

Dont know.

*What are poets useful for in a petty time life?*³³

With the suicide of Lapatiotis, the following logical question comes to our mind again, why prominent spiritual figures, tender and at the same time intelligent beings choose this way to end their life. The answers are many, the thoughts even more we will close this article with an excerpt from the first literary work of the author George Kheimonas, entitled *Peisistratos* and published in the autumn of 1960, an excerpt in favour of suicide and the right of every mortal to voluntarily and freely determine the end of his life:

"Suicide," says Peisistratos, is an unjustly misunderstood act, it is the most remarkable act we can do. Pain and creation are two great circles intersecting. (...) The pain that started from the resistance of matter to become a world becomes a pain of matter that ceases to be a world anymore. It does not understand, (...) in front of the act of my birth (...) is my only act that rise to the occasion because it has

³² For myths about the rose see: http://www.valentine.gr/king_rose_gr.php.

³³ Friedrich Hölderlin, *Egkomió, Treis Ymnoi, Tria Scholia*, Metafrasi Takis Papatsonis, (Athina: Ekdoseis Ikaros, 1993), 125.

insurmountable power and tragedy. What good is it for me to be fruitful and worthy, since at the moment I did not define but luck itself - the very power that gave birth to me, I have to bow my head and die unprotestingly consoling myself that this is what the law of my nature says and what can I do? a course that has a starting point and an end to the order of an enemy of mine, completely foreign to me, law - because I neither wanted my birth (how could it be possible?) or do I accept death - does it make sense? Since I could not give birth to myself, I do an equivalent act: I destroy him. Taking life from my material I raise it as an opponent to my mother the fate which is how I take her the right to decide for my end; She decided for my beginning, I decide for my end. I equate my power with hers. I acquire the means the only means to reach the power, whatever it is, to stand face to face in the cloudy, arrogant form of the Sphinx, equal to equal. Is there a stronger creation than this act?"³⁴.

The course of human existence is lonely and has a dubious effect and time *like an unruly impatient horse*³⁵ destroys everything in its path. The wayfarer thinks he is turning the world around, but he is only turning around. The cycle is vicious and deadlocked, and the journey ultimately brings only *a handful of ashes and death*³⁶.

After all, what is the end of all human existence according to the philosopher Maurice Blanchot: *"It does not matter. All that remains is the feeling of lightness, which is death itself or, to be more precise, the moment of my death which from now on is always pending and imminent at all times"*³⁷.

As the French philosopher Jacques Derrida (1930-2004), also known as the founder of deconstruction, characteristically states: *"we are all survivors with suspension"*³⁸.

³⁴ Giorgos Cheimonas, *Pezografimata, Eisagogi-Epimeleia-Chronologio Euripidis Garantoudis, Deuteri Ekdosi Sympliromeni*, (Athina: Ekdoseis Kastanioti, 2005), 73-75.

³⁵ Giannis Stroumpas, "Poiima ΙΘ," *Argyris Chionis, Ellines Poiites, I Genia tou 1970, Apo tin Poiitiki Syllogi Metamorfoseis*, (Athina: Ekdoseis Gkovosti, 2020), 136.

³⁶ Argyris Chionis, "Souvenir Erimias," *I Foni tis Siopis, Poiimata 1966-2000, Apo tin Poiitiki Syllogi Schimata Apousias*, (Athina: Ekdoseis Nefeli, 2006), 86.

³⁷ Maurice Blanchot, *I Stigmi tou Thanatou mou, Metafrasi-Epimetro: Vaggelis Mpitsoris*, (Athina: Ekdoseis Agra, 2000), 11.

³⁸ Jacques Derrida, *Mathainontas na zeis en telei, Metafrasi Vaggelis Mpitsoris*, (Athina: Ekdoseis Agra, 2006), 24-25.

Conclusion

Through this article, the tender and sensitive personality of the poet Lapathiotis who was never able to come to terms with the cold and heartless modern society is displayed in all its glory. His great mistake was his difference from other people who could not tolerate the poet's genius. Lapathiotis through his poetic work shows his adoration for youth and therefore always glorifies the mythological figure of Narcissus. He also has a special love for the rose, a symbol of love, passion, charm, but at the same time a symbol of short mortal life. Lapathiotis cannot tolerate this mortal fate and thus commits suicide freeing his soul from the prison of his body. In the poem entitled *Ek Vattheon, (De Profundis)*, he expresses to God his absolute indignation at life as he confesses that there is no longer the slightest reason for existence for him. With the following verses it is as if he is warning us about the end that will soon arrive through his suicide:

*“Have mercy on me God in my despair,
pity the flame I scatter in vain,
grieve in my indignation,
I live without a reason and without a purpose³⁹”.*

³⁹ Napoleon Lapathiotis, “Ek Vattheon,” *Poiimata - Apanta ta Eurethenta*. Eisagogi - Filologiki Epimeleia Giannis Pappas me ti synergasia tis Marias Fotiou, (Athina: Ekdoseis Taksideutis, 2015), 159.

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