Negotiating Heteronormativity In the Family Melodrama: A Case Study of Giorgos Katakouzinos's *Angelos/Angel* (1982)

Spyridon Chairetis
University of Oxford

ABSTRACT

This article argues that postmodern approaches to genre have deeply influenced the conceptualization of film genres. While the genre of melodrama along with its discursive signification has undergone substantial transformations over the course of decades, many film and genre scholars postulate that melodrama is governed by heteropatriarchal rules and conventions. My intention in this article is to argue that melodrama can be potentially ambiguous and ideologically subversive. For that purpose, Giorgos Katakouzinos's Angel *will serve as a case study. Katakouzinos's film, ever since its production in 1982 has received mixed feedback from critics, journalists and everyday people across Greece and beyond, who mainly approached the film as a narrative that reifies heteronormativity. Yet, the critical reception of the film does not only concern its themes and portrayals of homosexuality, but also its categorization in genre(s). Drawing on cultural studies and recent scholarship on queer(ing) melodrama, this article presents* Angel *as a family melodrama – in a broader sense of the term 'family' – and argues that the film replays and rejects heteronormative values, thus creating a cinematic space where its characters – both leading and supporting – assume different roles and reflect a breadth and diversity of desires, sexualities and domestic/public arrangements vis-à-vis heteronormativity. Finally, such an analysis suggests the need to re-assess old cultural texts and genres, with the ultimate aim to identify queer moments, which may have remained either unnoticed or disavowed.*

KEYWORDS

Angel
Greek cinema
heteronormativity
homosexuality
melodrama
queerness

INTRODUCTION[1]

Within the study of same-sex representational politics in Greek cinema, *Angelos/Angel* (1982) by Giorgos Katakouzinos cannot be overlooked. The film won three awards[2] at the Thessaloniki film festival and made a great sensation, reaching the top of the national box-office, with half a million viewers in its opening day. The film introduces the spectators to a twenty-year old closeted homosexual man, named Angelos/Angel (Michalis Maniatis), who works at a jewelry store and leads a discreet life in a rather homophobic social environment. During a night out, Angelos meets a sailor, Michalis (Dionysis Xanthos), falls in love with him, takes the decision to abandon his dysfunctional family in order to live with his lover and later on, he joins the army. In one of the film's most foreshadowing scenes, his ex-lover, a middle-aged man (Giorgos Bartis), tells Angelos that Michalis is a person not to be trusted and warns him to stay away from him. In subsequent scenes, Michalis buys Angelos women's underwear, and at a party, forces him to dress up as a woman. Later on, Angelos ends up in the streets with other transvestite prostitutes. He gets arrested, expelled from the army, outed to his family, while his father kills himself out of shame. Angelos becomes subject to verbal and physical abuse by his male clients and his partner. Towards the end, Angelos goes back to their little apartment and kills his lover with a knife.

Despite its massive success, Katakouzinos's film – inspired by real events and the life of Christos Roussos – received mixed feedback from critics, journalists and everyday spectators across Greece, who found themselves "exposed to the fragile nature of masculinity and a social reality that up until that time remained largely unknown" to the wider public (Karalis 2012: 202). On the one hand, most of the critical reviews of the period, focusing on Roussos's melodramatic life, big-screen adaptation and double *entendre* film title, saw the protagonist as a victim and a fallen angel, in need of support and compassion (Rafailidis 1995). On the other hand, however, the man who served as a source of inspiration for the making of the film, as well as gay spectators in Chicago and Cannes condemned *Angel,* considering the film stereotypical and degrading to the gay community.[3] Today, 35 years after its inaugural screening, *Angel* continues to occupy a special position in the history of Greek (queer) cinema and be a rich site for analysis. Kolovos (2000) and Soldatos (2010), for example, have approached the film as a narrative that exposes the ways in which social and ethical assumptions about

[1] This is a revised and extended version of a paper presented at the 'Diversity in 20th and 21st Century Greek Popular Culture(s) and Media' workshop, 14th March 2015, held at the University of Oxford.
[2] The film won the awards for best film, scenario and leading actor.
[3] Quote from the Greek TV show *I michani tou chronou/The Time Machine* (2005-2017), ALPHA Channel. Online show available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AhZPI4COVak. Accessed 29 November 2016.

homosexuality are reiterated through dominant discourses. In a similar vein, yet with an emphasis on the male protagonist, David Bleiler's analysis presenting many similarities with that of Rafailidis (1995) casts Angelos as "a helpless, humiliated and victimized subject" (2004: 178). Konstantinos Kiriakos has arguably provided the most systematic scholarly writing on *Angel.* In his monograph, *Politics and Desire: The Queer History of Greek Cinema*, Kiriakos illustrates the heteronormative pressures that homosexuals were likely to face and suggests that the main axis around which the film appears to revolve is "the pain and loneliness of homosexuality in a homophobic environment, as it is the case for the Greek society" (2017: 177). Yet, these particular understandings of the film, however sympathetic and innocent as they may appear to be, reproduce the closet for traditionally marginalized communities and construct homosexuals either as agentless victims of societal discrimination, and/or as queer villains, monsters and psychos (Morris 2001; Theodorakopoulos 2005)· The diverse critical reception of the film, however, does not only concern its themes and representation, but also its categorization in genre(s). While the production company characterized *Angel* as a film belonging to the drama genre, Kiriakos has seen the film falling under the rubric of melodrama (2001; 2017) and film platforms have considered it as a hybrid film, which straddles several genres such as LGBTQI, crime, and drama (Fandor 2017). Given the different standpoints adopted and the lack of consensus vis-à-vis Giorgos Katakouzinos's film, a number of interrelated questions arise here: Does Katakouzinos's film depict homosexuality in absolutely negative and stereotypical terms? How does *Angel* represent the rest of the characters? Are there ways to read the film differently? And finally, how does the film genre fit in the picture? In order to give answers to these questions, it is useful, at this juncture, to start by (re)defining the film's genre. In what follows, I will explore the definition, origins and (ab)uses of the term melodrama and discuss the history, evolution and particular features of the family melodrama in the space of Greece and beyond. After having explained in what ways *Angel* follows and at the same distances itself from the Greek family melodrama, I will draw on recent scholarship on queer melodrama, to investigate the queer potential of Katakouzinos's filmic work. My argument is that Katakouzinos's *Angel*, dealing with issues of gender, sexuality and homosexual desire can be read as a potentially subversive cultural text that negotiates heteronormativity and opens up spaces for unanticipated queer moments, which have remained either unnoticed or disavowed.

(FAMILY) MELODRAMA: THE HISTORY OF A POPULAR GENRE IN GREECE AND BEYOND

Film and literary scholars (Altman 1999; Chandler 1997; Kaklamanidou 2009; Neale 2002; Rio Alvaro del 2004) have long pointed out how postmodern approaches to genre have deeply influenced the conceptualization of film genres. The evolution of a film genre can be imagined as an active and dynamic process,

which not only entails modifications, determined by technological advancements, but as a development which is further triggered by sociopolitical and economic circumstances, producers' interventions, critical institutions and audiences. Following this line of thought, the genre of melodrama along with its discursive signification has unavoidably undergone substantial transformations, ever since "Jean Jacques Rousseau used the term in 1770 to describe his play *Pygmalion*" (qtd by Altman 1999: 70). Etymologically, melodrama is a compound, consisting of two Greek derivations: melo, which means music, and drama, which means play and/or action (Rooney 2013: 81). Thus, in a strict and rather literal sense, melodrama refers to dramas combined with music. Later on, however, silent films drew on the conventions of theatrical melodrama and developed a form of cinematic melodrama, whose meanings and conceptual applications became redefined (Han 2016: 53). In his seminal work *The Melodramatic Imagination,* Peter Brooks approaches melodrama as a drama of excess, a modern form and a mode of "high emotionalism and stark ethical conflict that is neither comic nor tragic" (1976: 12). From that point on, melodrama was associated with cultural texts designed to arouse strong emotions in the spectators (Chandler 1997; Kaplan 1983; Landy 1991). Yet, a widely concurred argument states that, because of its broad and loose understanding, melodrama gradually turned into an umbrella term and a one-size-fits-all "solution" for different types of films and sub-genres (LeBlanc 2006; Mercer and Shingler 2004; Merritt 1983). In his article 'Melo Talk: On the Meaning and Use of the Term "Melodrama" in the American Trade Press' (1993), Steve Neale posits that this inconsiderate use of the term omits a more structural criticism, which falsely presents melodrama as consistent and homogeneous across time. As he explains, in the period between 1910 and 1960, American melodramas do not address exclusively romantic and domestic narratives. On the contrary, they engage in depictions of war, violence and horror scenes and focus mainly, if not exclusively, on male protagonists.

In parallel to the circulation of various Hollywood films largely grouped as melodramas, the 1950s witnesses a veritable and systematic proliferation of a sub-genre of melodrama, known as family melodrama, which according to Linda Williams should not be equated with melodrama per se, despite morphological and/or thematic similarities they may both share (1998). Indeed, during this period and particularly owing to the presence of prominent Hollywood directors, films such as *Magnificent Obsession* (1954), *All That Heaven Allows* (1955), *Written on the Wind* (1956), and *Imitation of Life* (1959) by Douglas Sirk as well as *Cobweb* (1955) and *Two Weeks in Another Town* (1962) by Vincente Minnelli constitute archetypal examples of what Thomas Elsaesser (1972) describes as family melodrama, and serve to a greater or lesser extent, as sources of inspiration for subsequent filmmakers.

Thomas Schatz (1981) in *Hollywood Genres* has formed an elementary model for exploring the Hollywood family melodrama. Among the various conventions in which melodrama invests, attention is given to the main heroes, whose value systems, being antinomical to the one of their friends, family, community and/or colleagues generate conflict moments and relationships (Singer 1990, qtd by Stuart 2007: 54). The characters therefore, experience – among others – failed romances or friendships, strained familial situations, illnesses, losses, and neuroses and find themselves in the precarious position of being deemed impotent, while at the same time they ought to make choices that will shape the fate of their future life. Thus, melodrama explores various socioeconomic issues, by means of delving into the personal anguish and the psychological situation of the protagonist(s).

While the Hollywood family melodrama may serve as a good starting point for the study of Greek family melodrama, it is important to highlight that the latter has also followed separate trajectories. For Orsalia-Eleni Kassaveti, an important difference between the US and the Greek market lies in the public discourses of cultural value with regards to the genre. As she explains:

> The Greek cinematic melodrama [unlike the Hollywood melodrama] is a marginal genre that has been closely associated with a certain 'cheapness' in both form and content, and a subsequent ideological sedimentation due to this lack of serious engagement with the genre. (2017: 47)

Yet, not only has Kassaveti observed disparaging attitudes by the part of the Greek society and the general public towards melodrama, but she also raises the fundamental difference between the US and Greek melodrama, which is anchored in the way they address family issues. As she elaborates, the Greek family melodrama draws on "the Greek ethographia, and appears to have been influenced by the bucolic dramatic romance, as well as Indian and Turkish films, which reached Greek film theaters during the 1960s en masse" (ibid.: 50). In his chapter 'Sans famille, pas melodrame' (2001), Nikos Kolovos provides an analysis of family melodramas produced between 1950-1964 only to identify that the Greek family melodrama, similarly to the American one, is marked by turbulent conflicts between members of the family, the presence of evil friends, chance happenings, last minute rescues, *deus ex machina* endings and music accompaniment (ibid.: 331-334).

What is interesting in Kassaveti and Kolovos's work is that they both converge towards the idea that melodrama has remained static and conservative over the years, thus leaving no or little room for ideological subversion. More specifically, Kolovos even goes as far as to argue that "the family melodrama in Greece is an ideological formula, in which it is hard to trace sparks of what Althusser calls

melodramatic consciousness and subversive qualities" (ibid.: 343). Undoubtedly, the issue of power and ideology in cultural texts has been a subject that has occupied many researchers from a variety of disciplines. For media scholars (Avila-Saavedra 2009; Davis & Needham 2009; Fiske 1987; Gross 2001), popular culture in general, and films in particular adopt a one-sided heterosexual agenda, which is hierarchical in its treatment of men and women, and reticent in presenting queer pleasures in the same way as heterosexual ones. Among the writers (Gledhill 1987; Kleinhas 1978), who have discussed how hegemonic ideology operates in film language and storylines, Thomas Elsaesser suggests that Hollywood melodrama is the genre most capable of fleshing out those patterns of domination and exploitation existent in a given society (1972: 69). Even the most superficial examination of the family melodrama, both the American and the Greek, confirms that the overriding majority of conflicts and love stories involve white, heterosexual and middle to upper class subjects. Among these characters, women, according to Linda Williams, take on traditional status under patriarchy and act as "wives, mothers, abandoned lovers […] or hysteric figures 'afflicted' with a deadly or debilitating disease" (1998, qtd by Grant 2012: 161). In these contexts, women attempt to cope with their 'bourgeois tragedy', and break free from their externally imposed constraints. Yet, most of the times, their struggles are doomed to failure or neutralized for the sake of family unity and collective prosperity. Aside from heterosexual female protagonists, queer characters appear to face similar or equally unequal discrimination in films. Indicatively, Peter Brooks, adopting a rather pessimistic attitude, "allies the truth of melodrama to a love that dare not speak its name" (1976: 73) insinuating that non-normative desires making their appearance within the genre are usually policed and located in a heterosexual matrix.

Nevertheless, popular culture does not only embrace heteronormative prescriptions. Stuart Hall envisioned the popular as "a site whose texts are polymorphous, polysemous and open to negotiation" (2005: 228). On the same path, other theorists of cinema and melodrama, while agreeing upon the genre's adherence to hegemonic ideals of gender and sexuality, concur with Hall's assessment and consider melodrama as potentially ambiguous, ideologically subversive and accommodating of queer history and experience (Dean 2001; Elsaesser 1972; Pidduck 2013). In *Melodrama in Contemporary Film and Television*, Michael Stewart, drawing on three essays on queer melodrama published at *Camera Obscura*, explains the recent "cultural turn" in melodrama, which appears to be productively colonized and reappropriated by a number of feminist and queer scholars (2014: 7). Furthermore, particular emphasis should be made to the recent publication of Jonathan Goldberg's work on melodrama. *Melodrama: An Aesthetics of Impossibility* (2016), as its title proclaims, brings queerness, melodrama, and impossibility together and reveals how melodrama's refusal and simultaneous embrace of the ordinary constructs anti-normative

worlds and eventually make impossibility possible. In consideration of the above, the melodrama, irrespective of the sexual orientation and/or intention of its creator, can be positioned differently, and viewed as an arena, which integrates complex dialectics of resistance and acceptance, refusal and capitulation.

Following Jonathan Goldberg's example, this article aims to re-read *Angel* and its characters in an attempt to discover new potentials and possibilities. Drawing from cultural studies and queer theory, I am interested in evaluating how the film produces meaning and how I – as a PhD student, filmgoer and "perverse reader"[4] (Sedgwick 1993: 3) – interact with the text's multiple meanings. The figure of queer reading of the text partly borrows from the works of Alexander Doty (1993; 2000), Samuel Chambers (2009) and Frederik Dhaenens (2011; 2012; 2013). Employing a close reading of those characters and scenes which I find important for my analysis, and following a non-linear course, I argue that *Angel* replays and at the same time rejects heteronormative rules; more specifically, while on the one hand, the film reproduces hegemonic ideology, culminating with a tragic ending, endemic in numerous classic Hollywood melodramas, on the other hand, there are daringly queer moments and scenes where its characters – both leading and/or supporting – adopt resistant, emancipatory and non normative modes of 'living' inside the film. At this point, acknowledging the chaotic and multifaceted meaning of the word queer, it is important to provide an operational definition and then, limit its breadth by explaining how it will be used in this article.

The term 'queer', much like melodrama, has different meanings in different social and historical moments. From a bad word used to address homosexuals, 'queer' turned out to be a verb, a noun, an adjective, "a collection of intellectual engagements with the relations between sex, gender, and sexual desire" (Spargo 2000: 9), and an anarchical school of thought reacting against normalized hierarchies, conventional ways of living, and stable categories. Borrowing Dhaenens's definition, 'queer' here "connotes empowerment and an attack on the dominant, rigid, and implicitly violent sexual norms" (2013: 305). In other words, articulations of queerness within the melodrama may expose the

[4]In *Tendencies,* Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick defined her interpretative practices as "perverse" and/or "ardent". As she explains "the reading practices […] had necessarily to run against the grain […] often, of the most accessible voices even in the texts themselves" (1993: 5). Following her lead, I see myself as a perverse reader because I remain attached to texts which are received as obscene or marginal, placing myself in relation to the text and not relying on the critics' interpretative mastery or priority over the text.

centrality of heteronormativity and subvert its widespread institutions and practices.[5]

On viewing *Angel,* it appears to follow a series of structures from family melodrama: families in crisis, victimized heroes, dead-end situations, obscured social criticism and an emphasis on personal emotional traumas. The focus that Katakouzinos gave to the story, exploring the blurring boundaries between the private/personal and the public, links the film to a group of earlier Greek productions portraying cultural anxieties about masculinity, public shame, parenthood and family life. Some of the most popular titles could be Giorgos Tzavellas's *O Methystakas/The Drunkard* (1950), Maria Plyta's *Navagia tis Zois/Moment of Passion* (1959) and Dinos Dimopoulos's *To Amaxaki/The Horse Carriage* (1957). Yet, comparing *Angel* exclusively with films from previous decades without considering the topic of (homo)sexuality and the sociocultural context in which *Angel* was made and seen would circumscribe Katakouzinos's film's political aim,[6] historicity and 'conversation' with other contemporary directors. As briefly mentioned in the beginning of this article, *Angel* was officially released on October 15th 1982, a time period marked by "the total eclipse of the Greek melodrama from the cinematic map and the concomitant emergence of new values, the rise of sexual liberation at a global scale, and the advent of foreign consumption patterns" (Kassaveti 2017: 59). Since Rainer Werner Fassbinder's reputation was already established and his influence on the European cinema had become widespread at that time, it would not be impossible to suggest that the works of the German director and screenwriter had inspired Giorgos Katakouzinos. Although the links which connect the two directors' works have not been established or sufficiently theorized, even the most superficial examination of *Angel* and *In a Year of 13 Moons* (Fassbinder, 1978) could reveal interesting similarities. Based on the above, I argue that Giorgos Katakouzinos combines conventions from the Greek family melodrama of the 1950s and 1960s and thematic elements from R. W. Fassbinder, thus creating a family melodrama – in a broader sense of the term 'family' – which encompasses traditional families next to queer families of choice. The analysis that follows is an attempt to capture queer interventions and ruptures in the

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[5] An interesting example of this kind is provided by Marios Psaras in his recent monograph *The Queer Greek Weird Wave: Ethics, Politics and the Crisis of Meaning* (2016). In his volume, Psaras examines a number of films, created by well-known directors of contemporary Greek cinema in an attempt to reread, subvert and revise traditional notions of Greekness, the Greek nation and the family.

[6] Eleni Vernardou provides Katakouzinos's opinion about the relationship between cinema and reality (*Eleftherotypia* 14.8.2013). As she aptly explains, when asked in an interview, Katakouzinos rejected any direct relationship between his film and the crime that Christos Roussos committed. Katakouzinos's aim behind the *Angel* project was to portray a sensitive man and above all, "to sensitize the deeply conservative Greek society to homosexuality" (ibid.).

otherwise strictly heteronormative plot of *Angel* with the ultimate aim to provide a queerer perspective on the film.

BETWEEN VICTIMHOOD AND QUEER RESISTANCE

Right from the start, the film introduces us to Angelos and his social circles, whose personal accounts illustrate and reflect societal attitudes towards homosexuality. In one of the first scenes of the movie, Giorgos, a middle aged gay man and his friend and ex-lover Angelos meet at the airport and discuss the reasons behind Giorgos's decision to move abroad **(Fig.1).** In his narrative, the European country that Giorgos is about to visit is imagined as a phantasmagoric and exotic elsewhere, and a gateway that will offer him the possibility to live a happy and decent life that cannot be attained in Greece. Athens is presented as a homophobic, hypocritical and dangerous place for queers,[7] therefore being a sexual dissident in this city is implied as a condition which coincides with misery and loneliness and leads to what Goffman calls "a double biography" (1963, qtd by Eribon 2004: 4): a life of "deception and duplicity" (Seidman 2002: 25), characterized by inhibited interactions, use of hiding practices and lies.

Fig 1: *Angelos meets his ex-lover at the airport.*

In subsequent stages, the film itself confirms the validity of Giorgos's words and invites the viewer to images of brutal treatment of gays and transgenders by everyday people and institutions. Angelos endures multiple forms of oppression and becomes a target of physical and/or verbal harassment by his parents, police, military officers, lovers and strangers. Words like "*despinis*" (miss),

[7] Here, the word 'queer' is used as an umbrella term and includes all individuals who operate outside the heterosexual norm.

"*poustis*" (fag) and "*madam*" (madame), which are used by different characters to address the main protagonist of the film carry with them histories and politics of meaning and demonstrate that the homosexual identity is vulnerable, shameful, and prone to punishment and discipline. Interestingly, however, the film highlights that not all characters who engage in same sex practices suffer the same; an incongruence that can be explained on the basis of the unwritten 'laws' that govern sexuality in Greek and European contexts during the 1980s. Influential pieces written by scholars like Sasho Lambveski (1999), Huseyin Tapinc (1992) and Kostas Yannakopoulos (2001) bring to light different classification for the lexical category of homosexual behavior and different politics of meaning. The terms 'homosexual' and 'homosexuality', although used in scientific discourse, were generally unknown words in everyday language and "blanket terms for many who experienced same sex desire" (Kulick 1998: 215). According to Yannakopoulos (2001), the key aspect that separated men from *aderfes* (faggots) at that time was the role they assumed in sexual practices. The man who fucked continued to be a man as his penetrating sexual practice was assumed to satisfy a heterosexual need, and his role did not transgress the "boundaries of the phalocentrically correct Greek masculinity" (Vamvakitis 2008: 64). On the other end of the spectrum, those who engaged in receptive sexual intercourse and enjoyed being anally penetrated were assumed to equate themselves to women and were inevitably displaced from the male kingdom into a weakening, pathological, and even laughable position. Under this perspective, the homophobic attacks directed towards Angelos and his friends, as well as Angelos's lover's (Michalis/Dionysis Xanthos) safe zone positioning, in most parts of the film should come as no surprise. However, reading Angelos and his friends as subjects permanently assigned to inferiorized, and precarious positions by the sexual and gender rules of heteronormativity, and Michalis only as complicit in heteronormative regimes would circumspect their varying degrees of queerness and attempts for resistance. In the part that follows, I will try to explain how Angelos, Michalis and other supporting characters engage in a constant process of queering and de-queering cinematic spaces, both domestic and public.

(DE) QUEERING PRIVATE AND PUBLIC SPACES

To a certain extent, it can be argued that one of the film's primary focuses is the romance that develops between the two men. Katakouzinos's camera follows Angelos incessantly and records in meticulous detail the lovers' journey, from their first acquaintance at the Zappeion Park, to their subsequent dates in cafés and luna parks and their living under the same roof. Angelos and Michalis's decision to share a flat and cohabitate, viewed as a natural part and step of their courtship ritual, sabotages clichéd narratives, which construct gays as frivolous and in constant search for different sexual partners. Yet, their willingness to engage with and take part in domestic rituals, traditionally granted to

heterosexuals, evokes what Lisa Duggan's (2002) defines as "new homonormativity", which constitutes a specific set of social aspirations of gays who seek inclusion by heteronormative institutions. Indeed, Michalis and Angelos replay and imitate the ideal of a traditional heteronormative couple in a number of ways. This message is particularly reinforced by the film's construction of gendered roles, tasks and behaviors for each partner. Michalis for instance, is steadily articulated as a strong and outspoken man, "a straightforward and ordinary dude",[8] who wears clothes which reveal his hairy chest and big bulge, and thus offers the viewers a typified form of machismo. In most scenes, he is filmed outside the house smoking, riding motorcycles, hanging out in bars with friends and generally reinforcing stereotypical notions of what it means to be a man and a penetrator. On the other hand, Angelos's representation, while deviating from stereotypical images of (hyper) masculine or camp gays, exudes some form of submissiveness, grace and effeminacy.

Fig. 2: *Michalis enters the house. See the poster of a naked man on the wall.*

In one of the few available domestic scenes where both partners are present, the enactment of the typical 'honey I'm home' trope and the performance of specific tasks by each partner instead of parodying conventional cinematic formulas, misses the mark of critical irony and eventually serves conservative and heteronormative ends. Indicatively, Michalis dressed in the navy uniform, returns back home carrying take away food. He puts a flower behind his lover's right ear and Angelos takes him to the hallway to show him the posters on the walls and the changes he made to the house **(Fig. 2)**. Right after that, Angelos

[8] "Ντόμπρο και λαϊκό παιδί" (quote from the film *Angel*).

goes to the kitchen, slices the bread, takes the dishware and sets the table in order to have lunch together. This domestic scene, although short in duration, is particularly interesting because it tells a lot about the couple's arrangements, domestic rules and role distributions **(Fig. 3)**. At the same time, this scene, focused around daily and repetitive activities/routines, such as sleeping, coming back home after work, doing housework, and eating, represents the house as a place for continuity and stability: "now we have our home, we will have plenty of time at our disposal".[9]

Fig. 3: *While Michalis takes his clothes off, Angelos slices the bread in the kitchen.*

Yet, domesticity in the film is also associated with other values and symbols. The aforementioned pictures of naked men on the house walls as well as the former act of kissing prove that the house functions as a safe haven for the expression of gay identity. In a considerable number of scenes, the viewers witness Angelos and Michalis celebrating their love, and thus subverting sanitized and sexually-inactive cinematic gay portrayals. Take, for instance, the following example: Michalis and Angelos are lying in bed naked with their bodies covered with sheets, Angelos leans on Michalis's chest and his partner smokes a cigarette. While the sex scene is omitted, the film provides the viewers with bits and pieces to intrigue them and insinuate what has just happened. In this post-intercourse scene, Michalis breaks the silence together with the erotic ambience by articulating his desire to be with Angelos forever ("we'll be together forever"[10]). These words, expressing love and commitment, nurture a hope for steadiness and queer futurity, which is consistent with the heteronormative expectations

[9] "Τώρα έχουμε το σπίτι μας, θα έχουμε αρκετές ώρες στη διάθεσή μας" (quote from the film *Angel*).
[10] "Θα είμαστε για πάντα μαζί" (quote from the film *Angel*).

for a monogamous relationship. Nonetheless, considering the film's ending, the couple's dissolution and the scenes that follow, such an aspiration eventually appears to be utopic and unattainable.

Mainly from the second half of the film, Angelos and Michalis break the unwritten contract of monogamy, steadiness and exclusivity, verbally agreed between them, and engage in non-normative practices with others. For Eeden Moorefield Van et al., those "sexual affairs, which reside outside the primary relationship, constitute infidelity and break the rules that govern heteronormativity" (2011: 567). In my analysis, however, focusing on Angelos in particular, I will show that this is not exactly the case. In his emblematic book *Travesti: Sex, Gender, and Culture among Brazilian Transgendered Prostitutes*, Don Kulick (1998) posits that certain sexual topographies and relationships deviate from heteronormative prescriptions. Specifically, for transgender prostitutes – as this might be the case for prostitutes in general – sexual practices with clients are commonly driven by utilitarian logics of economic transaction (and not by emotional resonance). Consequently, those who prostitute themselves and may also be in a relationship are not assumed to commit infidelity, particularly when their partners are aware of their profession and sexual practices. In a similar way, given that Michalis knows and in fact pushes his lover into prostitution and cross-dressing, the word infidelity is not particularly relevant. Even so, Angelos's act of prostituting and involvement in multiple forms of sexual activities with numerous unknown partners-clients, yet with his partner's knowledge, still upsets the law of heteronormativity and brings to light alternative sex logistics and new conceptual frameworks for defining relationships.[11]

So far, an emphasis has been laid on Angelos's non-normative practices, demonstrating how they breach heteronormativity and serve as a form of resistance. Yet, Angelos's resistance is further accompanied by non-normative and non-expected sexual behavior. Viewers can see this most clearly through an erotic instantané between the protagonist and a male client. As the client picks up Angelos from Syngrou Avenue and takes him back to his home, Angelos finds pictures of him with a woman and assumes that he is married and heterosexual.

[11] An important clarification needs to be made at this point. While Katakouzinos's film does indeed cast light on alternative sexual practices and logistics between homosexual men, cinematic representations of alternative or marginalized sex practices between straight-identified characters circulated on the Greek big screen long before the 1980s. Takis Kanellopoulos's *Ekdromi/Excursion* (1966), Alexis Damianos's *Evdokia* (1971) and a considerable number of soft porn films produced in the 1970s upset traditional notions of sex (images of prostitution, depictions of love triangles, etc.) and can be viewed as cultural products contributing – to a greater or lesser extent – to the emancipation of the Greek youth culture of the late 1960s and 1970s (Karalis 2012; Kiriakos 2017; Moukazi 2015).

When they enter the bedroom, Angelos is about to kneel down and perform oral sex. Yet, the man stops him, kisses Angelos's body, moves towards his genitalia and performs fellatio on him. A little later, the film shows the two men in bed with the masculine man crying and Angelos consoling him **(Fig. 5)**. This scene, implying a reversal of stereotypical sex roles and practices, not only does it open up opportunities for Angelos to become a more 'alive' and active agent in the film's narrative economy, but also indicates his sexual transgression, as the more masculine man becomes a bottom and Angelos the top. The same can also be said for the masculine man, who according to his narrative had never had any same-sex (penetrative) experience before. So, Angelos's turning that man into a bottom and participant in queer experiences reinforces the argument that masculinity is an adaptive performance and reveals heteronormativity's internal contradictions and own permeability.

Fig. 5: *The male client is crying and Angelos caresses him.*

The same idea regarding (im)mutability is further elaborated when the camera shifts to explore Athenian public spaces. Throughout the film, Katakouzinos has vividly depicted scenes where policemen and everyday people monitor public spaces in order to cleanse them from 'vices'. At the same time though, *Angel*'s director sheds light on queer moments which take place under society's nose, thus, exposing the vulnerability of open spaces and their appropriation – at the earliest opportunity – by sexual dissidents for perverse purposes (Betksy 1995). Angelos and his transgender friends's presence in Syngrou Avenue for instance, cannot be ignored or underestimated. Through the film's dialogues and close-ups, viewers may pick into a community, which despite its polymorphy, follows specific codes and laws. Wearing high heels, provocative clothes and wigs, which constitute the quintessential accessory for cross-genders, Angelos and the rest of

the prostitutes invade the street and master the art of seduction; they wait for clients, reveal taboo part of their bodies, negotiate their own terms in transactional sex and make the male heterosexual gaze fantasize them **(Fig. 6)**. Their presence, acts, and strategies therefore disturb public decency and order, deconstruct a specific normality in a gender and sexual binary, and turn Syngrou into what Dimitris Papanikolaou calls "a mapped urban place of non-normative sexual identities" (2014: 215).

Fig. 6: *Transvestite prostitutes at Syngrou avenue.*

By all means, Angelos takes part in and contributes to the reconfiguration of Syngrou Avenue. Yet, unlike the rest of the prostitutes, Angelos's presence is not limited to this area; as discussed already, Angelos shows up in private houses, public spaces and institutions, putting on a different 'mask' every time. Viewers see him as a man, a homosexual, a gay-passing-as-straight for his family, a soldier, a victim of discrimination, a victimizer, an angel and a demon. By performing – sometimes unwillingly – a set of conflicting and contradictory identities, Angelos has access to the entire city (almost) and a wider spectrum of sex and gender subjectivities. Yet these identities, however diverse and liberating – at least some of them – as they might be, are never perfectly performed. Despite being a man, Angelos does not come up to the expectations of the Greek society and is strongly advised to complete his military obligations in order to become a man ("the military will make you a man"[12]). Yet, his homosexuality betrays him. Even when he is dressed in women's clothes, his transgender friends make fun of him because he cannot hold the cigarette

[12] "Ο στρατός κάνει τους άντρες" (quote from the film *Angel*).

properly and perform femininity in appropriate ways. If according to Judith Butler's famous formulation, gender is viewed as a series of performances that uncover no essence, Angelos's drag "reveals the imitative structure of gender itself – as well as its contingency" (1990: 175). By this, the film challenges normative gender, questions the 'fixity' of certain categories and identities and reveals their potentially plastic and malleable qualities.

So far, the paper has provided a queer reading of GT[13] characters that populate Katakouzinos's film and explained the ways through which they negotiate heteronormative discourses. At this point, it is crucial to concentrate on Angelos's grandmother, who despite her short-lived appearance onscreen, articulates resistance to heteronormativity and thus deserves particular mentioning. Roughly in the middle of the film, Katakouzinos's camera moves from the center of Athens to a village outside the capital and introduces us to an eccentric woman who lives alone in a dilapidated house and does not maintain good relations with the rest of the village. This is perfectly illustrated in a particular scene, where Angelos's grandmother interrupts a funeral procession. Without being asked and ignoring the code of conduct set out by heteronormativity, she unleashes hate speech against villagers and ecclesiastic representatives and reveals hidden secrets that none wants to hear. Angelos's grandmother, by unmasking women who used to be prostitutes and now pretend to be moral and gracious interrupts public decency and upsets the rules of conduct set in the sphere of public culture. Because for the villagers, the old woman's revelations, belong to the private realm and are therefore seen as a curse and a point of humiliation when discussed publicly. In an attempt to keep her mouth shut, they throw stones at her **(Fig. 7)** and call her "*trelogria*" ("old bag"), a word which is associated with mental deficiency and which is meant to be insulting. Angelos's grandmother however, is not affected. Because for Tony Adams (2011), an insult is effective only when the suggestion is horrible both to the subject and the object of the insult. In fact, Angelos's grandmother accepts the insult and turns it into embrace. Unlike the rest of the women in the village, she daringly admits her queerness and even articulates her non-normative sexual practices by disclosing her adventurous past as a prostitute and a pimp. In this way, she rejects hegemonic prescriptions, which are inextricably associated with hypocrisy and oppression, and opts for alternative modes of living outside the heteronormative sphere. Attention should be also drawn to the very end of this scene where Angelos's grandmother fantasizes about the possibility of her grandchild being a woman and a prostitute. The purpose of this scene is twofold: first, it creates a difference in knowledge, with the viewer knowing more than the film characters and, second, it depicts Angelos's grandmother as a person open to non-normative practices and unconventional ways of using the body.

[13] Gays and transgender persons.

Although this form of 'acceptance' is set within a framework, which associates gayness and transvestism with prostitution ("but you, had you been a woman, how much joy would I get from your body"[14]), it still contains subversive elements; by defying gender and age appropriate behaviors, Angelos's grandmother provides a non-conventional representation of an elderly woman but most importantly, confirms that queerness is a way of life and style and not a cultural overlay ascribed to a given sex, age or body.

Fig. 7: *Ecclesiastic representatives and villagers throw stones at Angelos's grandmother. This frame also shows the dilapidated house where the old woman lives.*

EN LIEU DE CONCLUSION

This article followed the recent scholarship on queer(ing) melodrama and attempted to re-read and re-assess a popular Greek family melodrama through the lens of queer theory. The analysis of Katakouzinos's film revealed that *Angel* cannot be simply dismissed as a homophobic and strictly heteronormative narrative. In fact, when read through the lens of queer theory, *Angel* can be understood as a text, which plays with the notion of heteronormativity, engaging in a constant game of submission and resistance. While on the one hand, *Angel* provides a claustrophobic, dimming and repressive environment for queers, on the other hand, it gives prominence to ways and opportunities for the display and expression of varying degrees of queerness. Specifically, considering that the Greek cinema had been a traditionally non-accessible and non-friendly space for

[14] "Εσύ όμως, αν ήσουν γυναίκα, χαρές που θά 'χα δει απ' το κορμί σου" (quote from the film *Angel*).

LGBT persons, *Angel*'s introduction of the G and T on the big screen can be seen as a remarkable and encouraging attempt towards addressing forms of symbolic annihilation and injustice. Yet, diversity is not solely associated with plurality of persons, but also with deviation and difference. The emergence of traditionally excluded and unconventional individuals, not only does it indicate the gradual recognition and problematization around these subject positions in society, but also brings along new, elastic conceptual frameworks for masculinity, femininity, domesticity, relationships, and public conduct logistics. Under this light, the family melodrama in question can be seen as a cinematic space, populated by a diverse set of people, each of which assumes different roles and reflects a breadth and diversity of desires, sexualities, and domestic /public arrangements vis-à-vis heteronormativity. Finally, the particular practice of reading cinematic genres through contemporary queer theorizing reveals its surprising potential and demonstrates that films, which have been read as conservative and heterocentrist, may provide new and fresh insights. Hence, using this analysis as a starting point, further scholarship may attempt to re-read and re-assess other Greek melodramas and genres, with the ultimate aim to 'mine' queerness hidden inside the media texts, that on the surface shouted about the (im)possibility of such a venture.

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