

INTERTEXTUAL RELATIONS IN SMYRNEAN COMEDY: THE
CASE OF *THE GOOD BRIDEGROOM* (Ο ΚΑΛΟΣ ΓΑΜΒΡΟΣ) AS
A THREAD CONNECTING FOLKTALES AND BOCCACCIO WITH
GREEK SHADOW THEATRE (ΚΑΡΑΓΚΙΟΖΙΣ) AND THE
FASOULIS GLOVE-PUPPET

[Relaciones intertextuales en la comedia de Esmirna: el caso de *El buen novio* (Ο καλός γαμβρός) como hilo que conecta cuentos populares y Boccaccio con el teatro de sombras griego (Karagkiosis) y la marioneta de guante Fasoulis]

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ABSTRACT

The unsigned one-act comedy *The Good Bridegroom* (Ο καλός γαμβρός, Smyrna 1870), depicts Polyphrontis's attempt to marry his daughter (Strepsinoe) to the elderly and cowardly Bambakis, despite her love for the impecunious Eustrophidis. Using a clever ruse at a cemetery, Bambakis is exposed as fearful, and Eustrophidis —later revealed as the heir to an Odessa fortune— wins both the father's consent and Strepsinoe's hand. The play seems never to have been staged. However, intertextual analysis reveals affinities with folktales and Greek shadow and puppet theatre. The narrative aligns with Aarne–Thompson–Uther type (ATU) 940, “The Three Suitors in the Cemetery,” where rivals undergo trials disguised as corpse, angel, and devil. Variants exist in Turkey, and Boccaccio's *Decameron* provides a literary precedent. In Greek folk, puppet and shadow theatre, the theme appears under titles such as *The Three Lovers*, *The Three Bridegrooms*, or *The Three Secretaries*. In these adaptations, the daughter's agency is reduced, while Karagkiozis, as comic trickster, outwits the rivals. A. D. Nikolaras's *Three Bridegrooms and a Bride* (1876, theatre) bears resemblance to it, emphasizing parental preference and hidden wealth. Shadow and puppet theatre preserved folkloric motifs, including cemetery trials, humorous textual mishaps, and the climactic pun in which Karagkiozis embraces the bride as the “tree trunk.” Overall, the circulation of these motifs across theatre, shadow theatre, puppet theatre, and folktale demonstrates the survival and transformation of *The Good Bridegroom* in popular performing arts, where the definition of a “good bridegroom” varies according to cleverness, inheritance, or female choice.

KEYWORDS: Greek puppet theatre (Fasoulis), Greek shadow theatre (Karagkiozis), Theatre, Folktale.

RESUMEN

La comedia anónima en un acto *El buen novio* (Ο καλός γαμβρός, Esmirna 1870), narra el intento de Polifrontis de casar a su hija Strepsinoe con el anciano y temeroso

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Bambakis, pese a su amor por el pobre Eustrofidis. Gracias a un engaño en un cementerio, Bambakis revela su cobardía, mientras que Eustrofidis —finalmente presentado como heredero de una fortuna en Odesa— obtiene el consentimiento paterno y la mano de Strepsinoe. La obra nunca llegó a representarse. El análisis intertextual muestra vínculos con cuentos populares y con el teatro de sombras y de marionetas griego. La trama se aproxima al motivo ATU 940, “Los tres pretendientes en el cementerio”, con paralelos en Turquía y precedentes literarios en el *Decamerón*. En versiones griegas, el protagonismo femenino se reduce y Karagkiozis, como trickster cómico, desenmascara a los rivales. Adaptaciones como *Tres novios y una novia* (1876) retoman elementos de riqueza oculta y elección paterna, mientras que el teatro de sombras preserva motivos folklóricos como pruebas en cementerios, juegos lingüísticos y puns cómicos. En conjunto, estas reelaboraciones ilustran la pervivencia y transformación de *El buen novio* en las artes escénicas populares, donde la definición de un “buen novio” fluctúa entre ingenio, herencia o elección femenina.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Teatro de marionetas griego (Fasoulis), Teatro de sombras griego (Karagkiozis), Teatro, Cuento popular.

In the spring of 1870, an unsigned (1870) one-act comedy titled *The Good Bridegroom* (Ο καλὸς γαμβρός) was published in five instalments in the magazine *Terpsis*, which was characterized as a “pleasantly humorous periodical of Smyrna”. In the play unfolds the failed attempt—owing to his daughter’s craftiness— of Polyphrontis, the father of the young Strepsinoe, to marry her to the elderly Bambakis—a variation of *il capitano* character— ignoring her affection for the financially weaker Eustrophidis.

Chrysothemis Stamatopoulou-Vasilakou (2009, p. 257-258) provides a comprehensive summary of the charming Smyrnaean comedy, in which she identifies “influences from Molière, foreshadowing the comedy-of-manners movement that followed”:

Polyphrontis, the father of Strepsinoe, who has reached marriageable age, keeps presenting potential suitors, whom his daughter rejects, as she has fallen in love with Eustrophidis, an intelligent, good-looking and well-raised young man who, nonetheless, lacks personal wealth—an unfavourable factor, according to her father, who does not accept him as a bridegroom. Polyphrontis pins his last hope on Bambakis, a wealthy bachelor who is in love with Strepsinoe and asks to marry her, even without a dowry. Aiming to avoid her father’s relentless pressure, the shrewd daughter conceives a plan to expose the boastful Bambakis, who constantly claims credit for his imaginary accomplishments. In order to accept his proposal, Strepsinoe asks him to go to the River Meles after midnight to fill a jug with water and then to the cemetery to bring her a cypress branch. However,

Bambakis —a coward by nature— belongs to an older generation of people who believe in ghosts and superstitions. In vain, Polyphrontis tries to prevent the implementation of his daughter's scheme. Eventually, Bambakis, overcoming his fears, accepts the proposal of Strepsinoe, takes water from the river and goes to the cemetery which he fears the most. Sent by Strepsinoe, Eustrophidis waits for him at the cemetery, disguised as a ghost, and threatens him that unless Strepsinoe is renounced and cursed, he will drag him to the underworld. Shaking with fear, Bambakis breaks the jug and yields to the ghost's demands. Then Strepsinoe and Polyphrontis, who are watching the scene from a distance, appear before him. The daughter, unmasking Bambakis, asks her father to take Eustrophidis as her husband; however, he continues to raise objections, until the young man shows him a document naming him the heir of an affluent uncle of his from Odessa, at which point Polyphrontis can do nothing but consent to the marriage of the young couple".

Despite the new ideas about female emancipation expressed in *The Good Bridegroom*, the play is believed to have never reached the stage and remained confined to a reading audience. However, through its intertextuality, we will establish below that it was not solely a comedic reading, since performances of a similar plot or conforming to its model were encountered in Greek shadow theatre and folk theatre, whereas a similar plotline can also be found in folktales.¹

More specifically, alongside the so-called comedies of professions, in which Karagiozis pursues different occupations, of which he is completely ignorant, there are some comedies that have been forgotten to a greater or lesser extent, whose structure differs from the standard one of the *Karagiozis* plays. It has frequently been demonstrated that these derive from different sources, such as folk theatre or fairy tale, but it is hardly possible to trace a specific model. It is believed that *The Good Bridegroom* is reflected in one of these folk comedies in shadow theatre titled *The Three lovers / Bridegrooms / Scribes / Secretaries* (Οἱ τρεῖς ἐρασταὶ / γαμπροὶ / γραμματικοὶ / γραμματεῖς), of the improvisational comedy under the title *The Three Secretaries* (Οἱ τρεῖς γραμματεῖς) and the folktale known as *The Three Suitors at the Graveyard* (Τρεῖς μνηστήρες στὸ νεκροταφεῖο).

Indeed, by investigating the source of this folktale, a similar plotline is found in the type under the title "The Three Suitors in the Cemetery"

¹ Preliminary findings of this study were briefly presented by the author at the International Workshop "Karagiozis & Fasoulis: A Family Meeting of Heroes," on March 3, 2024.

in accordance with the A. Aarne–S. Thompson–H. J. Uther AT(U) 940 tale type index (2004, v. II, p. 583-584). According to H. J. Uther, the plot of this category of tales is as follows: three potential suitors undergo trials to demonstrate their love and bravery. The first prospective suitor has to wrap himself in a shroud and lie down inside a coffin in the cemetery at night. The second suitor has to disguise himself as an angel and chant a memorial prayer, while the third one must veil himself as the devil and carry the coffin. When those who assume the identity of the Angel and the Devil get into a quarrel with each other, the shrouded man leaps to his feet, and then everyone is gripped by fear and runs away. Some versions feature additional episodes that involve the revenge of the suitors on their beloved, to whom they send a beggar pretending to be a nobleman. She eventually marries him after falling into their trap. According to N. A. Cvetinović, the same fairy tale is encountered in Turkey, whereas, curiously enough, Georgios Megas (1893-1976), Professor of Folklore Studies, had not traced it in Greece (2004, v. II, p. 583-584).

It should be noted that, according to the folklorist Marianthi Kaplanoglou (2021, p. 183-187), the folktale is connected with Phanar in Constantinople through a significant novelty emerged during the Greek War of Independence. Sebastitsa (1800-1886), the daughter of Alexandros Soutzos, granddaughter of Michael Soutzos and cousin of Alexandros Rizos Rangavis, appears to have been among the first people to document fairy tales from the narratives of a Chian maidservant working for the Soutzos family in Constantinople, which she then forwarded to the French scholar and collector of Greek folk songs Jean Alexandre Buchon to study and publish them. In addition, M. Kaplanoglou explains (2021, p. 195, 196, *passim*) that:

overwhelmed by the financial and social changes they were experiencing, the inhabitants of the insular communities of the Aegean were not confined to their own local area. This mobility clearly influenced their narrative choices. The continuous contacts between the rural communities of the Aegean islands and the urban centres of Constantinople, Smyrna and other cities of the Asia Minor west coast through the travels, for instance, of working women, constitutes a key parameter in shaping folk narrative on both sides of the Aegean. The case of the anonymous woman from Chios, who recounted fairy tales to Sebaste Soutzou, is the first known example, yet not the only one.

In fact, this narrative process relates not only to the home environment, but very often also to the workplace, and certainly involves

both children and adults among the audience. The relevant testimony to the fairytale narration sessions among workers of different origin in a shop at Constantinople, after its closing time in the evening, in the early 20th century, is a case in point.

Going back to the story of the suitors in the cemetery, it is worth noting that traces of it are also found in Boccaccio's *Decameron* (1892, p. 156-169·2007), written between 1348 and 1353. The work circulated in Greece also through popular publications —according K. Kassis (1985, p. 138)— and was most likely performed on stage in Smyrna.² It is in fact the eighth day's ninth story of *Decameron* and its title was translated into Greek as Ὁ ἐμπαιχθεὶς ἰατρός (*The deceived physician*). According to the plotline, the Florentine physician Simone, who had studied in Bologna, but nonetheless had learned little about his discipline and understood even less about life, falls victim to a prank by two young poor, yet quick-witted and ever cheerful painters. The prank is devised by Lebruno (Bruno in the original), who reveals to the physician that their constant cheerfulness supposedly derives from the fact that they are members of a society —some sort of club essentially— where they can have whatever they wish for, which practically means any woman they desire. He even convinces him that he has an affair with the Queen of England, whereas his colleague Buffalmacco is involved with the Queen of France. He recounts their alleged adventures at the society's evening meetings almost on a daily basis, while he is painting Simone's house or receives his treats. Urged by his curiosity and an old unfulfilled love, the physician asks them if he can be inducted into the society, as he believes that he truly deserves it. The two painters convince him that he will have to be fearless, and ask him to meet them at dawn in the Santa Maria Novella cemetery, where —dressed in his most formal attire— he must ride a wild beast with devil-like horns ("a black horned beast [...] will leap in a frenzy to scare you off"), without holding onto it, without being frightened or invoking the divine, until the animal carries him to the society's meeting place to be knighted by the countess. Excited, the physician consents and goes to the cemetery making up an excuse to his wife, and Lebruno, disguised as a beast, wearing a mask, two horns and a bear fur, hissing and jumping, lets Simone ride on him, but throws him onto a road full of potholes filled with animal excrement. The physician returns to his house reeking of stench that infuriates his wife ("you deserved this punishment. I bet you were on your way to see a mistress [...] let the mishap become a lesson to you, so that you do not fool me again. You, shitty doctor!"), and following another little prank by the

² See e.g. «Θέατρον Γυμν. Κύκλου», newsp. Ἀμάθεια, October 6)18, 1897, 2.

two painters, we are informed that the news of the naïve physician's misfortune spread across the entire Florence.

In 1876, the one-act comedy by the playwright and lyricist Andreas D. Nikolaras (1850-1915?)(1876),³ *Three Bridegrooms and a Bride* (Τρεῖς γαμβροὶ καὶ μία νύμφη), was published, which had been previously performed by the theatre company of D. Alexiadis. The author's comedies were particularly successful onstage. However, a review of this rare publication confirms that Nikolaras's work did not reflect the Smyrnaean *Good Bridegroom*, nor was it identified with the *Three Secretaries* of Karagkiozis, as we will get to know them in detail below. The story of Nikolaras's comedy is centred around a young bride (Sophia) and three prospective grooms, one of whom (Alexandros) has been selected by her, although she does not know much about him. The second groom (Sotiris)—a rustic yet financially robust farmer/landowner—is preferred by her father (Christodoulos), while another man (Graphidis)—a learned person, as his name suggests, with good manners but without personal wealth—is chosen by her mother (Eleni). Her parents invite the two candidates in order for the maiden to meet them, making them believe that it is their engagement day, while the third candidate, disguised as a cook, is brought into the house by the cunning servant Markos, who, being himself in love with the housemaid (Stamata), empathizes with the lovelorn young couple's heartache. In Nikolaras's thirty-two-page comedy, the lawyer Graphidis challenges the landowner Sotiris to a duel, who remains indifferent to his chivalrous behaviour. Once the miserly father discovers the identity of his new cook, when the latter temporarily removes his fake beard, and listens to him as he discloses who he truly is (a rich merchant from Odessa), consents to his marriage to his daughter without any prior trial. At the same time, the love between the two servants also reaches a happy ending, as usual, marked by their song with which the play ends, and the curtain falls.

As, so far, the Greek version of the fairy tale with the motif of the three suitors in the cemetery has not been found, and the storyline of the once popular improvisational comedy is lost, which means that we do not know whether or not it is identified with Nikolaras's play, we will approach the story of folk performances through shadow theatre. In addition to the narratives recounted by students of old Karagkiozis puppeteers⁴ and visual material of a version of the performance (Yayannos *et al.* 1976, p. 57, Picture b), in this particular case the

³ According to Th. Hadjipantazis' comment (2011, p. 107, footnote nr. 27), at the same year the play was republished by Ktenas Printing House.

⁴ Manthos Athinaios' (1925-2009) performance plotline was narrated by Yannis Ntagiakos, who apprenticed at his stage.

researcher enjoys the rare privilege of obtaining information from texts signed by Karagkiozis puppeteers. Of the earlier versions found in popular publications from the 1920s (?), one bears the signature of the Karagkiozis puppeteer Markos Xanthos from Crete, who nonetheless was active mainly at Athens (*The Three lovers / Karagkiozis and the Three Bridegrooms* [Οἱ τρεῖς ἐρασταὶ / Ὁ Καραγκιόζης καὶ οἱ τρεῖς γαμπροί], published by V. N. Vouniseas), while the second (*Karagkiozis as Hodja* [Ὁ Καραγκιόζης Χό(ν)τζας], published by Keraunos & Pallas) is signed by the great Karagkiozis puppeteer Costas Manou (C. Athanasiou's pseudonym) (s.d.).⁵ Furthermore, a popular edition was issued, signed by Yannis Kontos (s.d.), under the title *Karagkiozis and the Three Bridegrooms*. Also preserved is a condensed version (*The Three Secretaries*) by the Karagkiozis player and puppeteer Apostolos Karastergiopoulos (s.d.) (Tolias 1892/1896-1976/1977), as well as the manuscripts containing a version (*The Three Secretaries*) by the Karagkiozis puppeteer Vassilaros (1974).

The plotline of Xanthos's comedy (*The Three Lovers / Bridegrooms* [Οἱ τρεῖς ἐρασταὶ / γαμπροί]) is as follows: Through the mediation of Hadjiavatis, the elderly Ali Bey, the father of the twenty-year-old Hayriye, employs Karagkiozis as the third secretary in his office, alongside the Zakynthian Dionysios and Selim.⁶ Hayriye shows a strong affinity for Karagkiozis, but also for the other two men, with whom she has already come closer—a fact which she admits to her father. When the two men successively put forward an absurd business proposal and then request Ali Bey's permission to marry his daughter, he beats them up with a plank telling them that this should be considered as an advance payment of the dowry. Meanwhile, he and his daughter agree to play a prank on them, declaring that whoever responds most effectively to the challenge posed by them will win her hand in marriage. Karagkiozis, who had previously won Hayriye's favour, but had already noticed the plank, avoids the punishment. Ali Bey promises to give him his daughter under one condition—a desire expressed by his late wife: the suitor will have to go to her grave at midnight and read excerpts from a book of

⁵ It should be underlined that despite the similar title by C. Ganios (s.d.) the play has a different hypothesis.

⁶ The illustration of the book cover by Sotiris Christidis indicates that the three rivals are not the same persons: here they resemble to Stavrakas and the Cretan. Such replacements occur often, although are not easy to interpret. For a similar replacement in book cover see for example the publication of the Karagkiozis' play *The narrow bed* as A. G. Chotzakoglou notes (2016, p. 247, footnote nr. 33). Another common tactic, traced in popular publications, is that of giving a different title—although similar—on the cover than the inside cover.

prayers. Although the idea of visiting the graveyard upsets Karagkiozis, he consents. Then Ali Bey tells Selim that he will agree to his daughter's marriage to him on condition that he stays inside his late wife's grave for two hours at midnight. In order to prove his bravery, he too, accepts the challenge. Ali Bey promises Dionysios the same reward, asking him to demonstrate his valour by going to the cemetery at midnight wearing a white frock coat, holding a bell, to shout "I am the devil!". Eventually, all three prospective bridegrooms do go to the cemetery. Selim sneaks into the grave and, when Karagkiozis starts reading the list of goods purchased from the grocery on credit, which he accidentally took with him instead of the book of prayers, Selim begins to land repeated blows on him with a plank, while Dionysios, disguised as the devil, is ringing the bell as he walks around and shouts. Both Hayriye and Ali Bey, who are watching the scene, burst into laughter. Although the three men realize that they have fallen victim to a plot, insist on marrying Hayriye. The young woman finds herself at an impasse, because —as she confesses to her father— she loves all three suitors. He, therefore, comes up with a new trial: as soon as one of the rivals gives the starting signal, all three will race towards a stump facing them. The first to touch the wood will marry Hayriye. Karagkiozis shouts the starting signal, but while Selim and Dionysios run towards the stump, Karagkiozis embraces Hayriye and, in a cheerful mood, explains that the others may have touched the stump, yet he is holding in his arms the trunk itself, which is undeniably more important. Ali Bey gives his blessing to the couple of Karagkiozis and Hayriye, Dionysios becomes their man of honour and Selim their best man.

Examination of the work signed by Kontos confirms that it is the same text. However, the sole element that differentiates this edition, is its cover. Here is illustrated the play's finale, showing Karagkiozis carrying Hayriye in his arms, illuminated by her father's lantern. In the background are depicted Dionysios and Selim running amid a wooded landscape (of the cemetery). Hence, the cover's iconography is entirely consistent with the plotline, in contrast to the previous work.

The thirty-two-page text signed by Manos, despite the misleading title *Karagkiozis as Hodja*, has the same plot as the previous plays. However, here Barba-Giorgos has been added to the storyline as a prospective bridegroom, chosen by the bride's father, Osman. Emine has agreed to marry all three of her father's secretaries (Dionysios, Stavrakas and Karagkiozis), yet her father has promised Barba-Giorgos to give him his daughter. In line with the previous motif, each of the three men makes a supposed business proposition to Osman Bey (to produce fish glue from burnt cod, inflate fleas and then export them to the USA, import eggs and

hatch them, respectively), and then requests Emine's hand in marriage. Osman then withdraws, apparently to consult his daughter, but upon his return, he physically attacks them. As usual, Karagkiozis, being perceptive, has suspected what is about to happen and escapes thrashing. Immediately afterwards, Osman Bey asks each man separately to display fearlessness in order to be accepted as a groom and, despite their hesitations, they all agree to meet at the cemetery at midnight. Dionysios is asked to wrap himself up in a shroud and enter Osman's family tomb; Stavrakas has to wear a devil's costume and walk around the cemetery ringing a small bell; as for Karagkiozis, he has to disguise himself as a hodja and read out supplications from the Quran in front of the family tomb. Osman also invites Barba-Giorgos, so that they can all watch together the prank he has played on the would-be suitors. As the scene shifts and the setting changes into the cemetery and Osman Bey's family tomb, the mastermind of the prank and his companions keep themselves out of sight and watch Dionysios entering and lying down inside the tomb; Karagkiozis, instead of the Quran, reads by mistake the list of goods purchased on credit, while Dionysios responds every now and then "It was not me who bought these!"; Stavrakas, dressed as the devil, rings a small bell shouting "I am a demon!". Then, Karagkiozis, terrified, hastens to exorcise the demon-Stavrakas and escapes from the shrouded Dionysios who also runs in fear. Barba-Giorgos hits them with his tsarouchi shoe; hence the chase ends and they all identify each other. Osman explains that since all suitors are brave, he will give his daughter to the smartest of them—whoever touches the tree first. While the three bridegrooms touch the tree facing them, Karagkiozis embraces Emine, and Osman rules in his favour, clarifying that the winner is whoever touches the trunk. Barba-Giorgos beats his nephew Karagkiozis in order to give him the bride and, indeed when the latter explains to Osman that he is already married and a father, he hands Emine over to Barba-Giorgos, while Dionysios and Stavrakas become their best men. Karagkiozis, dressed as a Hodja, gives them his blessing.

In the thirty-two-page version by the Karagkiozis puppeteer Vassilaros (1974) from Aegion, written in 1974 in the Patras region, Peteinarakis,⁷ Louisa's father, runs a real estate agency. He hires Karagkiozis on the recommendation of Hadjiavatis to replace his third secretary, who passed away after illness, supposedly as a polyglot accountant, together with

⁷ As A. G. Chotzakoglou (2016, p. 234, 236) analytically points out, Peteinarakis is the name of the groom's father as well, in the comic play *Νύμφη και φοράδα*, which was traced in Karagkiozis' stage as *Χαρίκλεια ή Φοράδα* and is traceable also in cinema (*Τον βρήκαμε τον Παναγή*, 1963), were karagkiozis puppeteer Dimitris Mollas is the production manager.

Zapheiris Hadjidolmas and Dionysios. One by one, the three secretaries confess to their employer their love for his daughter and their desire to marry her. He, therefore, decides to pull a prank on them, by asking each to prove their bravery by going to the cemetery at midnight and staying at the post he assigns them for fifteen minutes. Zapheiris is asked to stay in the funerary monument of Metropolitan Gabriel; Dionysios must wear a red mask and ring a bell wandering through the cemetery; Karagkiozis is requested to read canticles at the metropolitan's grave. They accept the challenge, some willingly and some under pressure, and while Peteinarakis and Louisa watch them in secret laughing heartily, the three suitors carry out their tasks in fear. The ludicrousness of the scene increases as Karagkiozis, instead of the book of psalms, has brought with him the book recording credit purchases, which he reads in a chant-like manner, and Zapheiris from the grave's interior answers every now and then "it was not me who bought these!".⁸ Once the fifteen-minute time limit expires, the three secretaries, demanding that their agreement be honoured and that they marry Louisa, rush separately to Peteinarakis's house, where the real estate agent and his daughter have already arrived taking a shortcut. To further amuse herself and her father, Louisa announces an additional trial, stating that she will marry whoever runs faster to embrace the tree facing them. Zapheiris and Dionysios start running, but Karagkiozis instantly embraces Louisa, saying: "Hey losers, here stands the tree with the twin frothy waves and the coastal batteries [...] Am I a fool to ignore the blooming almond tree and hug the stump instead?" Irritated, the two prospective bridegrooms give up, while Peteinarakis and Louisa applaud the breadth of Karagkiozis's mind, accepting his marriage proposal. However, Karagkiozis makes known that he is already married, and that he only requests a salary increase, suggesting that another bridegroom be found for Louisa. The sets and puppets of the Vassilaros archive depicted in Yayannos brothers and I. Digklis' album (1976, p. 57· 1977, p. 39, 163, 183, 194, *passim*) bear witness to the performances of this play, in this or a similar version.⁹

The five-page —definitely abridged— version by Karastergiopoulos features, as is usually the case with him, few dialogues and longer narratives. However, it differs from Xanthos's complete version in a few rather insignificant points. Perhaps, the most important is that here the

⁸ The pattern of reading by mistake a book recording credit purchases, instead of the right text, is traced in *Ὁ Καραγκιόζης προφήτης* (*Karagkiozis as prophet*) as well, at the dialogue between Karagkiozis and his middle son, in front of a prophet's grave.

⁹ A setting from the Vassilaros' collection, with the note «grave for the *Τρεῖς γραμματεῖς*» is sheltered today in the collection of Museum of Modern Greek Culture (Athens), under registration nr. 9811.

young woman does not seem to have responded to the feelings of her father's three secretaries, and while the first trial is imposed by her father, the second one is decided by her. The names of the girl and the earlier secretary —Aphrodite and Menelaus— inspired by Greek mythology, which must have fascinated Karastergiopoulos, are characteristic, as D. Fanaras' research (2006, p. 111-112) indicates.¹⁰ Minor changes, such as the illness of the third secretary and his replacement by Karagkiozis, the order of seniority of the potential husbands (Menelaus has four years of previous service, while Dionysios has three), the way it is proposed to the first secretary to enter the tomb, purportedly as a desire of the girl's grandfather, and the absence of the final scene of the blessing of Karagkiozis and Aphrodite, do not affect the plot.

It is interesting that the Karagkiozis puppeteer Manthos Athinaios, who performed this play, stated that both this and the *The Boss outside* (Το αφεντικό απ' όξω) as well as certain other comedies were rooted in the "Italian Boulevard theatre", therefore, they should not be set in a supposedly Ottoman era.¹¹ For Athinaios and his fellow Karagkiozis puppeteers, this practically meant that male figures should not be depicted wearing breeches nor women in salwars, but instead they should be dressed *alla franca*, i.e. in European-style garments.

By studying the above shadow theatre versions, alongside *The Good Bridegroom*, several conclusions can be drawn: the motif of the emancipated young woman who chooses her husband, against her father's will, disappears in the Karagkiozis version. The maiden may be depicted humorously crafty and modern, as she responds to the flirtation of the three would-be lovers, justifying herself to her father with lines, such as "What did you think I am; some kind of fool?"; however, she does not choose the bridegroom herself and does not oppose her father's desire at any stage. In theatre, the proposed bridegroom is an old braggart —characteristic attributes that establish an affinity with Comedia dell' Arte's *il capitano* character. Moreover, he is a coward and superstitious, and all these traits lead, with the precision of a mathematical law, to hilarious scenes. In contrast, in shadow theatre, this comical character is absent, and his superstition is somehow shared between the rival lovers who —although they hesitate— are bold enough to meet in the cemetery at midnight in order to be with the much-endowed bride. In fact, in shadow theatre, while the suitors become the

¹⁰ Among his unpublished scenarios a play titled *Οι μνηστήρες τῆς Πηνελόπης* (*Penelope's suitors*) is traced.

¹¹ Y. Ntagiakos' interview.

target of funny practical jokes, in the end, the “good bridegroom” turns out to be the smartest one. In contrast, in the theatrical play, the “good bridegroom” is the one chosen by the bride, who scrupulously puts her clever scheme into action. However, it may be possible that the bridegroom’s goodness is also associated with the inheritance of his uncle’s fortune, which at the end he proves in writing, bringing about a sense of balance. Perhaps, the “good bridegroom” is the one who eventually has been approved by both the father-in-law and the bride.

Furthermore, while the suitors in theatre are two, they become three in shadow theatre, as in the folktale, —a number that has been favoured since mythology. Equally favourite and frequent in traditions, as N. Politis indicates (1904, v. B, p. 231-235, *passim*), is the devil’s figure, whose identity is taken on by Dionysios in disguise. And if in conventional theatre, the addition of an actor might have entailed difficulties, shadow theatre is suitable for an increase in the number of characters and relatively inexpensive and quick scenery changes (here: house/office, cemetery, tree). In addition, the element of the cypress branch, which the bride requests in theatre, turns into a footrace in shadow theatre and an embrace of a tree trunk —presumably cypress— given that the action takes place in a cemetery. And while the footrace would demonstrate physical strength and endurance, the tree’s hugging seems to have been selected to provide an ingenious and piquant finale. Karagkiozis’s embrace of the girl’s body signifies the interpretation of the pun that involves the Greek words κομός (*kormos*=trunk) and κομί (*kormi*=body). Since he is familiar with wordplay, Karagkiozis swiftly apprehends it, thereby confirming his wit and sound judgement which, combined with his audacity, make him a “good bridegroom”. It is striking that this episode has not yet been traced in a fairy-tale version.

In addition to the above, the “plank” with which the maiden’s father hits the suitors in shadow theatre¹² constitutes a characteristic “accessory” of Fasoulis/Paschalis, the protagonist in Greek glove puppet theatre. Research could not but seek out traces of the theatrical *Good Bridegroom* or the *Three Bridegrooms / Lovers* of the Karagkiozis shadow theatre in this type of puppetry. The aim is to identify whether there was an in-between stage during the passage from theatre to puppet theatre, at which this adaptation may have taken place, and also the point at which the two bridegrooms became three, the jug with water turned into a different challenge for each suitor within the cemetery, and the cypress branch changed into a tree trunk.

¹² See e.g. pp. 13, 17.

Indeed, now that the plotline is known, it can be inferred from Magouliotis's research in the press that relevant titles were already present since the 19th century in puppeteers' repertoire. Of course, as with shadow theatre, titles in puppet theatre were fluid, which complicates research today.¹³ Indicative of this is the reference, for instance, to the actress Aikaterini Markesini who impersonated the elderly mother in the theatrical version of *Three Bridegrooms and a Bride* (Constantinople, 1874-1875, theatrical company of D. Alexiades), as Th. Hadjipantazis notes (2002, v. A2, p. 992) —a role which, based on the available evidence, does not seem to exist in folktales and shadow theatre, but only in the play by A. Nikolaras. A parameter which should be taken into consideration is that the popular (puppet) theatre comedy *The Three Corporals* (Οἱ τρεῖς δεκανεῖς) was also known by the title *Three Rival Lovers* (Τρεῖς ἀντερασταί) and its theme was similar to that of *Three Bridegrooms and a Bride* recounting the adventures of three suitors competing for a woman's heart. This fact does not allow us to determine, based on the title, e.g. *Three Lovers* (Τρεῖς ἐρασταί), which of the two plays is, and may therefore cause confusion.¹⁴ Similarly, perhaps only from the puppetry play *The Three Secretaries* can we be certain (?) that they are associated with the theatrical work *The Good Bridegroom*.

However, Charilaos Patentas, as Ap. Magouliotis' findings demonstrate (2012, p.120), staged (1899) performances under the titles *The Three Secretaries* and *The Three Lovers*. Shortly later (1900, 1907,

¹³ In this frame it is assumed that the glove puppet plays titled *The diable as lover* or *The diable disguised* (Ο ἑραστής διάβολος ἢ Ὁ μεταμφιεσμένος διάβολος) may coincide with the shadow theatre play *Robert le diable* (Ροβέρτος διάβολος), where the devil wearing a disguise succeeds to become the young woman's lover. However, the scene where a man is dressed as devil may also be part of the play *Three bridegrooms / Secretaries / Rival Lovers / Inamoured men*. It should be mentioned merely in passing that the first play seems to have borrowed its title by the homonymous opera (*Robert le diable*, 1827-1831) by G. Meyerbeer (libretto by Eug. Scribe – G. Delavigne). *The diable as lover* was performed, according to Magouliotis' research, by puppeteers Charilaos Patentas (2012, p. 120), Eustratios Kasidakis (*ibid.*, p. 123) and Gogos (*ibid.*, p. 122), in 1901, 1903, 1915 respectively. *The diable disguised*, a comic play with three acts, was performed by Ch. Konitsiotis at least from 1900 and on (see <Ἀπὸ τὰ θέατρα>, newsp. *Ἐμπρός*, July 28, 1900, 3). It should also be pointed out that the comic play *Four bridegrooms and one bride*, written down by Constantinos Mourelatos (1961) as a scenario for puppets, despite the similar title, has a completely different plotline, that echoes facets of the Karagkiozis' play *Τὸ ἀφεντικό απ' ὄξω*: the protagonist (Paschalis) is hired in order to guard an old man's (Fontas) young daughter and protect her from disturbing suitors, connected to the underworld.

¹⁴ See e.g. the *The three rival lovers* by the troupe of D. Neris in Constantinople of 1871, which according to the index (p. 1147) is identified as *The three corporals* by Hadjipantazis (2002, p. 796).

1915) Chr. Konitsiotis staged the play *Three Bridegrooms and a Bride*.¹⁵ Since at least 1902, according to Magouliotis (2012, p. 122), the audience of A. Moutsos enjoyed performances of *Three Enamoured Men* (Τρεῖς ἐρωτευμένοι), who, in fact, in 1903 acquired different nationalities (an English, an Italian and a Greek fellow).¹⁶ This was followed in 1904 by *The Auction* (Δημοπρασία), as Magouliotis notes (2012, p. 122), for which we do not know whether it was an adaptation of the play of the same title by Alexandros Pistis or an alternative title for *Three Bridegrooms and a Bride*. In 1906, Maridakis presented the plays *The Bridegrooms at the Market* (Οἱ γαμβροὶ στὸ παζάρι) and *The Three Rival Lovers* (Οἱ τρεῖς ἀντερασταί) (ibid, p. 118), while Eustratios Kasidakis, who in the early 20th century was touring in Constantinople, staged (1923) in Alexandria a work titled *Three Dogs, one Bone* (Τρεῖς σκύλοι ἓνα κόκκαλο), as N. Nikitaridis notes (2019), which could be related to the play under discussion. In 1914, 1933 and 1935, plays under the title *Three Lovers*, *Three Secretaries*, and *Three Men for One Woman* (Τρεῖς γιὰ μία) were also staged in Thessaloniki and Patras by the puppeteer Ioannis Leventis.¹⁷ In 1935, *The Three Secretaries* was also performed by Moschoyannis—a puppeteer, marionette and Karagkiozis puppeteer from Egypt traced by Chotzakoglou (2010; 2015)—thereby confirming the extent to which the play had become known. All the aforementioned puppeteers, with the exception of Patentas, Gogos and Moschoyannis, were active in Constantinople or Smyrna. The above dates can only be indicative, as the plays' titles were often not recorded in the press. Hence, the work in question could have been staged earlier than its first known printed announcement (1899).

Research into Greek periodicals provides us with additional relevant material. According to C. Malafantis (1991, p. 207-213), in the summer of 1907, Gregorios Xenopoulos published in the *Diaplasia ton Paidon* magazine an article signed under his pseudonym Faedon, on his visit to the little theatre of Christos Konitsiotis, in the Athenian neighbourhood of Dexameni. The play he attended—whose performance, according to him, he had already watched in conventional theatrical form with actors—was none other than *Three Bridegrooms and a Bride*.

¹⁵ <Ἀπὸ τὰ θέατρα>, newsp. Ἐμπρός (Athens), June 20 Ἰουνίου, 1900, p. 3; Faedon 1907: <Θέατρα>, newsp. Ἀκρόπολις (Athens), October 25, 1915, p. 3.

¹⁶ «Νευρόσπαστα Μούτσου», newsp. Κωνσταντινούπολις, August 23, 1903, p. 3; «Νευρόσπαστα Ἀθ. Μούτσου», Κωνσταντινούπολις, August 23, 1903, p. 4.

¹⁷ «Ταράτσα Μαρούδα (Ἀνδρείκελλα Λεβέντη)», <Κινηματογράφοι & Θέατρα>, newsp. Νεολόγος Πατρῶν (Patras), September 5, 1933, p. 3; «Ἑλλάς (Θίασος ἀνδρείκελλων Ἰ. Λεβέντη)», *ibid.*, September 7, 14, 1935, p. 3.

In the evening when I went [to the theatre], they were performing the comedy ‘Three Bridegrooms and a Bride’. Have you ever seen it? I had watched it with live actors, yet the wooden puppets truly made me roar with laughter! And the reason for this was Paschalis. You cannot possibly imagine the words that came out of his mouth, the way he behaved, and the way he ... beat others up! Never in theatre have I ever experienced anything smarter, funnier or more cheerful. And never have I ever laughed so heartily!

The testimony of G. Xenopoulos is particularly significant, as it corroborates that the puppetry adaptation of *Three Bridegrooms and a Bride* was performed with a plotline that was similar to that of conventional theatre.

In the collection of Constantinopolitan playbills, which is documented in Stamatopoulou-Vassilakou’s book with the same title (1999, p. 7-8, 10), one also sees booklets for performances (1879) under the title *Three Rival Lovers* and *Three Bridegrooms and a Bride*. Alongside these, there is (1999, p. 107) a playbill for a performance with the thematically related title *Bridegrooms at Auction* (Γαμβροὶ σὲ δημοπρασία) (1898). However, a play of the same title was definitely performed at Smyrna as well.¹⁸ What we do not know is whether behind the title *Three Bridegrooms and a Bride* lies Nikolaras’s comedy of the same title, in which the role of the servant was successfully performed, according to the playwright (1876, p. [32]), by Georgios Nikephoros (“I am ever so grateful to the actors for the ultimate success of this comedy of mine, and particularly to the brilliant actor G. Nikephoros”).

For the needs of her doctoral thesis on the social impact of itinerant theatre troupes (“*bouloukia*”), the sociologist Chryssoula Kefala (2009, p. 102) interviewed folk theatre actors. Although her goal was not to document plotlines, the brief catalogue of play titles she compiled, now that the voices of these actors have been silenced, constitutes a significant aid to folk-theatre scholars. Hence, among the titles appear *The Three Secretaries*, accompanied by the note that “most of these comedies were also performed in shadow theatre”, which —although we do not know whether it comes from the writer or the actors-storytellers— is unquestionably confirmed, as Chotzakoglou (2016, p. 231-256) indicates. So far, research into known relevant archives has not led to the discovery of the improvisational comedy *The Three Secretaries*, mainly as a result

¹⁸ <Εγγόρια>, newsp. *Νέα Σμύρνη*, January 9, 1884, p. 1.

of the oral nature of such texts and the considerably limited accessibility of related archives today.¹⁹

The fluidity between the repertoires of shadow and puppet theatre, traced by Chotzakoglou (2011; 2018),²⁰ and the role of conventional folk theatre as a source of models are indisputable. Bearing in mind that a work with such a storyline is not among the earliest examples of shadow theatre—such as, for instance, those in Ottoman Constantinople—so as to assume that it was first presented by the early Karagkiozis puppeteers in Greece who inspired Greek puppeteers, it seems more plausible that the play was introduced into shadow theatre through folk theatre and puppetry. The publication time of the theatrical *Good Bridegroom* shows that the theatrical reading, or more likely, its unknown early theatrical performances predate puppetry. However, the close affinity between the fairy tale's plotline and that of shadow theatre indicates that shadow theatre, puppetry and conventional theatre drew inspiration directly from an earlier source, such as narratives and folktale. The adapter's identity—aside from his full name—, capacity (e.g. actor or puppeteer), and active years remain so far unknown. Thus, the play of traditional theatre and puppetry, in which the protagonists are rival lovers competing in a cemetery, is added to those which—despite the fact that the relevant texts of actors and puppeteers are lost—their distinguishable traces are revealed to us through their cultural survival within the realm of the multi-collective shadow theatre.

*Bibliography*²¹

[UNSIGNED] 1870. [Unsigned], «Ὁ καλὸς γαμβρός: Κωμῳδία πρωτότυπος εἰς πράξιν μίαν», *Terpsis* (Smyrna), March 28, April 1, 4, 8 & 18, p. 3, 3, 2-3, 3, 3, respectively. [In Greek].

BOCCACCIO 2007. G. Boccaccio, «Master Simone the physician having been induced by Bruno and Buffalmacco to repair to a certain place by night, there to be made a member of a company that goeth a-roving, is cast by Buffalmacco into a trench full of ordure and there

¹⁹ A corpus of such plays is sheltered at the National Library of Greece, traced by K. Karra (KARRA 2018), while another similar corpus can be found in the collection of Performing Arts of ELIA-MIET. Research about our text on both archives proved unfruitful.

²⁰ The writer and adapter C. Mourelatos notes (1961) in a text he sold and mailed to a shadow and puppet theatre performer, revealing us puppetry's secrets: «*You should clarify. Is it for Puppet or Shadow theatre that you are interested in? Although it is the same thing. You may convert them [he means the scenarios] by yourself*».

²¹ Material from the daily press is not included in this list.

- left», (The 9th story), in *The Decameron*, (transl. by J. Payne). [E-book via «The Project Gutenberg»: <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/23700/23700-h/23700-h.htm>].
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