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*Araştırma Makalesi / Research Article*

**THE TRAGIC END OF THE MODERN GREEK POET  
KOSTAS KARYOTAKIS (1896-1928)**

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**Abstract:** Kostas Karyotakis (1896-1928) is one of the most important poets of the 1920s generation. He opposed too harsh society, strongly criticized everyday life and conveyed his existential anguish in his poetry until the end. His poetry and his life were inextricable as his poetry portrayed his life. He committed suicide driven by frustration in Preveza on July 21, 1928 leaving behind the tragedy of human existence that he himself could no longer tolerate. How tragic is it that so gifted individuals choose to kill themselves, what is happening inside their souls? Their intellect, their high sensitivity, the fact that they are different from the rest of the society, all together lead them to isolation and pessimism. Kostas Karyotakis committed suicide very young, but his poetic work was able to overcome the ravages of time and be particularly cherished and instructive even today. Karyotakis was a deeply lyrical and sensitive poet and influenced future generations of Greek poets with his writing and thought. Greek poets such as Giorgos Seferis, Giannis Ritsos, Manolis Anagnostakis, Titos Patrikios and the entire modern Greek poetic generation of the 1970s were greatly influenced by his poetry.

**Key Words:** Artistic intellect, frustration, existential emptiness, suicide, impasse.

**ÇAĞDAŞ YUNAN ŞAİRİ KOSTAS KARYOTAKİS'İN  
TRAJİK SONU (1896-1928)**

**Öz:** Kostas Karyotakis 1920 kuşağının önemli şairlerinden biridir. Sert topluma karşı çıkmış, gündelik yaşamı sert bir şekilde eleştirmiş, varoluşsal acılarını şiirlerinde sonuna kadar aktarmıştır. Onun şiiri tamamen hayatıyla özdeşleşmişti, şiiri onun hayatının ta kendisiydi. Kendisinin artık dayanamayacağı insan varoluşu trajedisini geride bırakarak 21 Temmuz 1928'de Preveze'de hayal kırıklığı içinde intihar etti. Bu kadar yetenekli insanların kendilerini öldürmeyi seçmeleri ne kadar trajik, ruhlarının içinde neler oluyor? Zekâları, yüksek duyarlılıkları, toplumun geri kalanından farklı olmaları onları yalnızlığa ve karamsarlığa sürükler. Karyotakis çok

genç yaşta intihar etti ama onun şiirsel eseri zamanın tahribatının üstesinden gelmeyi başardı ve bugün bile özellikle sevilen ve öğretici olmayı başardı. Karyotakis son derece lirik ve duyarlı bir şairdi. Yazıları ve düşünceleriyle gelecek nesil çağdaş yunan şairlerini etkilenmiştir. Giorgos Seferis, Giannis Ritsos, Manolis Anagnostakis, Titos Patrikios gibi çağdaş yunan şairleri ve aynı şekilde 1970'lerin çağdaş Yunan şiir kuşağı onun şiirlerinden büyük ölçüde etkilenmiştir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Sanatsal zekâ, hayal kırıklığı, varoluşsal boşluk, intihar, çıkmaz.

### Extended Abstract

Karyotakis is a poet in constant disharmony with the reality that surrounds him, dominated by disastrous mental passions, the kind of poet who composes his work by consuming and destroying himself. Through his poetry, Karyotakis admits to secular nothingness and absolute zero, ending up to confront in this way the tragedy of the world that leads to the final choice of death over life. The poet cannot easily conform to everyday life that surrounds him, he refuses to be part of this tragedy and the way he will put an end to all this existential adventure is a choice of his own. His suicide was a response to everything that tormented him and had him placed at constant distance from everyone and everything. Over time, Karyotakis becomes a myth, a poet who managed to describe the problematic relationship between the writer and the social environment as well as between the individual and society. Karyotakis' readers can distinguish through his verses the poet's continuous and unequal battle with the phenomenon of the absurdity of existence. The poet Karyotakis appears to be very similar to the tragic mythological hero Sisyphus. The gods had condemned Sisyphus to relentlessly push a rock to the top of a mountain, where the stone tumbled from under its own weight. The ancient gods had rightly thought that a life without hope is the most terrible punishment ever; Sisyphus is the absurd hero, not only for every bad thing that happened to him but also for his torture. Sisyphus' contempt for the gods, his hatred for death and his passion for life cost him this unspeakable torment in which all his being is consumed in a hopeless loop. Via his suicide, Karyotakis says a resonant no to the absurdity of human existence. He determines the end of this tragedy by himself. Through his poems, Karyotakis continuously seeks the truth of life and existence. He saw very clearly what was happening around him and wanted to express it without any concession to common perceptions and beliefs. He realized the universal tragedy, the pain and disappointments of people and wanted to show them up in every way through all his poetic work. The coexistence of the horror

of life (*taedium vitae*, as the Latin writers used to say) and the ecstasy that arises from life is the unreasonable combination that leads the poet to a constant impasse. The true poet is unhappy because of his own poetic quality. Karyotakis had to live between two worlds, inspiration and boring daily life. At this point, the words of the great modern Greek poet and Nobel laureate Odysseas Elytis come to mind when he says in his famous essay "*Open Papers*" (*Ανοιχτά Χαρτιά*) from the famous Ikaros Publishing House: "*when I pick up the pen I become someone else (...) and the loneliness of the pen is one of the greatest*". All of Karyotakis' poems could be considered as harbingers of his decision to commit suicide. Many research papers have been and are still being written about his work and poets greatly influenced by it are constantly being discovered. These are Giannis Ritsos, Giorgos Seferis, Manolis Anagnostakis, Titos Patrikios and one of the most recent ones, Alexis Traianos. Today, his poetry still moves all readers who wonder how it is possible for such a gifted and charismatic person as Karyotakis to decide to surrender life in this way. The end of Karyotakis' life coincided with the end of his poetry. He died with the conscience that he had nothing more to give, nothing more to say. Karyotakis consistently expressed the prevailing atmosphere of pessimism in the groups of young intellectuals of his time and depicted his protest against the bourgeois, bureaucratic modern Greek society after the Asia Minor Catastrophe. He was a very remarkable and rare poet because he wrote with the blood of his own body and soul the deep truth of his poetry. He opposes his fate and says a resonant no to mythical Sisyphus' miserable destiny. Many criticized him for this decision to take his life, but no one is entitled to do so because it is simply impossible for anybody to infiltrate the depths of a soul. Thus, this would be a sacrilege on our part and our intention is certainly not that. Finally, showing absolute respect to the phenomenon of Karyotakis, we try to look at the poet, the man and this bright soul that all he seeks to do through his poetry is to teach and advise us.

## Introduction

The destiny of some writers has been decided long before they were born. The fate of some artists is so uncommon, so strange and special that the poet of Modern Greek literature Kiki Dimoula describes it as the fate of exception and rarity<sup>1</sup>. Thus, Kostas Karyotakis is a poet stigmatized by a

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<sup>1</sup> Kiki Dimoula, *Eklithin Omilitria*, Ekdoseis İkaros, Athina 2022, s. 69.

rare fate. Kostas Karyotakis (1896-1928) is considered to be the main representative of the literary generation of 1920. He is the foremost exponent of Modern Greek lyric poetry and his work has been translated into more than thirty languages. Several poets manage to emerge as great, but those truly capable of becoming symbols of their generation are very few. Karyotakis was one of them. His death by suicide in Preveza at only 32 years of age, attested to his sincere attitude towards both his life and poetic work<sup>2</sup>.

The poets who wrote between 1910-1930 are widely known as Neoromantics. The general characteristics of the 1920s poetry are the following:

- ┆ pessimism, melancholy, a sense of dissatisfaction and impasse
- the absence of ideals, the mourning for their loss
- the turn to the person's inner world
- the refuge in daydreaming and escaping

The main representatives of this poetic generation are:

- Kostas Karyotakis [Κώστας Καρυωτάκης] (1896-1928)
- Kostas Ouranis [Κώστας Ουράνης] (1890-1953)
- Napoleon Lapathiotis [Ναπολέον Λαπαθιώτης] (1888-1943)
- Tellos Agras [Τέλλος Αγρας] (1899-1944)
- Romos Filyras [Ρώμος Φιλύρας] (1889-1942)
- Fotos Gifyllis [Φώτος Γιοφύλλης] (1887-1981)
- Mitsos Papanikolaou [Μήτσος Παπανικολάου] (1900-1943)
- Maria Polydouri [Μαρία Πολυδούρη] (1902-1930)

Modern Greek literary critic Linos Politis describes the poetic generation of 1920s in the following way:

*“The poets of the 1920s generation, also called –decadents- or -intruistes- cultivated this feeling of dissatisfaction and decay in many tones. Especially after Karyotakis' tragic suicide, his poetry and ideas overflowed Modern Greek poetry”<sup>3</sup>.*

Roderick Beaton clearly defines what the Modern Greek poetry of the 1920s generation means and represents: *“These poets, just like*

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<sup>2</sup> Vaggelis Athanasopoulos, *To Poiitiko Topio tou 19ou kai 20ou Aiona*, G' Tomos, Ekdoseis Kastanioti, Athina 2007, s. 205.

<sup>3</sup> Linos Politis, *Ístoria tis Neoellinikis Logotekhnias*, Ekdoseis Morfotiko Ídryma Ethikis Trapezis, Athina 1978, s. 249.

*the novelists of the same period, turned their attention to the inner world and experience of the individual, dug into the heritage of French Symbolism and the melancholic aspect of the poet Palamas. For all these poets, their lives had been stripped of ideals and the role of the poet was to grieve this loss. These poets blame society for tearing down all ideals with its destructive and intolerable routine*<sup>4</sup>.

Kostas Karyotakis also grieves the loss and absence of ideals in his life:

*What will of God is this that governs us,  
which tragic fate holds the thread  
of the empty days we are currently living  
like from a bad, old habit?*

*Ποια θέληση θεού μας κυβερνάει,  
ποια μοίρα τραγική κρατάει το νήμα  
των άδειων ημερών που τώρα ζούμε  
σαν από μια κακή, παλιά συνήθεια;*<sup>5</sup>

The main poetic themes of Karyotakis and by extension the Modern Greek Neo-Romantic poetry are the pursuit of the ideal and then failure, lust and then delusion and complete disappointment. Karyotakis oscillates between two words: between the realization of futility and complete despair. The poetic themes of Karyotakis are dominated by the acceptance of the tragic word which ultimately leads only to death. Karyotakis is in complete dissonance with the environment that surrounds him and even worse in complete dissonance with himself<sup>6</sup>.

## **I. A Poet Sui Generis**

Kostas Karyotakis went to Athens in 1914 to study at the Law School and at the end of 1917 he obtained his degree. His first poetry collection, *The Pain of Man and Things*, (*Ο Πόνος του Ανθρώπου και των Πραμάτων*), was published in 1919. His second collection, under the title *Nepenthe*

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<sup>4</sup> Roderick Beaton, *Eisagogi sti Neoteri Elliniki Logotekhnia*, Ekdoseis Nefeli, Athina 1996, s. 169.

<sup>5</sup> Kostas Karyotakis, *Poimata kai Peza*, Epimeleia G. Savvidis, Ekdoseis Ermis, Athina 1972, s. 88 (untitled poem).

<sup>6</sup> Euripidis Garantoudis, «Ī Poiisi tou Karyotaki», *Grammata II: Neoelliniki Filologia (19os & 20os aionas)*, Elliniko Anoikhto Panepistimio, Patra 2008, ss. 324-325.

(*Νηπενθή*), was published in 1921. At the same time, he was emotionally connected with the poet Maria Polydouri [[Μαρία Πολυδούρη](#)] (1902-1930). In December 1927 he published his last collection of poems entitled *Elegies and Satires* (*Ελεγεία και Σάτιρες*). Among his writings there are also 16 prose texts. Karyotakis latest prose texts have as subject: "his opposition to the world, everyday life, mankind, there is a huge pessimism about the meaning of life and the meaning of existence in general. Karyotakis' personal tragedy is clearly depicted in the prose text with given title "Escape" (*Φυγή*), which begins in the following way: 'I feel reality through physical pain'<sup>7</sup>.

For a while, Karyotakis tried to practice law. However, the lack of clientele made him seek a position as a civil servant. In 1923 he was appointed to the Ministry of Social Welfare. In 1928 he was seconded to Patras, but left immediately for a travel to Paris and after his return he was transferred to the Prefecture of Preveza. Eventually, on July 21, 1928, at 4:30 pm, and at the age of 32, Kostas Karyotakis laid under a tree and committed suicide by firing a gun to his heart. All this happened in the town of Preveza, which was so strongly connected with the poet's last moments but also with the time of his death. One last letter was found in the pocket of the costume of his corpse and it reads the following:

*“Nor am I the right man for the job. My whole past proves so. **Every reality was repulsive to me.***

*I had the vertigo of danger. And the danger that has come, I accept it with a willing heart. I hang for those who, as I did, **did not see any ideal in their lives, have always been at the mercy of their hesitations, or considered their existence to be a game with no substance.** I see them coming more and more along with the centuries. I am addressing them.*

*After tasting all the joys (!!!), I am ready for a dishonorable death. I feel sorry for my unhappy parents; I feel sorry for my siblings. **But I leave with my head held up high. I have been ill***<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> Giorgos Kravasilis, «Mia serra Nosira Triantafylla. Ta Teleutaia Peza tou K.G. Karyotaki», *Grammata kai Tekhnes, Aferoma K.G. Karyotakis*, Miniaia Epitheorisi Tekhnis, Kritikis kai Koinonikou Provlimatismou, Iounios - Ioulios 1985, Arithmos Teukhous 41, Ekdoseis Papageorgiou, Athina 1985, s. 39.

<sup>8</sup> Giorgos Savvidis, *Khronografía K.G. Karyotaki*, Epimeleia G.P. Savvidis, N.M. Khatzidaki, Mariliza Mitsou, Ekdoseis Morfotiko Idryma Ethnikis Trapezis, Athina 1989, s. 141.

Stefanos Bekatoros then proceeds to an excellent analysis of Karyotakis' last letter shortly before committing suicide:

*"Karyotakis describes in his letter the desperate search for the essence of things. (...) Divided in two, the poet suffers a complete rupture with reality, everyday life but also with himself. The more he tends to transcend the world, the more painfully he feels imprisoned in it. There is a risk that he crashes and eventually he does"*<sup>9</sup>.

Karyotakis died with a bullet in his heart, after having tried unsuccessfully to drown in the sea, a fact that psychologically symbolizes the return to mother's arms. In his prose work *"The praise of the sea"* (*To εγκώμιο της θάλασσας*), he states:

*"The sea is my only love. Because it appears as an ideal. And its name is wondrous (...). The man's soul is bathed in the purity of sea. Our nostalgia finds a way out and our pain its expression"*<sup>10</sup>.

The words of Petros Khartokollis, Psychiatry Professor, are of extreme importance:

*"Without a doubt, the ideal suicide of Greek literature is Karyotakis. (...) Karyotakis professed with consistency the pessimistic atmosphere that prevailed in the circles of young intellectuals of his time and the bitter protest against the bourgeois and bureaucratic modern Greek society"*<sup>11</sup>.

Modern Greek literary critic Kleon Paraschos, a peer of the poet, attests:

*"If Karyotakis' pessimism was something entirely of his own, his despair was ours as well as all the mental and intellectual dramas he expressed. (...) No one represented us as much as Karyotakis did. Nobody else was as familiar with the atmosphere and spirit of our time as Karyotakis was"*<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> Stefanos Mpekatoros, «To Psomi tis Eksorias. Simeioseis gia mia Epanektimi tou K.G. Karyotaki», *Grammata kai Tekhnes, Afteroma K.G. Karyotakis*, Miniaia Epitheorisi Tekhnis, Kritikis kai Koinonikou Provlitismou, Iounios - Ioulios 1985, Arithmos Teukhous 41, Ekdoseis Papageorgiou, Athina 1985, s. 15.

<sup>10</sup> Kostas Karyotakis, *Ta Peza*, Filologiki Epimeleia G. Savvidis, Ekdoseis Nefeli, Athina 1989, ss. 38-40.

<sup>11</sup> Petros Khartokollis, *Idanikoi Autokheires, Ellines Logotekhnes pou Autoktonisan*, Ekdoseis Estia, Athina 2003, s. 11.

<sup>12</sup> Kostas Karyotakis, *Apanta*, Epimeleia X. Sakellariadis, K. Paraskhos kai T. Agras, Ekdoseis Gkovosti, Athina 1938, s. 21.

When a poet of this value commits suicide, it is natural to have various interpretations of why he made this fatal decision. Titos Patrikios, in his text entitled *Kostas Karyotakis (Κώστας Καρυωτάκης)* in the volume *Satire and Politics in Modern Greece from Solomos to Seferis (Σάτιρα και πολιτική στη νεώτερη Ελλάδα από τον Σολωμό ως τον Σεφέρη)*, published in 1979 by the Company of Culture and General Education of Moraitis School, says among other things:

*‘The suicide of Karyotakis is not a random event, unrelated to his poetry. As much as it may derive from the sensations of death that exist within him, it is also related to the way he joined society and clashed with it... Moreover, that his suicide may, to a certain extent, be linked to commitments he made through his own poetry’<sup>13</sup>.*

One reason that seems to have pushed Karyotakis to commit suicide is the syphilis he is likely to have suffered from. Another reason could have been the lack of real love in his life. The beautiful and emancipated poet of the 1920s generation, Maria Polydouri [Μαρία Πολυδούρη] had fallen in love with him and he seemed to have a interest in her, too. According to Polydouri, he was the first to confess his love, but unfortunately this love was an unfortunate one without a happy ending. Referring to this stormy love, Lili Zografou says:

*‘At the beginning of 1922, the two poets meet at the offices of the Prefecture of Athens. Their relationship has been tempestuous due to a fatal series of misunderstandings that would separate them in the most difficult moments, exactly when they would be in great need of each other’<sup>14</sup>.*

Maria Polydouri's love poems have one and only addressee: the poet Kostas Karyotakis. Polydouri's poetic work is appreciated by critics mainly for the authenticity of feelings, for the sensitivity, the tenderness and intensity. Among the most special ones that the poet dedicates to Karyotakis is the poem *"Only because you loved me"* (*"Γιατί μ' αγάπησες"*)

*Only because you held me in your arms  
one night and you kissed my lips,  
only for this I'm beautiful as wide open lily*

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<sup>13</sup> Anastasios Vistonitis, «1928: 90 Khronia apo tin Autoktoia tou Karyotaki», *To Vima*, Athina, 05/01/2018, <https://www.tovima.gr/2018/01/05/culture/1928-90-xronia-apo-tin-aytoktonia-toy-karywtaki/>

<sup>14</sup> Lili Zografou, *Kostas Karyotakis Maria Polydouri kai i Arkhi tis Amfisvitisis*, Ekdoseis Gnosi, Athina 1961, s. 63.



*and I still have a shiver in my soul,  
only because you held me in your arms.*

*(.....)*

*I was born only because you loved me,  
my life was given for this.*

*In the graceless, unfulfilled life  
my life was fulfilled.*

*I was born only because you loved me.*

*Μόνο γιατί με κράτησες στα χέρια σου*

*Μια νύχτα και με φίλησες στο στόμα,*

*Μόνο γι' αυτό είμαι ωραία σαν κρίνο ολόανοιχτο*

*Κ' έχω ένα ρίγος στην ψυχή μου ακόμα,*

*Μόνο γιατί με κράτησες στα χέρια σου.*

*(.....)*

*Μόνο γιατί μ' αγάπησες γεννήθηκα,*

*γι' αυτό η ζωή μου εδόθη.*

*Στην άχαρη ζωή την ανεκπλήρωτη*

*Μένα η ζωή πληρώθη (για έμενα η ζωή εκπληρώθηκε).*

*Μόνο γιατί μ' αγάπησες γεννήθηκα<sup>15</sup>.*

Here, there's a big question: why does fate not allow people born for each other to live happily ever after? Why is happiness such a rare gift to people? No one can give answers to these eternal mysteries and riddles, only those who read these stories always feel deeply moved and choke up a little because of these injustices. On the other hand, there is one very important thing we must not forget: these very moving love stories may not have had a happy ending but left their imprint in history forever rendering their protagonists eternal lovers who triumphed over time.

There is a secret in the depths of Karyotakis' poetry: it's his inability to feel love and surrender himself completely to the woman he loves. That's the reason for all his despair on an emotional level but also for his deep and incurable pessimism. Concerning his inability to love truly and deeply, the psychiatrist and writer Petros Khartokollis states:

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<sup>15</sup> Maria Polydouri, "Mono giati m'agapises", apo tin Poiitiki Syllogi *Oi Trillies pou Svinoun*, Apanta, Eisagogi-Epimeleia-Skholiasmos: Takis Mendrakos, Ekdoseis Asteri, Athina 1982, ss. 89-91.

*"Karyotakis' problem was that he was unable to love the women who could love him. Having a very bad idea for himself he didn't think he deserved to be loved. This spiteful idea he maintained for himself was projected onto others by creating a false image of superiority for himself that collapsed when a woman rejected him, while making him lose his appreciation for a woman who could love him, just like Polydouri did"*<sup>16</sup>.

## II. The Poet's difficult and demanding relationship with Poetry

Symeon Stampoulos very cleverly observes that the relationship between poetry and the poet is not easy at all. It involves devotion, it is a way of life, a disease that traps the charismatic poets forever. Karyotakis had understood since the very beginning that this was his fate and there could be no chance of escape. Each poet has only one right and at the same time an obligation to carry out the divine or demonic commandment he carries within him:

*"Vaché, Rigaut, Crevel, Yesenin, Mayakovsky, Chelan, Sylvia Plath, Trakl, Pavese, Marina Tsvetaeva, Karyotakis, Lapathiotis, Alexis Traianos... (the list will remain open forever), they took refuge into their poetry and became themselves, as Friedrich Hölderlin had wished, their word and their poem. Their poetry was engraved onto their bodies. It is the mark of the condemned, that is, the poet. The critics of literature are responsible for all the rest, ephemeral and perishable"*<sup>17</sup>.

Thanasis Kostavaras correctly observes that Karyotakis' poetry and life were a single body, a single soul. Their identification was absolute and the bonding of art and life was ultimate. Karyotakis' poetry carries within it the poet's own blood, the poet himself is his poem:

*"His life and work were two things alike and totally dependent on one another. They complement each other so much that they end up being identical. His poetry has been the identity of his life"*<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>16</sup> Petros Khartokollis, *Ídanikoi Autokheires, Ellines Logotekhnes pou Autoktonisan*, Ekdoseis Estia, Athina 2003, s. 32.

<sup>17</sup> Symeon Stampoulos, «O Kostas Karyotakis den Aytoktonise....to Olisthima enos Daskalou», *Neon Planodion*, Athina 21.07.2020, <https://neoplanodion.gr/2020/07/21/>

<sup>18</sup> Thanasis Kostavaras, «O Karyotakismos os Poiitki Moira», *Grammata kai Tekhnes, Aferoma K.G. Karyotakis*, Miniaia Epitheorisi Tekhnis, Kritikis kai

Nasos Vagenas, one of the greatest modern Greek poets of the 1970s generation, also shares the above opinion when he affirms:

*"Poetry, the most humane situation, is at the same time the most inhumane. The tension of the poetic experience is so strong that its prolongation would be capable of crushing the one who lives it. It is impossible for anyone to live constantly in a poetic way"*<sup>19</sup>.

Karyotakis' work influenced great poets of Modern Greek literature such as Seferis, Empeirikos, Ritsos and Elytis. It also influenced the younger poets to such an extent that his own poetic flow known as "καρυωτακισμός" (lat. karyotakismos) prevailed in Modern Greek literature. This means that the younger ones had a tendency to imitate but also to follow his expressive ways as well as his poetic ideology. The term known as "καρυωτακισμός" (lat. karyotakismos) as critic and as a poetic phenomenon refers to the continuing influence of Karyotakis on his younger poetic contemporaries, especially the Greek Poetic Generation of the 1970. Poets like Tasos Leivaditis, Titos Patrikios, Giannis Ritsos, and Kiki Dimoula are influenced by the poetry of Karyotakis and deal with the existential and philosophical poetic themes. Dimitris Tziouvas believes that:

*"the relation between younger poets and Karyotakis was primarily ideological and psychological other than expressive. The reason for this is because everyone thought of him as the denier poet, the social ant conformist"*<sup>20</sup>.

The suicidal poet Alexis Traianos, for example, who is considered one of the greatest representatives of the poetic generation of the 1970s and a great admirer of Karyotakis' poetic work, writes in his poem "*Dream of the poet Kostas Karyotakis*" ("*Όνειρο του ποιητή Κώστα Καρυωτάκη*"):

*And then you came where of course you had to come  
Slowly dragging the horror of an everlasting wound  
Into the crack of the most visceral end  
To the black impasse in the abyss of the mind*

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Koinonikou Provlitismou, Ιούνιος - Ιούλιος 1985, Arithmos Teukhous 41, Ekdoseis Papageorgiou, Athina 1985, s. 4.

<sup>19</sup> Nasos Vagenas, *Ϊ Esthita tis Theas, Seumioseis gia tin Poiisi kai tin Kritiki*, Ekdoseis Stigmi, Athina 1988, s. 235.

<sup>20</sup> *Karyotakis kai Karyotakismos* (13 Ιανουαριου και 1 Fevrouariou 1997), Epistimoniko Symposio, Etaireia Spoudon Neollinikou Politismou kai Genikis Paideias, Skholi Moraiti, Athina 1998, ss. 105-106.

*Κι έπειτα ήρθες να που έπρεπε βέβαια να έρθεις  
Αγάλι σέρνοντας τη φρίκη μιας πληγής παντοντινης  
Μέσα στου πιο αποτρόπαιου τέλους τον κρότο  
Στο μαύρο αδιέξοδο στην άβυσσο του νου<sup>21</sup>.*

Karyotakis and all the poets who try to touch the depths of the abyss pay for this choice with their own lives. By committing suicide, Karyotakis refuses to bear a miserable, boring life, an everyday life full of compromises. The following poem entitled "I want to leave this place" ('*Θέλω να φύγω πια από δω* ') is extremely insightful:

*I want to leave this place, I want to go far away,  
to some place unrecognizable and new,  
I want to become a golden dust in the ether,  
simple element, free and brave.  
The things of the world seem to be like a soft dream  
and speak to the soul  
beautiful be the faces and smile  
beautiful be even my own self*

*Θέλω να φύγω πια από δω, θέλω να φύγω πέρα,  
σε κάποιο τόπο αγνώριστο και νέο,  
θέλω να γίνω μια χρυσή σκόνη μες στον αιθέρα,  
απλό στοιχείο, ελεύθερο, γενναίο.  
Σαν όνειρο να φαίνονται απαλό και να μιλούνε  
έως την ψυχή τα πράγματα του κόσμου,  
ωραία να 'ναι τα πρόσωπα και να χαμογελούνε,  
ωραίος ακόμη ο ίδιος εαυτός μου<sup>22</sup>.*

Moreover, as Giorgos Kotzioulas mentions, Karyotakis' texts do not refer to natural nihilists, but to those people possessed of a moral conscience

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<sup>21</sup> Alexis Traianos, *Ϊ Klepsydra me tis Stakhtes. Thessaloniki: Egnatia, Athina 1975, s. 15.*

<sup>22</sup> Kostas Karyotakis, *Ta Poiimata (1913-1928)*, Epimeleia G. Savvidis, Ekdoseis Nefeli, Athina 1992, s. 129.

who have realized that the world of their time has been led to an irreversible moral degeneration:

*“People who had no faith, all those disgusted by the pettiness of life, saw in Karyotakis a quiet, unarmed revolutionary, who did not ask for any action on their part, only acceptance. [...] Where should one turn to? There is no refuge, neither earthly nor spiritual”<sup>23</sup>.*

The great philosopher of modern Greece, University Professor Dimitrios Liantinis (1942-1998), expresses the same complaint as Karyotakis about the ultimate corruption and disintegration of the world and culture in the last letter he leaves to his daughter before committing suicide. Two intellectuals who express the same anguish, concerns, the same complaints through their last farewell letters shortly before taking their own lives, even though they had never met.

In his goodbye letter to his daughter Diotima, Professor of Philosophy Liantinis writes:

*‘My Diotima,*

*I am leaving this world willingly. I am vanishing standing on my feet, strong and proud. I've prepared this very moment step by step throughout my life, which was many things, but above all it has been a careful study of death. (...) I die healthy in body and mind (...). Remember that difficult times are about to come for the new generations. And it is unfair and very strange to spare such a gift of life to people, and for most to live in the dizziness of this ridiculous absurdity.*

*My last action has the meaning of protesting against the harm that we, the adults, prepare for the innocent new generations that come next. We survive at their expense. An abyssal harm in its horror.*

*My sorrow for this crime is killing me.*

*I lived isolated and strong.*

*Liantinis”<sup>24</sup>.*

## Conclusions

Karyotakis' suicide was an event that shook the intellectual circles of his period and continues to raise many questions that were never answered. Significant personalities, important litterateurs, university professors and

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<sup>23</sup> Giorgos Kotzioulas, «i Kathierosi tou Karyotaki», *Poiitiki Tekhni*, Teukhos. 18, Athina 1948, ss. 315-316.

<sup>24</sup> Dimitris Alikakos, *Ezisa Erimos kai Iskhyros Liantinis*, Ekdoseis Eleftheroudakis, Athina 2016, ss. 10-11.

literary critics try to explain the mystery and enigma behind the suicidal act. Author Elli Aleksiou gives her own enlightening view on the subject:

*“Karyotakis was deeply intertwined with the void. The dissatisfaction. A torturous thirst. A hideous quest which took the form of a serious illness throughout his short life. But since he carried this torturous mentality within him, he could never get rid of it. When the groups of intellectuals were informed of the tragic death of Karyotakis, almost immediately and without any hesitations it was said and accepted that “His last transfer to Preveza was the coup de grace” No! Death gave him the desired redemption. For Karyotakis it was the elixir of his unhappy life. It was the expected and desired ideal end. For Karyotakis, his psychological dead-end was so permanent and so intense that it could no longer continue. Suicide was the natural finishing line to his suffering nature. Everything suddenly brightened up. The incomprehensible became understandable and Karyotakis entered the group of creators who create and die with the consistency that describes only the few and the chosen”<sup>25</sup>.*

Suicidal poets, authors and artists constitute an important category of people whose intelligence, genius and great sensitivity never allowed them to become part of a social system that hardly tolerates anything different and special. Their work brings to light their mental breakdown. Their verses are so vividly written that it feels as if they were sitting next to us and talking directly with us. Their poetry is a legacy for future generations, their words and verses are full of wisdom and teachings. They are people who were not afraid to oppose their fates, who had a special inner world whose pace gets past the usual. The following verses of the great writer from Eastern Thrace, Georgios Vizyinos (1849-), who wrote while being shut-in in the Dromokaiteio Psychiatric Hospital of Athens, reveal his strained mental state and perfectly describe the fragile inner nature of all those sensitive suicidal poets:

*the rhythm of the world  
has altered within me*

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<sup>25</sup> Elli Aleksiou, *Ellines Logotekhnes*, Ekdoseis Kastaniotis, Athina 1982, s. 98.

*μετεβλήθη εντός μου  
κι ο ρυθμός του κόσμου*<sup>26</sup>

Such beautiful and succinct verses! After all, there are situations, reasons, causes that can, out of a sudden, transform and disrupt the balance of our inner world. The poet Georgios Vizyinos, after having an unfortunate love affair with Betina Fravasili and two unsuccessful suicide attempts, was precipitately admitted to the Dromokaiteio Psychiatric Hospital of Athens on April 13, 1892, where he remained for four whole years and eventually died shut-in and isolated. The fact that his hospitalization in the above mental institution for four whole years did not stop him from writing poems that still move us today and bring tears to our eyes is truly admirable<sup>27</sup>.

It is safe to say that our efforts to examine the reasons why and how a suicide was committed are respected but should never be excessive because some questions may not be prone to be answered. We shall let the verses of these poets speak infinitely instead of us, they are definitely trying to tell us something...

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<sup>26</sup> Eleni Pippa, *Pagkosmia Poiisi*, Tomos B', Ekdoseis Íolkos, Athina, ss. 44-46.

<sup>27</sup> Georgios Vizyinos, *Ta Poiimata*, Tomos A', Neoelliniki Vivliothiki, Ídryma Kosta kai Elenis Ourani, Athina 2003, s. 145.

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