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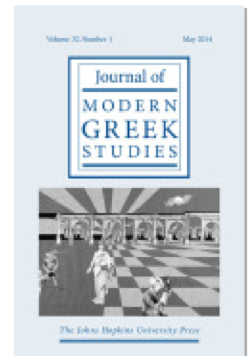

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Metaphorical Transgression and Transfiguration of Loss through Language in Alexandros Papadiamantis's "Under the Royal Oak Tree"

Nicolas Evzonas

Abstract

The present contribution offers a close reading of Alexandros Papadiamantis's first-person short story «Ὑπὸ τὴν βασιλικὴν δρῦν» ("Under the Royal Oak Tree"), published in March 1901. Behind its euphoric atmosphere and carefree façade, which relates a child's attraction to a majestic tree, this less-than-realistic tale conceals a poignant struggle between sexual desire and parental and religious prohibition. The tree's transformation into a ravishing young woman during the main character's sleep—the focal point of the story—along with the free associations of the dreamer reveal a blend of oedipal fantasies and recurring Papadiamantian themes. Furthermore, the extremely rich and overdetermined vocabulary of the text transforms the oak tree into a pluralistic symbol.

Introduction

Exactly three months after the nocturnal tale «Ἡ Φαρμακολύτρια» ("The Deliverer from Potions and Spells"), Alexandros Papadiamantis published the short story «Ὑπὸ τὴν βασιλικὴν δρῦν» ("Under the Royal Oak Tree," 31 March 1901), a narrative whose atmospheric effect and contents reflect the season of its publication. Despite all of its radiance and the seemingly nonchalant eroticism bursting throughout, this text, famous for dramatizing the poetic transformation of a tree into a lovely young girl, also harbors a harrowing reverie in the background, while staging a fierce rivalry between sexual drive and parental and religious rule.

My purpose here is to listen carefully to this text, to its details, words, and silences, with a primarily psychoanalytic awareness, tracing the story's plot as if I were seeking to discover what was hidden behind the discourse of a

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parlêtre (a "speaking being" as described by Jacques Lacan 1979, who keeps a precious secret hidden not just from his listener but also from himself). Numerous attempts have been made, though not always with the necessary meticulous textual and intertextual concern, to decipher the short story's enigma, and especially to interpret the symbolism of the magnificent oak tree, which has been seen as a mythological goddess, a metaphysical/mystical entity, an embodiment of pagan eroticism, a Christian epiphany, a maternal image, a sociological ladder, the Tree of Good and Evil, and a real tree from the writer's birthplace. Some readings draw attention to the outburst of repressed yearning as implied in the text, although in a more or less intuitive manner, while recklessly transposing elements from the author's life onto its prose.[1]

The goal of this contribution is not to invalidate the previous efforts made to comprehend this artful example of Papadiamantis's fiction but, on the contrary, to use them as guides, showing more specifically how hindered sexuality and its release are staged in the text, and defining the corresponding psychological issues. I do not presume to fully explicate the short story, whose wealth lies beyond any specialized religious, folkloric, semiotic, comparative, or psychologically inclined review; I only propose to highlight an aspect of Papadiamantis's writing that has not been adequately explored in Modern Greek Studies, contrary to the countless modern and post-modern approaches in European and American literary studies which seriously take into account the unconscious of the author and/or reader.[2]

Let me state that my reading shall not refer to any biographical elements, not because the author is dead—post-structuralism's superlative proclamation (Barthes 1993)—but mainly because Papadiamantis has been abused by his legend as very few artists have, and as a result, this severely falsified poetic universe needs to be restored. Nevertheless, as I admit, along with Bakhtin and his followers such as Tzvetan Todorov (1981), that a text does not constitute a mere product of language but is the creation of a material being endowed with a body and subjective background—while also belonging to a context in which it enters into dialogue with other texts—I shall only cast aside the historical entity of Papadiamantis in a rhetorical way.

A tricky rivalry between sacred desire and holy prohibition

Like "The Deliverer from Potions and Spells" and «Ὄνειρο στὸ κῦμα» ("Dream on the Waves"),[3] "Under the Royal Oak Tree" is a first-person narrative staged in two epochs, a distant past (childhood), and a gloomier present (middle age). However, the closing remark of the autodiegetic narrative «διὰ τὴν ἀντιγραφήν» (by the hand of the copyist) is missing from this text, probably because of the story's metaphorical and unrealistic style, which tempers the need for a distanciation.[4]

Adopting in every segment (except for the final one) the perspective of the autodiegetic narrator's childhood self—which as Maria Iatrou points out coincides chronologically with the "apotheosis of childishness" in Western culture (1885–1920) and whose use by Papadiamantis is quite innovative in Modern Greek literature (2012)[5]—the short story begins with a parallel of two "enjoyments" (the verb «ἀπολαμβάνω» used in both cases): participating with family in rural festivities and gazing from afar at a huge oak tree. The first enjoyment is shared and active, while the second is solitary and voyeuristic. Let me stress that all the celebrations mentioned in the text are associated with either springtime Christian feasts (Easter, St. George's Day, the Feast of Saint Constantine, the Feast of the Ascension) or May Day (pagan in origin), which confirms the syncretism of Orthodox and Ancient Greek elements in Papadiamantis's prose. When, a little later in the text, the main character decides to offer a brief insight into these festivities, the impression given is what Guy Saunier has described as "strange ceremonies of a pagan nature and probably totally fictitious" (2001:102).[6] This is hardly surprising since the description comes through the subjective view of a spellbound child.

The paratext also has its own say: this short story was originally published in the magazine *Panathinea*, whose title references the famous ancient Panathenaic festival, known for its athletic contests and poetic competitions, animal sacrifices, music, and dances. When reading the following extract, one cannot help but think that the narrator, while probably endeavoring to retain the outlook of his past, uncultured, and naïve self,[7] betrays a newly acquired culture[8] and draws his inspiration from the Panathenaic celebrations:

> Ἤγοντο ἐκεῖ χοροί καί πανηγύρεις δρόσος καὶ ἀναψυχὴ καὶ χάρμα ἐβασίλευεν. Ἐθύοντο ἀρνία καὶ ἐρίφια, καὶ σπονδαὶ ἐγίνοντο πυροξάνθου ἀνθοκοσμίου. Ἐτελοῦντο ἀγῶνες ἁμίλλης, δισκοβολίαι καὶ ἅλματα. Ἔπληττε τὰς πραείας ἠχοὺς ὁ φθόγγος τοῦ αὐλοῦ καὶ τῆς λύρας, συνοδεύων τὸ εὔρυθμον βῆμα τῶν παρθένων πρὸς κύκλιον χορόν. Καὶ ξανθαὶ, ἐρυθρόπεπλοι βοσκοποῦλαι ἐπήδων, ἐπέτων, ἐκελάδουν. (III, 328, 16–21)[9]

> During that festival, people danced; they celebrated. Freshness, entertainment, and pleasure reigned. Lambs and young goats were sacrificed; there were libations of golden Muscat wine. There were wrestling, jumping, and discus-throwing contests. The sweet tones of the aulos and lyre accompanied the measured steps of the young girls' round dancing. Thus, the young shepherdesses skipped, flitted about, and sang, with their blonde hair loose over their red dresses.

Whether the author was influenced by the feasts dedicated to Athena Polias or whether he conceived the entire scene, what should be kept in mind is the anachronistic and strongly mythical aspect of the entertainment.

The oak tree watched from afar by the main character, deep in a "sweet reverie" («ἐρρέμβαζον γλυκά» III, 327, 3) and a state of "unspeakable emotion" («ἄφατον συγκίνησιν» III, 327, 14) does appear to belong to the realm of fantasy:

> Ὁποῖον μεγαλεῖον εἶχεν! Οἱ κλάδοι της οἱ χλωρόφαιοι, κατάμεστοι, κραταιοί οἱ κλῶνές της, γαμψοὶ ὡς ἡ κατατομὴ τοῦ ἀετοῦ, οὖλοι ὡς ἡ χαίτη τοῦ λέοντος, προεῖχον ἀναδεδημένοι, εἰς βασιλικὰ στέμματα. Καὶ ἦτον ἐκείνη ἄνασσα τοῦ δρυμοῦ, δέσποινα ἀγρίας καλλονῆς, βασίλισσα τῆς δρόσου . . .
> Ἀπὸ τὰ φύλλα της ἐστάλαζε κ'ἔρρεεν ὁλόγυρά της «μάννα ζωῆς, δρόσος γλυκασμοῦ, μέλι τὸ ἐκ πέτρας».Ἔθαλπον οἱ ζωηφόροι ὀποὶ της ἔρωτα θείας ἀκμῆς, κ'ἔπνεεν ἡ θεσπεσία φυλλάς της ἵμερον τρυφῆς ἀκηράτου. Καὶ ἡ κορυφή της ἡ βαθύκομος ἠγείρετο ὡς στέμμα παρθενικόν, διάδημα θεῖον. (III, 327, 5–13)

> What grandeur! Her[10] dark green branches, thick and strong, her twigs crooked like an eagle's silhouette, with curls like a lion's mane, twining and protruding like royal crowns. And she was the sovereign of the woods, a savagely beautiful princess, the queen of dew . . .
> From her leaves dripped "the manna of life, the dew of sweetness, the honey from the rock." Her invigorating sap excited the prime of godlike love, and her exquisite foliage inspired pure voluptuous pleasure. And her richly maned top resembled a virginal crown or divine tiara.

The prevailing trait is highlighted in the title, namely the sovereign nature of the tree. Her Majesty the oak displays an "eagle's profile" and a "lion's mane"; she bears a "crown," "tiara," even several "royal crowns"; and she is a "princess," "sovereign," and "queen." Referring to representations of trees in the social hierarchy (stemming from the Anglo-Saxon tradition in particular), Robert Peckham (1994:152–153) establishes an opposition between the Royal Oak and the egalitarian society of the young narrator's shepherd friends in the short story, and considers the year "186 . . .", quoted in the text, as a reference to King Otto's deposition in 1862.

The contrast between the majestic oak, the high-born woman-tree—openly compared to a mistress further along in the text when the narrator declares, «ἡ δρῦς ὑπῆρξεν ἡ πρώτη παιδική μου ἐρωμένη» ("The oak was my first childhood lover" III, 329, 13–14)—and her much lowlier young admirer would thus underscore one aspect (among many others) of the incompatibility of the "partners." Many Papadiamantian characters display this sort of social inferiority complex in relation both to the woman whom they love and to their competitor for her hand. We also notice the nominal groups "divine tiara," "exquisite foliage," and "godlike bloom," suggesting the sacred nature of the noble tree[11] (fully supported by the Greco-Roman tradition among others[12]), as well as her "virginal crown," pointing to her virginity (an essential trait which other signs corroborate later in the text). Furthermore, the excerpt taken from

the Acolouthy of the Three Hierarchs, "manna of life, dew of sweetness, honey from the rock," alludes to the possible nourishing and maternal side of the oak tree, whose Greek name is feminine: ἡ δρῦς. These characteristics, combined with the epithets, «δέσποινα», «βασίλισσα», and «ἄνασσα», inevitably evoke the Virgin Mary.[13] Our young narrator thus fantasizes about an erotic object, which is a blend of maternity, virginity, and saintliness, a typical assemblage of the oedipal mother before her "sexual downfall" (in her son's mind).[14]

The following passage overtly reveals the sensual nature of the narrator's fascination for the tree-woman:

> Μ'ἔθελγε, μ'ἐκήλει, μ'ἐκάλει ἐγγύς της. Ἐπόθουν νὰ πηδήσω ἀπὸ τοῦ ὑποζυγίου, νὰ τρέξω πλησίον της, νὰ τὴν ἀπολαύσω· νὰ περιπτυχθῶ τὸν κορμόν της, ὅστις θὰ ἦτο ἀγκάλιασμα διὰ πέντε παιδιὰ ὡς ἐμέ, καὶ νὰ τὸν φιλήσω. Νὰ προσπαθήσω ν'ἀναρριχηθῶ εἰς τὸ πελώριον στέλεχος, τὸ ἁδρὸν καὶ ἀμαυρόν, ν'ἀναβῶ εἰς τὸ σταύρωμα τῶν κλάδων της, ν'ἀνέλθω εἰς τοὺς κλῶνας, νὰ ὑψωθῶ εἰς τοὺς ἀκρέμονας . . . Καὶ ἂν δὲν μ'ἐδέχετο, καὶ ἂν μ'ἀπέβαλλεν ἀπὸ τὸ σῶμά της καὶ μ'ἔρριπτε κάτω, ἂς ἔπιπτον νὰ κυλισθῶ εἰς τὴν χλόην της, νὰ στεγασθῶ ὑπὸ τὴν σκιάν της, ὑπὸ τὰ ἀετώματα τῶν κλώνων της, τὰ ὅμοια μὲ στέμματα Δαυΐδ θεολήπτου. (III, 327, 18–328, 3)

> She attracted me, called me, called me close to her. I desired to jump down from my saddle, run towards her, enjoy her, embrace her trunk with my arms, even if five children's arms would be needed for doing so, and kiss her. I was burning to climb on that gigantic, robust, and dark trunk, to reach her lower branches, and then scale up to her top . . . And, if the tree should not approve of me, if she should reject me from her body and throw me down, then I might fall to the ground, roll in the grass, and take shelter in her shade, under the pediment of her twigs, reminiscent of the crown of David, the king inspired by God.

Let me first point out the desire to convert the abovementioned scopophilic urge into a pleasureful physical touch, perhaps even into symbiotic physical enjoyment. A religious reading of the text, based on the affinities between Papadiamantis's language and metaphors used in the *Song of the Songs* (cf. «ἀναβήσομαι ἐπὶ τῷ φοινίκι, κρατήσω τῶν ὕψεων αὐτοῦ», "I will climb the palm tree and lay hold of its height," 7, 9), would interpret this and any expression of sensuality as a longing for the spiritual world (Kamberidis 1990:137–154). The narrator is no longer satisfied with simply watching the enchanting oak from a distance: he wishes to draw closer to it, kiss it, touch it, and mount it, just as a lover would with a woman, or a baby with his mother's body. The word «σῶμα» ("body") clearly shows us the anthropomorphism that will later emerge in the text in a dream recounted by the young boy-narrator. The disproportion between the two "lovers" ("embrace her trunk with my arms, even if five children's arms would be needed for doing so") is also worthy of a comment, since although it is logically explained by the narrator's young age, it repeats the topic of the lover's

inadequacy because of his (financial, social, or sexual) "inferiority," as unveiled in other Papadiamantian texts (Evzonas 2012:152–220). Regarding this latter issue, it might be interpreted as an expression of the boy's oedipal fear of his inability to compete with his father in order to satisfy his mother, which would also explain his fantasy about being expelled from the trunk/body of the tree ("if it should reject me from its body") and the "compromise" of only asking for its protection or shelter ("[I might] take shelter in its shade"). The young lover's fear of not measuring up to his goddess-mistress and being rejected by the tree (thrown off it), ejected from it, or even *ab-jected* (if we impart a more archaic root to the fantasy),[15] are recurrent themes in the Papadiamantian corpus. I can henceforth call this pattern that of the "Gulliverized lover" or "infantilized lover." In this text, the fantasy is literal since the desiring person is truly a child. The childish side of the story and metaphorical nature of the object of desire, which have led numerous critics to deem it just another whimsical tale, are precisely the most revealing elements of this story, as they literalize (transcribe to the letter) oneiric themes and schemata.[16]

To conclude with the abovementioned excerpt, I should add that the longing to climb the oak tree is probably overdetermined by a longing for learning and knowledge[17] (the tree and especially the oak are well-known symbols of wisdom[18]) and, given the generational symbolism of the tree (in the Papadiamantian corpus[19] and elsewhere[20]), by a longing to learn more about one's origins. This interpretation gains further backing if we recall Kotsos in Papadiamantis's «Ἡ φωνὴ τοῦ Δράκου» ("The Dragon's Voice"), a boy born out of wedlock obsessed by the mysterious circumstances of his birth and in desperate search of his family history, who climbs a tree and falls to his death.[21] The similarity with the child who fantasizes about scaling the oak tree and falling from it allows us to surmise and argue that whoever tries to unravel the mystery of one's own coming into the world by endeavoring to invade his parents' privacy shall be punished by castration. The case of Pentheus, who climbed a pine tree—the tree in "The Dragon's Voice" is likewise a pine tree—in order to spy on the Maenads' orgies (in which his own mother takes part), the subsequent felling of the tree, and Pentheus's slaughter by his own mother gives strong credibility to the psychoanalytical interpretation of tree climbing as an erection and, at the same time, of scaling a tree in order to get a vantage post as a means to access forbidden sexual knowledge.[22]

"Forbidden": the word is now out.

> *Ἐπόθουν*, ἀλλ'ἡ συνοδία [sic] τῶν οἰκείων μου, μεθ'ὧν ἐτέλουν τὰς ἐκδρομὰς ἐκείνας ἀνὰ τὰ ὄρη, δὲν θὰ ἤθελε νὰ μοὶ τὸ *ἐπιτρέψῃ*. (III, 328, 4–5; emphasis added)

> Such was my overwhelming *desire*, but the relatives with whom I journeyed into the mountains would never *allow* me to fulfill it.

Here, the narrator's openly stated desire to "enjoy" the tree comes up against his family's prohibitive decrees. The pleasure (acknowledged at the beginning of the story) of participating in pagan-Christian festivities with his relatives along with the happiness derived from interacting with his family is darkened by this prohibitive rule. It is significant that after mentioning this taboo, the narrator follows on with talk of a «σωτήριον ἔτος» ("year of the Lord") and a site called «Μέγα Μανδρί» that is "freely" associated with his parents:

> Καὶ μίαν χρονιάν, ἦτο κατὰ τὰς ἑορτὰς τοῦ σωτηρίου ἔτους 186 . . . , καθὼς εἴχομεν διέλθει πλησίον τοῦ δένδρου, ἐφθάσαμεν εἰς τὸ Μέγα Μανδρί·–ἦτο δὲ τὸ *Μέγα Μανδρὶ* μικρὸς συνοικισμός, θερινὸν σκήνωμα τῶν βοσκῶν τοῦ τόπου. Ἐκατοίκουν ἐκεῖ ἑπτὰ ἢ ὀκτὼ οἰκογένειαι ἀγροτῶν. Δύο ἐκ τῶν οἰκογενειῶν τούτων συνεδέοντο πρὸς τοὺς γονεῖς μου διὰ δεσμῶν βαπτίσματος, κολληγοσύνης, κτλ. καὶ ὅλοι ἦσαν φίλοι καὶ συμπατριῶταί μας. (III, 328, 4–11)

> However, at one of the celebrations in the year of the Lord 186 . . . , we walked past the oak tree to *Mega Mandri*, which was a humble hamlet inhabited by local shepherds during summer. Seven or eight peasant families lived there. Two or three of them were linked to my parents through some godchild or tenant farmer of theirs, and all of them were regarded as friends and fellow countrymen of ours.

The toponym "Mega Mandri" literally means "Large Sheep Pen" or "Large Enclosure" (if one takes into account the fenced structure of a pen). As the word «Μέγα» conveys a notion of sacredness and «Μανδρί» evokes restriction and enclosing, we may also read: "Large Prison," "Holy Prison," or even "Holy Prohibition." In my opinion, the mention of this site along with the "year of the Lord," as a reminder of both Salvation and Christ, a site from which the narrator gazes upon the magic oak, though inaccessible to him due to the moral strictness of his family who forbade him to enter the place, embodies the prohibitions, both parental and religious, standing between him and the object of his sexual desire. Moreover, the fact that the oak tree is described as «Τὸ Μεγάλο Δέντρο» ("The Large Tree") at the end of the narrative, a name parallel in structure to «Τὸ Μέγα Μανδρί» ("The Large Sheep Pen"), does not in my view, and contrary to what Peckham maintains, suggest a convergence,[23] but rather a symmetrical opposition between a sacralized object of lust and an *equally* revered obstacle, or in other words, the equipollence of the existing forces, which confers a dramatic tone of the final "victory" of the tree.

The correlation between the site «Τὸ Μέγα Μανδρί», the Lord, and the narrator's parents is confirmed as soon as he recounts how he escaped his relatives' watchfulness[24] and left the Holy Saturday morning mass («τοῦ Μεγάλου Σαββάτου») to join the oak tree and embrace it. A little further on, he points out that he ran away while his parents («γονεῖς») stayed at «Μέγα Μανδρί» (III, 329, 29–30). The following pattern thus emerges: Γονεῖς, Μέγα Μανδρί, Μεγάλο Σάββατο vs Μεγάλο Δέντρο. It becomes rather clear that in order

to be able to fulfill his sexual desire, the narrator has to free himself from a twofold authority and behave both disobediently and impiously. The narrator additionally admits to having dreamt about his magnificent lover all through the previous night (III, 329, 1–2), that is, Good Friday night. Yet according to Orthodox practice on the day commemorating the Passion of Christ, strict fasting and total abstinence are in order, and the slightest trace of carnal excitation is deemed a major sin. All things considered, the "innocent" child in "Under the Royal Oak" is not so different from the shepherd in "Dream on the Waves" whose erotic transgression occurs during the sacred time before the Dormition of the Virgin Mary; nor is he different from the fiery narrator in "The Deliverer from Potions and Spells," who takes great delight in the knowledge that Saint Anastasia has not succeeded in curing his tormenting sexual urges. Let us not forget the elderly character in «Ἡ Μαυρομαντυλού» ("The Black-Scarved Woman"), who breaks his lifelong chastity during Lent by embracing a mourning and virginal (ἀπείρανδρος) mother transformed into a maritime reef. Stimulated by a similarly transgressive impulse, the naughty young boy in «Τά δαιμόνια στὸ ρέμα» ("The Demons in the Gully") leaves the holy ceremony conducted by his father—who, as a priest, both officially and explicitly represents religious rule—in order to wander in a highly sensualized way.[25]

"Under the Royal Oak Tree" is sprinkled with words and expressions alluding to deviation and sin. The child who disappears from church before the end of the Easter service (thus, before Holy Communion) to join his «ἐρωμένη» must follow a byway and stealthy path,[26] discovered only the day before, thus on Good Friday («Διὰ πλαγίου, κρυφοῦ δρομίσκου τὸν ὁποῖον εἶχον ἀνακαλύψει τὴν προτεραίαν» III, 329, 8). Afterwards, when the narrator glimpses from afar city dwellers coming to spend their holidays in the countryside, he wanders from the straight and narrow path («ἐξετράπην τῆς ὁδοῦ» III, 329, 25) for fear that they will reveal him to his parents, and hides behind some thick bushes, an action which serves as a subtle allusion to his moral deviation. Once this threat is gone, he loses his way and takes an uphill path on his left, which makes him an "alter ego" of the autodiegetic narrator of "The Demons in the Gully,"[27] a character emblematic of deviation and distress in the Papadiamantian corpus.

It is interesting that it is the oak tree, the "young virgin of the mountain" («κόρη παρθενικὴ τοῦ βουνοῦ» III, 328, 28) and "his benefactress and guardian" («ἡ εὐεργέτις μου καὶ κηδεμών μου» III, 329, 34), who saves and redeems him («μ'ἐξήγαγεν ἐκ τῆς ἀπάτης» III, 330, 1) when he fears his parents' scolding. This allows us to detect, once again in the literary world of Papadiamantis, the "family romance"[28] of double filiation, i.e., the "bad" birth parents and the "good" adoptive parents, or, as revealed by a thorough intertextual examination, the "copulating" parents and the "chaste" parents (Evzonas 2012:453, 461–466, 473–477). In this text, the figure opposed to the negatively perceived genitors is the oak, a virgin mother freed from the father, the idealized second

mother appearing behind the spinsters, barren women, and nuns in Papadiamantis's works, who are also the various earthly avatars of the singular Virgin Mary—whose exaltation by the writer exceeds in intensity her classically elated position in Orthodox Mariology (Evzonas 2012:476).

After finding his way again, the narrator comes close to realizing his dream. But before meeting "his dearest dryad of the woods" (III, 330, 7), he must traverse a harsh landscape full of obstacles:

> Ἤρχισα νὰ κατέρχωμαι, μέσω τῶν ἀγρῶν, ὑπερπηδῶν αἱμασιάς, χάνδακας, φραγμοὺς θάμνων καὶ βάτων, σχίζων τὰς σάρκας μου, αἱμάσσων χεῖρας καὶ πόδας . . . (III, 330, 4–6)

> I started walking downhill through the fields, jumping over stone walls, ditches, bushes, and bramble hedges that made my hands and feet bleed . . .

Although an echo of the *Song of the Songs* is easily perceptible here (cf. «Ἰδοὺ οὗτος ἥκει πηδῶν ἐπὶ τὰ ὄρη, διαλλόμενος ἐπὶ τοὺς βουνούς», "Here he comes, leaping over the mountains, bounding over the hills" 2, 8), the walls, fences, and hedges symbolize the moral barriers to be crossed, while the bramble bushes (and their thorns) refer more precisely to impious passion,[29] as in "The Deliverer from Potions and Spells" and «Ἁμαρτίας φάντασμα» ("Specter of Sin"). Everything in the text that we are now examining shows that the way to the fulfillment of sexual desire is through transgression and sin.

A "Freudian" dream

By the time the sensuous fugitive has finally reached his destination, instead of engaging in the delightful acts he vowed to enjoy with the body of his "lover," he chooses to take shelter in the oak's shade, delight in its coolness, breathe in its aromas, savor the mellifluous songs of the birds perched on its branches, and daydream, lost in contemplation (III, 330, 8–14). No climbing, no acrobatic feats: only relaxation, rest, peace of mind, drowsiness, and a growing sleepiness. The narrator resembles a child rocking himself and then falling asleep in his mother's arms («ὁ Μορφεὺς ἦλθε καὶ μ'ἐβαυκάλησε», "Morpheus came and rocked me in his arms" III, 330, 17).[30]

Later in the text, there is a description of the sleeping boy's dream, with a narration of the effects and his reflections upon waking, which could be safely described as free associations. The dream itself depicts the gradual transformation of the tree into an attractive young girl and supports the feeling often induced by numerous descriptions of landscapes in Papadiamantis's texts, which transpose onto nature a sensual surge initially aimed at a feminine human being. Unlike other critics (e.g., Stergiopoulos 2003:133, Moullas 1974:n.p.) who simply detect the writer's repressed eroticism (being deprived of sexual relations in real life, he would gain a substitutive, though "poor,"

fulfillment through the images of nature invested in a libidinal way, which were less liable to censorship), we see them as the magnificent fruit of what Gilbert Durand calls "the release of the imaginary" (1992:36), or—dare we say—the fruit of a manifest repression/release mechanism:

> Μοῦ ἐφάνη ὅτι τὸ δένδρον—ἔσωζον καθ'ὕπνον τὴν ἔννοιαν τοῦ δένδρου—μικρὸν κατὰ μικρὸν μετέβαλλεν ὄψιν, εἶδος καὶ μορφήν. Εἰς μίαν στιγμὴν ἡ ρίζα του μοῦ ἐφάνη ὡς δύο ὡραῖοι εὔτορνοι κνῆμαι, κολλημέναι ἡ μία ἐπάνω εἰς τὴν ἄλλην, εἶτα κατ'ὀλίγον ἐξεκόλλησαν κ'ἐχωρίσθησαν εἰς δύο ὁ κορμὸς μοῦ ἐφάνη ὅτι διεπλάσσετο καὶ ἐμορφοῦτο εἰς ὀσφύν, εἰς κοιλίαν καὶ εἰς στέρνον, μὲ δύο κόλπους γλαφυρούς, προέχοντας οἱ δύο παμμέγιστοι κλάδοι μοῦ ἐφάνησαν ὡς δύο βραχίονες, χεῖρες ὀρεγόμεναι εἰς τὸ ἄπειρον, εἶτα κατερχόμεναι συγκατα-βατικῶς πρὸς τὴν γῆν, ἐφ'ἧς ἐγὼ ἐκείμην· καὶ τὸ βαθύφαιον, ἀειθαλὲς φύλλωμα μοῦ ἐφάνη ὡς κόμη πλουσία κόρης, ἀναδεδημένη πρὸς τ'ἄνω, εἶτα λυομένη, κυματίζουσα, χαλαρουμένη πρὸς τὰ κάτω. (III, 330, 19–29)
>
> It seemed to me that the tree—for I still kept the notion of the tree in my sleep—was little by little changing its appearance, its state, and its shape. At some moment, I thought I could see, not the root of the oak, but two beautifully shaped legs, initially stuck together, which soon gradually began to split and become separated, as the trunk seemed to restructure itself to let appear the shape of a waist, a belly, a bust with two graciously upturned breasts. The two thicker branches seemed to resemble two arms, two hands stretched towards the infinite sky, before returning condescendingly down to the ground, where I was lying. And the foliage, dark and evergreen, took the appearance of a young girl's thick hair, tied on the top of her head, then loosening and falling in waves.

Apart from the libidinal roots and poetical flourishes displayed, we notice the contrast between the «ἄπειρον» (the infinite) and the «γῆν» (the ground or earth), associated respectively with the nymph and the child. This antithesis returns us to the aforementioned theme of incompatibility, and could be understood as an allusion to the supernatural quality of the oak tree as opposed to the terrestrial one of her ecstatic admirer (or, maybe, to the divine essence of one, and the mortal essence of the other), as well as an allegory of a mother's attitude towards her child. As to the image of a fantastic entity lowering her branches towards the narrator, it is reminiscent of a mother bending over her baby to kiss him or hold him in her arms.

The conclusion drawn by the narrator in his dream, the conclusion that "is no less logical because it was formulated in [his] hallucinatory delirium" («εἰς λῆρον ἐν εἴδει συλλογισμοῦ διατυπωθέν» III, 330, 30), adds an interesting element:

> «Ἄ! δὲν εἶναι δένδρον, εἶναι κόρη· καὶ τὰ δένδρα, ὅσα βλέπομεν, εἶναι γυναῖκες!» (III, 330, 31–32)
>
> "Oh! It isn't a tree, it's a girl, and all the trees that we see are women!"

Throughout his work, Papadiamantis uses two words, «κόρη» and «γυνή» (or «γυναῖκα» in demotic), that cannot be interchanged because they refer to two distinct social and physiological statuses. The former, depicting either young girls or spinsters, designates a virgin, whereas the latter indicates a "picked" woman, i.e., a woman who has engaged in sexual acts. Therefore, the narrator's thinking may be interpreted as follows: all trees are sexually active women (γυναῖκες), except for his venerated oak, who is an immaculate vestal (κόρη). This reasoning is open to an oedipal analysis, the main tenet of which is that all little boys like to fantasize that their mother, unlike all other women, is an untouched Madonna exclusively devoted to their needs. Indeed, according to Julia Kristeva, this is one of the reasons why the cult of the Virgin Mary is so profoundly anchored in peoples' hearts (1997:47).[31]

Pursuing this unconsciously Freudian process,[32] the narrator then recounts incidental ideas associated with his dream. Immediately after the outburst of the tree/female-being equation, his mind recalls the episode of the blind man healed by Christ, as related in the Gospel According to Saint Mark (8, 24–25), which the narrator claims to have learned from his Sacred History teacher:

> Καταρχὰς μὲν εἶδε τοὺς ἀνθρώπους ὡς δένδρα· δεύτερον δὲ τοὺς εἶδε καθαρά . . .
>
> In the beginning, he saw people who looked like trees walking. Only later did he see them clearly.

Instead of being an extract of the narrator's Christian education, we should rather read the passage as confirmation of the sacred nature of oneiric messages.[33] Meanwhile, it provides a more suitable key to understanding Papadiamantis's oneirology, which turns out to be ultimately Freudian: since the tale of the blind man supports the contents of the dream, I argue that the text subtly states that far from being the illogical offspring of our conscience, our dreams, those dark products of the imaginary, are the clearest representations of reality, and so to speak, the first step towards curing intellectual blindness (at first, one "sees" people as trees, then one "sees" them more clearly and detects their real essence), but also, as in this case, towards curing sexual ignorance or "sexual blindness." Let us not disregard that due to his experience with the oak-woman, the narrator wakes up from a sensual lethargy, discovers his sexuality that had hitherto been hibernating because of the admonition pronounced by the parental/religious authority, and acquires a more global understanding of himself. The healed child/blind man is now enlightened and is open to the range of knowledge implied in "Dreams on the Waves." Like any kind of awareness—the one gained in this story, the one that Prometheus brought to humans,[34] that of Sophocles's Oedipus or of Adam and Eve—it brings with it consequences to which I will return.

The narrator finally remembers that just before he woke from his dream, the fabulous creature uttered a heart-rending message:

> — Εἰπὲ νὰ μοῦ φεισθοῦν, νὰ μὴ μὲ κόψουν . . . διὰ νὰ μὴν κάμω ἀκουσίως κακόν. Δὲν εἶμ'ἐγὼ νύμφη ἀθάνατος· θὰ ζήσω ὅσον αὐτὸ τὸ δένδρον . . . (III, 331, 5–6)

> — Tell them to spare me, not to fell me . . . so that I don't have to do any harm despite myself. I am not an immortal dryad. I shall only live as long as the tree is alive . . .

The oak-girl, the virgin nymph, asks not to be sawn off and violently touched, for such an act would put a stop to her life; this is why she requests for the narrator to prevent this sacrilegious deed, otherwise she will take revenge on her attacker "despite herself."

Whether or not this excerpt draws inspiration from a mythological source,[35] we are free to dwell on its psychological background and thus unveil the "super-Papadiamantian" theme of defloration as a violent act whose victim is likely to perish and its author be weakened. In this respect, we may add that the spring poppies surrounding the tree provide a "scarlet" («κατακοκκίνων» III, 330, 17) bed for the dozing narrator. These crimson flowers, named in both katharèvousa («μηκώνων» III, 330, 16) and demotic («παπαροῦνες» III, 330, 9)—a typical Papadiamantian stylistic gesture—are in all likelihood a metaphor for the sleeping person's excitement. Drawing a connection to both «Τὸ καμίνι» ("The Crucible"), in which wild poppies evoke the festive blood of spring stemmed by attackers (IV, 205, 22–206, 7), and «Θέρος-Ἔρος» ("Theros-Eros"), in which they evoke the scythe of a lethal Theros-Eros in the second (II, 187, 4–9), with the idea of rape underlying both descriptions (Evzonas 2012:294–298), I can detect an analogous symbolism in "Under the Royal Oak Tree." Apart from the turgescence of desire (a phenomenon similarly linked to blood flow) in the sleeping child, the red poppies could also allegorically signify—through an overdetermination specific to literary tropes—the virginal bleeding of the hamadryad, which will inopportunely be stemmed if she is felled, if she is subjected to the sadism of a man, if she stops being a «κόρη».

Be that as it may, the words of the tree-woman strike fear into the narrator's mind and "cut off" his sleep. Not only does he awaken "full of anguish"[36] («εξύπνησα ἔντρομος» III, 331, 7), but he opens his eyes "in the oak's impenetrable shade" («σκιὰ ἀδιαπέραστος» III, 331, 9). This detail might seem insignificant were it not for the meaning of psychological night, the darkening of reason, linked to sin and feelings of guilt (III, 243, 28–32), which is more or less explicitly attributed to the dense foliage blocking the sunlight by the narrator of "The Demons in the Gully." Another fact supports this explanation: the boy hears a shepherd's voice calling him by name, yelling that his father is beside himself with worry and looking for him everywhere so that he had

better run as fast as he can "down there" («ἐκεῖ κάτω» III, 331, 13), that is, to the «Μέγα Μανδρί», which is not named on this occasion. What started as an idyllic dream thus ends as a nightmare coupled with a call to order from both his father and God.

A tree as a symbol of a proteiform and efflorescent drive

The narrative ends with a short section in which the narrator returns to his village after a protracted exile. As he revisits the scene of his childhood, an old lady tells him that the Royal Oak was cut down by a man named Varyenis, who almost immediately fell ill and died. Her conclusion, which constitutes the last sentence of the narrative, is that "the Large Tree was haunted" («Τὸ Μεγάλο Δέντρο ἦτον στοιχειωμένο» III, 331, 30). The disappearance of the oak, though adding a prophetic dimension to the narrator's dream, mainly stresses the tragic fate striking the objects of desire among Papadiamantis's characters as they invariably end up dead or married, with these two outcomes being almost synonymous in his works. We might recall the notorious "married or dead" of Polymnia in «Ὁλόγυρα στὴ λίμνη» ("Around the Lagoon"), Myrsouda in «Ρόδιν' ἀκρογιάλια» ("Rose-Tinted Shores") and, less directly, Moschoula in "Dream on the Waves." This is not difficult to explain. Since every libidinal irruption clashes with the ruthless censorship of the Superego, anything likely to kindle or arouse that corrupting surge should be condemned, put down, demolished.[37] "The Large Tree was haunted": evidently so. In olden days, the oak was a source of excitement; thus it must become, in retrospect, the devil's den. Unsurprisingly, the bearer of this closing message is a «γραῖα» (old woman) spinning with her distaff, undoubtedly a spinner of fate—bearing in mind the specific mythical investment of weaving activities in Ancient Greek texts[38] as well as in Papadiamantis's «Ἡ Φόνισσα» ("The Murderess")[39]—but she is also a female twice detached from sexuality by virtue of her old age and her occupation. The contrast is striking and effective: the voluptuous hamadryad incarnate in the oak has disappeared and in her stead comes a timeworn figure complete with a device "blessed" by Athena, the goddess born in the absence of sexual intercourse and hostile to carnal pleasures.

The question raised now is this: who is Varyenis, the woodcutter who killed the sacred tree with his felling axe? Saunier (2001:105–106) identifies him with the narrator, used as a mask for the writer who, throughout his literary production, never stops killing "trees," or in other words, women, according to my analysis. This interpretation, both attractive and plausible, may be corroborated by other elements; for instance, the recurrent disappearance of a character in a short text and its later reappearance assuming the features or name of another; the distortion of «Βαργένης» as «Βαρυγένης», "the man with a dense, uncouth beard," not unlike the author himself, or as «ἐργένης» ("a

bachelor") who «βαριέται» ("is bored"), that is, "the bored unmarried man," again probably resembling Papadiamantis, if we consider that many of his characters, including "The Murderess" (III, 418, 18), deem their «βίον» ("life") «ἀνωφελῆ, μάταιον καὶ βαρύν» ("worthless, futile, and tedious").

Remaining focused on the textual reality, I should stress that the narrator's awakening in a quake after the prophecy about the felling of the tree is linked to the resurgence of paternal rule (embodied in the minatory message brought by the shepherd). This fact allows the reader to construe the oak's destruction as the dread of castration that accompanies the transgressive desire to fuse with the maternalized tree, thereby allowing for the possible detection of the interconnected phallic and maternal meanings of the tree. In psychoanalysis and symbolic anthropology this ambivalence is evident in numerous myths, such as that of Pentheus.[40] The fantasy of scaling the oak only to be thrown from it—expressed at the beginning of the story and reviewed above—would be consistent with this theory (the phallus tree versus the matrix tree, "mounting" the mother versus castration).

Yet, another reading of this text is possible. Looking more deeply into the nymph's entreaty ("Tell them not to fell me") enables us to consider the oedipal boy fantasizing that his mother is being abused by her lover/his father and wishes him to intervene so as to save her.[41] According to this analytical point of view, the defiling woodcutter who "axes" the sacred tree—the tree-κόρη—to death could represent the sadistic father of the "primal scene"[42] who forces the reluctant vestal mother to participate in indecent acts. Killing Varyenis would therefore simultaneously satisfy the yearning for punishment and revenge as well as the resolve to castrate the genitor-feller in order to appropriate his phallic power. Building such a "tree" of fantasy obviously triggers an intense anxiety. To round off this interpretation, let us conjure the memory of Saint George, whose name-day celebrations are cited twice in the text (III, 327, 3; III, 328, 13), and who was beheaded after killing the dragon that threatened to devour the princess. Castration (with decapitation being an "isotope," borrowing the terminology of Julien Greimas 1966:30) is the inescapable destiny of those who try to kill the Father in order to become the Mother's hero.

Several readings are worth considering if we are to do justice to the exceptional richness of the short story "Under the Royal Oak Tree." The text itself presents an allegory of this versatility and pluralism when describing the tree's polymorphic variations depending on the observation post:

> Κατὰ τὰς ποικίλας κυμάνσεις τῆς ὁδοῦ, σύμφωνα μέ τὰ κοιλώματα ἢ τὰς προεξοχὰς τοῦ ἐδάφους, καὶ κατὰ τὰς κινήσεις τοῦ ὀναρίου τὰς ἰδιοτρόπους καὶ πείσμονας—καθὼς ἐξάνοιγα τὸ πρῶτον τὴν δρῦν, καθ᾽ὅσον ἐπλησίαζα ἢ ἀπεμακρυνόμην ἀπ᾽αὐτῆς, τόσας θέας, ἀπόψεις καὶ φάσεις ἐλάμβανε τὸ δένδρον. Ἐκ πλαγίου καὶ μακρόθεν εἶχεν ὄψιν λιγυρᾶς χάριτος· ἐγγύθεν καὶ κατὰ μέτωπον,

> προέκυπτεν ὅλη μεστὴ καὶ ἀμφιλαφής, βαθύχλωρος, ἐπιβάλλουσα ὡς νύμφη. (III, 328, 29–35)

> Depending on the bends of the road, the depressions and bumps of the ground, and also on my donkey's unpredictable and stubborn movements, whether I was coming closer to the oak tree or moving away from it, after I had glimpsed it for the first time, the tree incessantly changed its view, aspect, and phases. Seen from the side and from some distance, it appeared to have a graceful slenderness; from up close and abreast it appeared fully-grown and strong, with all its dark-green leaves, as imposing as a bride.

The metamorphosis is seemingly consubstantial, with the majestic oak-tree becoming a symbol of the symbol.[43] Isn't a symbol defined by its proteiform character, depending at least partially on a man's position in time and space?[44] A sociological tree, a family tree, the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, a matrix tree, a penis tree, a kaleidoscopic tree. The Papadiamantian writing multiplies *ad infinitum* the re-creative potentialities of a tree that perhaps really stood, as some critics insist, in the landscape of Skiathos.

By way of conclusion

Irrespective of the angle from which we study "Under the Royal Oak Tree," one steadfast fact remains: the short story closes with absence and loss, that of the phallus, the lover, youth, one's birthplace, the paradise of childhood. And yet, exactly as in "Dream on the Waves," the Garden of Eden before the downfall and exile is seen as only a literary hoax, a magnificent delusion. Oppressive rule, both parental and religious, has always existed and been a source of conflict and anguish, even when it is well concealed under a veneer of springtime carefreeness. Magic sounds, heady fragrances, gleaming colors, unpredictable, astounding images, transcendental associations, uplifting quotations: such is the fabulous power of language, capable of transfiguring the most bitter sorrow, transmuting the deepest loss, and consoling the direst distress.[45] The turmoil or rather the efflorescence of imagination (since I am working on an eminently floral text) that makes every word, every metaphor, and each and every detail of this literary wonder burst with enjoyment demonstrates the extraordinary fecundity of a drive that ceaselessly reinvents itself in order to claim its rights, while outsmarting the watchfulness of the Superego's Cerberus. Indeed, this may be the secret of Papadiamantian fictional prose, which keeps enchanting readers through the ages. If neither this rural drama nor other works of the author are deemed outmoded in the present context of globalization, virtualization, and sexual exuberance, it is most likely because the conflicting forces underpinning it are as timeless as the human psyche.[46]

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NOTES

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[1] See for instance Panos Moullas (1974:n.p.).

[2] See the resolutely interdisciplinary approach of Julia Kristeva, the textual analytic methods of Jean Bellemin-Noël, and the analyses of Frances Restuccia, richly enhanced with cinematographic references.

[3] Kamberidis (1990:137 *sq.*) stresses the affinities between "Dream on the Waves" and "Under the Royal Oak Tree," not because of their common narrative techniques, but because of their overtly expressed eroticism, which, according to him, conveys the search for the divine Eros.

[4] According to Stergiopoulos (2003:125), the missing closing sentence "by the hand of the copyist" may be explained by the fact that this narrative does not describe a tangible physical (guilty) relationship with a real woman and that its dreamlike quality remains in full force and in all its "unreality" to the end, contrary to what happens in "Dream on the Waves."

[5] Iatrou (2012) mentions that prior to Papadiamantis, only Georgios Vizyenos presented narrations in which the focalization through the partial knowledge and imaginary logic of a child alternates with the focalization through the complete knowledge and mature language of an adult narrator.

[6] See also Stergiopoulos (2003:130), who notes that the description of such celebrations combines the writer's Christian faith and paganism. Additionally, Constantinides (1996:393) points out that despite the numerous references to Greek Orthodox celebrations, the setting of this short story is evidently more pagan than Christian.

[7] For Farinou-Malamatari (1987:282) this narrative only outwardly adopts the child's perspective.

[8] See further on in the narrative the reference to the myth of the hamadryad: "I only learned about it later from a mythology booklet [. . .]" (III, 331, 14–15).

[9] All references to Papadiamantis's texts are to his complete works edited by Triantafyllopoulos (1981–1992), 6 volumes. The Roman numeral refers to the volume, the first Arabic numeral to the page, and the second Arabic number to the line(s) quoted.

[10] The Greek name of the oak tree (ἡ Δρῦς) is feminine, and I have chosen to use the feminine form in the English translation, so as to convey the feminine quality with which the author invests the tree.

[11] Stergiopoulos (2003:128) notes that these words and expressions give the impression that the tree is endowed with divine powers and that the narrator is driven by a religious quasi-mystical impulse.

[12] Cf. Zeus's Oak in Dodona, Jupiter's Oak on the Capitol in Rome, Ramowe's Oak in Prussia, Hercules's club made of oak wood, etc. All of these examples are taken from Chevalier and Cheerbrant (1982) s.v. "chêne" (oak).

[13] After studying the first description of the oak in the novel, Karantzi (2001:494) wrote that "'The royal crown' and 'the divine tiara' give the reader the impression that the text describes a virginal young girl who combines the characteristics of a saint, even those of the Virgin Mary, with those of a young princess or queen, while simultaneously retaining her arborescent quality." See also Saunier (2001:104–105), who carries out an "inventory" of the virginal and motherly characteristics of the oak based on the three available descriptions of the tree in the short story.

[14] Regarding the idealized mother, who is perceived as a holy virgin dedicated to her son's needs until her brutal demystification, then despised as a "prostitute" once the latter becomes aware of her involvement in sexual activities with his father, see Freud (1997:51–53).

[15] According to Kristeva (1980), in the first stage of his emotional development, the infant is unable to recognize his mother as an independent external entity, thus as an object: to him, she is only an *ab-ject*, something between an outer and inner reality, something that is intro-jected and ab-jected, swallowed and regurgitated, incorporated and expelled. During this period, the child lives in a constantly ambivalent situation, fantasizing about voluptuously "eating" his mother, while in fear of being eaten by her; he is thus overwhelmed and, at the same time, attacked by her; he is simultaneously fascinated and repelled, bewitched and disgusted, loved and crushed.

[16] Iatrou (2012) points out that children take metaphors literally and that the latter correspond to the symbolism found in dreams as described by Freud. Therefore, the child's perspective is closer to a dreamlike logic, which is confirmed by sociolinguistics.

[17] See Farinou-Malamatari (1987:283), who associates the oak in the story with the thirst for life and knowledge.

[18] See Chevalier and Cheerbrant (1982) s.v. *chêne* (oak).

[19] See the examples mentioned by Peckham (1994:151): «Οἱ ελαφροΐσκιωτοι» ("The Loonies" II, 490), "The Murderess" (III, 419), etc.

[20] See Chevalier and Cheerbrant (1982) s.v. *arbre* (tree): "The wealth of '*father-trees*' as well as '*mother-trees*' in the legends of peoples leads to the '*ancestor-tree*' whose image, gradually stripped of its mythical image, has led to the present-day *family-tree*. On the way, between the deep symbol and modern allegory, we may mention the myth [. . .] of the Bible's Tree of Jesse, which symbolizes the chain of generations, and whose story reaches its peak with the advent of the Virgin Mary and Christ."

[21] Saunier (2001:120–121) suggests an interpretation of tree climbing in "The Dragon's Voice" as the narrator seeking his genealogical identity. He also notes the pattern of climbing and falling from a tree in "Under the Royal Oak Tree," but without any further explanation (2001:100, n. 1).

[22] See the interpretation of the myth of Pentheus by Chevalier and Cheerbrant (1982) s.v. *arbre* (tree). See also Sale (1972:74) for a more detailed interpretation specifically centred on Euripides's handling of this myth, and Milner (1996:47–49), who disregards the "primal scene" (Pentheus's spying on the Bacchic orgies in which his mother takes part; see *infra*, n. 42) in order to concentrate on the conflicts begotten by the difference between the sexes (having repressed his own femininity, Pentheus tried to catch a glimpse of that which eluded him, and by dressing as a woman, to imitate through his disguise that which he disliked).

[23] Peckham (1994:154) stresses that the narrator quotes excerpts from the Liturgy to describe the tree and dismisses the idea of an antithesis between the «Μέγα Μανδρί» and «Μεγάλο δένδρο», instead opting for a "more profound affinity between them," namely their sacred character.

[24] See Karantzi (2001:494): "We should remember that the narrator runs to the tree in secrecy, hiding from his parents as if it were some mischievous deed or sin." See also the similar observations of Saunier (2001:97), Iatrou (2012), and Bouchet (2001:235). The latter prefers to use terminology associated with pleasure rather than sin, noting that "We see a shift from a pleasure first linked to a religious event towards a superior enjoyment born of the vision of the tree."

[25] Iatrou (2012), who examines the two short stories based on the presence of "dreams and childishness" in both, stresses that they are focalized through the perspective of the child and use the common theme of parental disobedience, which she relates to the "lifting of a ban" in Propp's *Morphology of the Folk Tale*.

[26] See Stergiopoulos (2003:131) who stresses that the devious and secret path insinuates interdict and transgression.

[27] See the comparison of the two narratives by Saunier (2001:98–100) and the extensive comments of Iatrou (2012).

[28] The "family romance" is a conscious fantasy, though later repressed, in which a child imagines his birth parents to be not his "real" parents, but adoptive parents, or his birth to be the outcome of maternal infidelity. Typically, the fantasy parents are of noble lineage, or at least, a higher social class than the real parents. The possible aims and sources of the family romance fantasy are revenge against frustrating parents, rivalry with the parent of the same sex, separation from the idealized parents by way of their transformation into fantasy parents, and elimination of siblings for competitive or incestuous purposes. See Freud (1973) and de Mijolla-Mellor (2005). On the "family romance" in literature, see Robert (1977).

[29] See Peckham (1994:155), who notes "the child moves towards the tree through a landscape full of brambles, just like a sinner."

[30] According to Saunier (2001:103), the unexpected presence of this ancient male character is a sort of trompe-l'oeil, since rocking, especially in the works of Papadiamantis, is a motherly act.

[31] Cf. Warner (1976), who gives a global and extended account of Virgin Mary worship.

[32] Note the coincidence between the publication dates of "Under the Royal Oak Tree" and Freud's monumental *Interpretation of Dreams*, an element that has not escaped the attention of Iatrou (2012), who has published some interesting studies on dreams in Modern Greek literature.

[33] See Saunier: "The reference to the episode of the blind man in the New Testament literally adds a holy quality to the episode" (2001:101).

[34] Bachelard even mentions a "Prometheus complex," which could, in his opinion, be the Oedipus complex of the intellectual world, bringing together "all of the tendencies that urge us to learn as much as our fathers, more than our fathers, as much as our teachers, more than our teachers" (1985:30–31).

[35] The narrator maintains that he later learned in a mythology booklet that the hamadryad lives and dies with the tree in which she is incarnated (III, 331, 14–16). This led Zamarou to seek and identify a legend in Apollonius of Rhodes's *Argonautics*, from which she believes the writer drew his inspiration. Without fully supporting this thesis, Stergiopoulos speaks more generally of ancient mythology and the popular traditions associated with fairies, goblins, or haunted trees, which certainly contributed to shaping "Under the Royal Oak Tree." Regarding these two analyses, see Stergiopoulos (2003:135–136).

[36] Stealthily but very importantly, this information reverses the affective contents of the outwardly idyllic dream, reminding the reader of a detail found in the *Odyssey*: the paradoxical tears flowing in Penelope's dream when an eagle kills her goose-suitors. For Devereux (2006: LIII, n. 31), the appearance of tears in a happy dream conveys the genuine sorrow caused by the impending death of the young suitors and presumed lovers of Odysseus's wife. For Devereux, a practicing psychoanalyst and Hellenist, this paradox derives from an ancient tradition that Homer probably tried to expurgate so as to avoid shocking his contemporaries.

[37] See Aristinos (2002:83), who interprets the felling of the Royal Oak as emblematic of a writer guilt-ridden by his sexual drives.

[38] The myths of Aëdon, the Minyades, Persephone, Arachne, Homer's Penelope, and Aristophanes's Lysistratian women indicate a dissonance in Greek imaginary thought between weaving and mingling with the other sex, weaving being the privilege of autonomous womanhood. When this craft is performed by a married woman, it signifies a regression (transgression) towards the stage of «παρθένος», that of premarital autonomy. Regarding this point, see Redfield (1982:194–195), Loraux (2007:189), and Papadopoulou-Belmehdi (1994:152–157).

[39] Amersa's (the glorified spinster who proudly rejects marriage and reproduction in Papadiamantis's "The Murderess,") repeated linking with weaving alludes to the character's sexual abstinence.

[40] Regarding the ambivalence and androgyny of the tree, see Chevalier and Cheerbrant (1982) s.v. *arbre* (tree).

[41] Devereux specifically associates rescue fantasies, which had been widely studied by Freud (1910), with the "primal scene" (see the following note), that is, when the child perceives his mother's voluptuous moaning during sexual intercourse with his father as a cry for help and need for rescue. Devereux is particularly interested in detecting this theme, which he termed the "Mommy's hero" fantasy (*héros de maman*), in Greek mythology. He thus studies Kronos who saves Gaia from Ouranos's oppressive and uninterrupted *coïtum*, Perseus who needs to save Danaë from Polydectes, the reverse ("counteroedipal") case of Phoenix who undermines his father in order to avenge his mother's sexual frustration because of the latter, and so forth. See Devereux 1988:285–286 and 2007:448, 476–477, n. 226.

[42] In psychoanalysis, "primal scene" refers to a child witnessing or fantasizing about his parents' sexual intercourse, perceived as a violent act. As this scene is not understood, it remains enigmatic, arousing anguish along with sexual excitement. See de Mijolla-Mellor (2005b).

[43] For Farinou-Malamatari (1987:285), the oak is nothing but a symbol.

[44] The oak and its symbolism depending on one's location in time and space have been theorized by Peckham (1994:153).

[45] See Farinou-Malamatari (1987:285), for whom the first description of the royal oak in the text represents a victory of language, compensating for the mourning context discernible at the end of the narrative.

[46] Kamberidis (1990), stressing the importance of the choice of title «Ὑπὸ τὴν βασιλικὴν δρῦν» (instead of the simpler «ἡ βασιλικὴ δρῦς») and, citing interesting cross-references from biblical excerpts, states that the title symbolizes a beneficial landscape under the auspices of God, being the God of literature, we may add.

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