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# The Politics of Marriage and Liebestod in Chortatsis' *Erophile*

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## Introduction

This paper<sup>1</sup> will discuss the impact that “arranged marriages” had on women’s life, as it is delineated in the tragedy *Erophile*<sup>2</sup> written by Georgios Chortatsis around 1595,<sup>3</sup> during the period of the late Renaissance in Crete. The French anthropologist and ethnologist Levi-Strauss states in *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*<sup>4</sup> that “marriage is regarded everywhere as a particularly favourable occasion for the initiation or development of a cycle of exchange.” He further points out that women have been nothing more and nothing less than an exchanged object, the supreme gift among “other goods, material and spiritual” in an arranged marriage. Hence, marriage arrangements were considered to be the “weightiest business” for a family. This financial transaction was rationalised in terms of providing for women’s financial protection and the enhancement of her kin.<sup>5</sup> Women had to accept the husband chosen for them or risk disaster. A rebellious, disobedient and undutiful daughter threatened social stability and the patriarchal system

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is a slightly modified version of my Master’s Thesis, submitted in 2013 with the title “*Liebestod, Eros and Thanatos in the Cretan Renaissance: Women’s social role as depicted by Georgios Chortatsis in the Tragedy Erophile*”.

<sup>2</sup> The edition used for this paper is: Stylianos Alexiou - Martha Aposkiti, *Ερωφίλη τραγωδία Γεωργίου Χορτάτση*. Αθήνα: Εκδόσεις Στιγμή, 1988.

<sup>3</sup> This date is proposed by Alexiou (1988: 12). Other scholars date the tragedy to between 1573 till 1600.

<sup>4</sup> Levi-Strauss (1969: 63).

<sup>5</sup> Hufton (1993: 16).

and might face death in challenging parental rule. A marriage in which a father's and daughter's choice of the husband coincided was probably the exception.<sup>6</sup>

The authority of fathers in the Renaissance was considerable, although dramatists such as Shakespeare and his contemporary Cretan poets Chortatsis and Kornaros called it into question. Are there any limits? What about love? How far can an enraged father go? Tragedies written at that time graphically depict the verbal and physical violence that a father might inflict on his defiant daughter. A female rejecting the “masculine code”<sup>7</sup> is always mistreated and sometimes has to pay the ultimate price for her disobedience. The fate of Renaissance women was closely intertwined with the interests of the male members of their family. In the tragedy *Erophile*, Chortatsis depicts this desperate clash between father and daughter. Furthermore, the detrimental power of *Eros* over the protagonists causes them to confront the omnipotence of *Thanatos* and gradually overcomes their survival instinct. Unrequited or thwarted love in combination with inexorable social pressure triggers their death which would further be linked to the *Liebestod*<sup>8</sup> motive.

My literary and “historical” investigation will further take into account the intermingling of Cretan and Venetian culture on the island during the late Renaissance period. Given the long duration of the island's subjection to Venetian rule (from 1211-1669) and the fact that the Cretan nobility tended to be educated in Italy, the population was inevitably exposed to a new culture,<sup>9</sup> and this set in train “a syncretism” on which the intellectual and artistic Renaissance of Venetian-ruled Crete was to be based.<sup>10</sup> However, while my aim is to link the narrative content of the tragedy to its contemporary historical context with a view to

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<sup>6</sup> Hansen (1993: 13).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., (1993: 11).

<sup>8</sup> In the opera *Tristan und Isolde* Richard Wagner for the first time uses the term *Liebestod* to define the yearning of two lovers to unite in death.

<sup>9</sup> Holton (1991: 2). According to Holton the impact of the conquerors' culture on the island was neither prompt nor decisive. It is, however, indisputable that the achievements of the Italian Renaissance were disseminated on the island during the years of Venetian rule.

<sup>10</sup> Detorakis (1994: 191).

shedding light on women's social role in Cretan society during the late Renaissance period, I am well aware of the implications of the fact that *Erophile* is a work of poetic imagination and theatrical form. It is certainly not to be confused with a work of historiography, and accordingly the correlation of the narrative content of the play with historical data will be cautious and tentative. Finally, the interpretation of aspects of love and death impinges on philosophical thought where the play suggests their deep connection.

### *The plot*

Filogonos, ascending to power after having murdered his brother, the King of Egypt, proceeds to marry his widowed sister-in-law and maintains his reign by force. The Queen dies very young leaving Erophile, her only daughter and heir to the throne, motherless and vulnerable. The King adopts Panaretos, a boy of royal origin, who spends his childhood alongside the Princess Erophile. When the two grow up, they fall in love and secretly marry. Upon uncovering their secret, King Filogonos ruthlessly sets in train his elaborate plan of revenge. Erophile's eloquent attempts to soften her father's heart and secure his forgiveness are in vain. The King first tortures Panaretos and finally kills him in a brutal fashion and takes revenge on his daughter Erophile by presenting to her, as a wedding gift, a casket containing the mutilated head, heart and hands. Devastated, Erophile mourns the remains of Panaretos and commits a spectacular – on stage – suicide. Nena, Erophile's nurse, leads the final retaliation, supported by the women of the chorus: they kill the King, and complete the “catharsis.”

### *Analysis*

Erophile spends her childhood “κοπελίστικο καιρό” (I 150) in the palace in the company of Panaretos, whom the King had adopted for the purpose of providing companionship for his motherless daughter.<sup>11</sup> It is

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<sup>11</sup> Although Erophile and Panaretos were separated when they reached puberty and Ero-

not surprising that a deep affection forms between them and develops on Erophile's part into an exclusive preference for Panaretos. Erophile's feelings for Panaretos are described by Chortatsis as sisterly,<sup>12</sup> “σά νά ’θελά ’σται ἀδέλφι τση μ’ ἀγάπησε περίσσα” (I 154). Their companionship is seen as harmless since they are as children considered to be “innocent” but upon reaching the age of consent to an arranged marriage, Erophile constantly ran the risk of harming her reputation for chastity and modesty and thereby diminishing her “marriageability”.<sup>13</sup> Bancroft-Marcus remarks on the danger faced by young women of staining their reputation as “the smallest unsanctioned physical contact could stir malicious gossip, since only officially engaged couples were permitted to talk freely, hold hands, embrace and kiss.”<sup>14</sup> As an unmarried girl, her honour should have been protected by the male members of her family, but her trustworthy nurse is charged with the laborious task of keeping a constant eye on her. Being the only child, she enjoys the exclusive and boundless love of her father, but at the same time she is the only heir and bears the responsibility for serving her family's interest.

The fact that she is a motherless child is a decisive factor in determining her tragic end. According to Gediman's<sup>15</sup> psychoanalytic investigation of the legend of Tristan and Isolde<sup>16</sup> the loss of a parent in childhood can lead to a longing for parental love and this in turn can lead to a lifelong struggle and a death wish, in order for the child to be eternally reunited with the lost parent. It is striking that also in other

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phile entered marriageable age, King Filogonos is deemed by his close advisor to have contributed to the development of amorous sentiments between the two children by allowing children of different sexes to consort with each other.

<sup>12</sup> The incest theme explicitly mentioned in Erophile's immediate prototype *Orbecche* is perhaps distantly echoed here. Chortatsis most probably considered the subject incompatible with the sensitivities of his Cretan audience. Bursian (1870: 549) considers the incest theme in *Orbecche* to be unsuccessful and states that its omission in *Erophile* is a great advantage (“grosser Vorzug”) of the Cretan tragedy.

<sup>13</sup> Hansen (1993: 11).

<sup>14</sup> Bancroft-Marcus (1983: 20).

<sup>15</sup> Gediman (1995: 36)

<sup>16</sup> *Tristan und Isolde* (c. 1210-1215) by Gottfried von Strassburg.

Cretan Renaissance works the female protagonists are motherless.<sup>17</sup> The psychological effect of orphanhood was compounded by the sociological, inasmuch as her early deprivation of her mother exposed Erophile to the full force of the patriarchal system without the protection of motherly love. On the other hand, not having a female role-model to follow, Erophile develops her own female identity, much more influenced by the male identity of the era and in particular that of her father. A mother figure might have inspired Erophile to develop a compliant and obedient character disposed to accept the role of an exchangeable commodity for which she would normally have been destined. The absence of maternal influence allows Erophile to transgress the boundaries of her sex and social class, and contributes to her tragic suicide. Hirsch<sup>18</sup> succinctly states the multidimensional importance of mothers as role-models.

Furthermore the mother herself became a feminine role-model whose actions and precepts instilled in her daughter the means of appearing as a compliant and desirable object to the opposite sex.<sup>19</sup> This form of femininity, “translated” as conforming to the social rules and obedient to the patriarchal system, perpetuated the social order and kept women in a subordinate role. Although Erophile’s maternal figure is replaced by Nena, her nurse,<sup>20</sup> Nena is torn between her love for Erophile and her

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<sup>17</sup> Namely Panoria, the Shepherdess and Aretousa, in the pastoral tragicomedy *Panoria*, the pastoral idyll *The Shepherdess*, and the tragedy *King Rhodolinos* respectively. In the Arthurian tradition the female protagonist is also motherless (Queen Guinevere) and Shakespeare, a contemporary of Chortatsis, also presents motherless female protagonists.

<sup>18</sup> Hirsch (1981: 202). “There can be no systematic and theoretical study of women in patriarchal culture, there can be no theory of women’s oppression, that does not take into account woman’s role as a mother of daughters and as a daughter to mothers, that does not study female identity in relation to previous and subsequent generations of women, and that does not study that relationship in the wider context: the emotional, political, economic, and symbolic structures of family and society.”

<sup>19</sup> Rasmussen (1997: 117).

<sup>20</sup> Klapisch-Zuber (1985: 135-8) states that giving a child to a nurse normally meant separation from it. Usually boys were nurtured at their home by a nurse while most girls were given away to the nurse’s home. Erophile enjoys the benefits of being the only child and having her own nurse not only breast-feeding her but also being a permanent companion during her whole life.

obligations to keep her mistress in line. By trying to remind Erophone of the duties and responsibilities of her social rank, she hopes to protect her from harm. Erophone is well aware of her designated role and she expresses this burden thus:

Ωφρου, κακό μου ριζικό, κ' ίντα 'θελα τα πλούτη  
κ' ίντα 'θελα να γεννηθώ στην αφεντιάν ετούτη!  
Τι με φελούνε οι ομορφιές, τι με φελούν τα κάλλη,  
και τσ' όρεξής μου τα κλειδιά να τα κρατούσιν άλλοι; (II 49-54).

Apart from her orphanhood, which allowed the protagonist to move beyond her gender limits and her aristocratic origin, another determinant of the course of the plot is Erophone's beauty, which enhances her marriageability. The poet skillfully emphasises her physical attractiveness. Her beauty was unmatched and fully in harmony with the beauty standards of the Renaissance period and the "chivalrous and romantic Petrarchists" who considered woman "as a beautiful goddess, a pure and celestial angel"<sup>21</sup> (τέτοια κάλλη; το πρόσωπο τ' αγγελικό; το πρόσωπο τ' όμορφο; Βασιλοπούλα ομορφοκαμωμένη; μιας κόρης όμορφης; με δίχως ταίρι σ' τσ' ομορφιές κ' εις τα περίσσα κάλλη; η νεράιδα ή όμορφη; στα χιόνια του προσώπου τση).<sup>22</sup> Women have tended to primarily be identified as either beautiful or not, as a 16<sup>th</sup>-century text declared "Of an ugly girl nothing is expected."<sup>23</sup> Andrew the Chaplain (Andreas Cappelanus), the theoretician of courtly love in the Middle Ages, believed that beauty is the only foundation for love to the extent of claiming that blind people are unable to experience amorous sentiments.<sup>24</sup>

Hence, Erophone's physical attractiveness and social status as demonstrated above made her a desirable object of love and immediately justify Panaretos's feelings. Belonging to a lower social class, he would clearly stand to gain substantially from a marital union with her. The following verses could not better summarize the benefits that Panaretos would have gained by a marriage with Erophone:

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<sup>21</sup> Bancroft-Marcus (1983: 28).

<sup>22</sup> Alexiou 1988: (I 244; I 246; I 299; I 309; II 319; I 309; III 194; I 373).

<sup>23</sup> Nahoum-Grappe (1993: 86).

<sup>24</sup> Bergman (1987: 97).



Παιδί ἴσουνε ἴνους βασιλιού, σαν ἔχομε πωμένο,  
κ' ἡ τύχη σε κατάφερε σ' τούτο τον τόπο ξένο,  
κι αγάλια αγάλια σ' ἔκαμε, σα βρίσκεσαι, μεγάλο  
στ' αφέντη μας την επαρχιά παρά κιανένα άλλο,  
κ' εκείνο απ' ὄλες τσ' ἄλλες σου καλομοιριές σφαλίζει:  
**με τσ' Ερωφίλης την παντρειά στ' ἄστρα ἡ κορφή σου αγγίζει.**  
(I 451-456)

McKee,<sup>25</sup> referring to Veneto-Cretan women in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, i.e. during the Venetian occupation of the island, remarks on the low percentage of intermarriage between Latin noble women and Cretan men due to the valuable property that would have been transferred by way of marriage dowry to the benefit of the husband's family. She further states that although society did actually accept intermarriage, with some reluctance,<sup>26</sup> there are only five marriages between Latin women and Greek men recorded among the nobility in the legal will-documents during the early Renaissance period in Crete.<sup>27</sup> This could also with due reservation reflect the relative status of aristocratic women and lower class men in Venetian Crete at the late renaissance period and the potential of the marriage of a noble woman to redistribute wealth and power on the island. Little wonder then that the King rages at his son-in-law and ironically refers to him as worthy, “τον ἄξο μου γαμπρό” (IV 647).

Erophile on the other hand desperately attempts to convince her father of Panaretos's qualities; she reminds him of her lover's commendable attributes and wisdom (χάρεις, αρετές, γνώσεις), virtues that could have given the King some scope to accept his son-in-law, but in the event his rejection sheds further light on Medieval and Renaissance society, where patricians distinguished themselves from the masses, not only by the title acquired at birth, but also by their wealth. Panaretos's claims to nobility are not consistent with his financial situation. Erophile

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<sup>25</sup> McKee (1993: 233).

<sup>26</sup> Maltezoú (1991: 33). Despite the fact that Venice forbade the Latin feudatories to marry Greek women, mixed marriages are documented in the sources from the end of the thirteenth century onwards.

<sup>27</sup> McKee (1993: 233).

confirms the complementarity of wealth and royalty in beseeching her father “πλούσο κι αδυνατότατο<sup>28</sup> και βασιλιό μεγάλο / θες τονέ κάμει να γενεί παρά κιανέναν άλλο” (IV 341-342).

Moreover, aristocratic origin and wealth were usually closely connected, and we know that although Panaretos claims to be son of the King of Tsertsas, he is still considered to be a mere servant of the King of Egypt and his daughter. His subordination is obvious in many verses where the protagonist uses words and phrases denoting his inferiority when he address the King’s daughter, “την κερά μου/αφέντρα μου<sup>29</sup> / βασιλίσσά μου” and the King himself, “τον αφέντη μου”. The use of phrases recognising his vassal status, such as “σκλάβος σου / δούλος σου”, further confirms his lower social class.

However, social changes took place in the sixteenth and seventeenth century and made it possible for a man not born into the aristocracy to achieve a gentleman’s status by elegance, intellect, knowledge acquired through higher education and other abilities. Hence, Panaretos has to present other qualities of character or intellect to compensate for his lack of status, thereby justifying Erofile’s choice. He adopts the techniques of courtly lovers as portrayed by poets and romance writers from the eleventh and twelfth century onward, where courtly love<sup>30</sup> made its appearance in the intellectual world and subsequently influenced the Medieval and Renaissance conception of the ideal man and woman. Following the patterns of courtly love both men and women in Renaissance had to present special characteristics. Men should in first place be devoted, dauntless, eloquent, knowledgeable and admirable. The virtues expected of women, on the other hand, were truthfulness, attractive-

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<sup>28</sup> “αδυνατότατο” here means quite the opposite of what it denotes in current standard Greek. In this verse it equates to “δυνατό” and is translated as “strong”.

<sup>29</sup> Both words and phrases are repeated frequently in the tragedy.

<sup>30</sup> Marchello-Nizia (1997: 147-162). Courtly love was a literary creation and more precisely a poetic one in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> century in southern France, and was a result of social necessities. The adjective *courtois* makes its appearance in the *Chanson de Roland* for the first time. In the later 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries the concept of adventure arrived to complicate the courtly characteristics; adventure served to test the courage, bravery and heroic virtues of a man.

ness, sensibility and elegance.<sup>31</sup> Panaretos seems to personify the courtly model of masculinity as portrayed by Duby.<sup>32</sup> Although his lady is not married as the perfect courtly woman model would have been, she is still not master of herself. Her father replaces the male authority that she has to obey and honour. The “lady” in this case, or borrowing Duby’s<sup>33</sup> term the “prized body”, is only won through great effort and risk. Like a knight in Medieval poetry or romance, he falls in love with the daughter of his master and has, therefore, to confront the dilemma to serve or betray him. Although Panaretos’s devotion to the King is indisputable, his feelings for Erofile predominate. Wounded by love he endeavours to awaken love feelings in Erofile or to unconsciously manipulate her into confessing a mutual passion for him. He demonstrates his full submission and willingness to undertake any risk in order to compensate for his social inferiority and get his “final reward”, the love of his lady. Duby’s description of the sequence of actions required of a man in order to win the love of his lady wholly corresponds to Panaretos’s course of action.<sup>34</sup>

According to the social hierarchy of the time, she ranks above him. He calls attention to this fact through various gestures or allegiance. He kneels down, assuming the posture of a vassal **[κι ομπρός τση γονατίζω (I 307)]**.

He speaks pledging his faith, promising, like a liege man, not to offer his services to anyone else **[καθώς πάντα ἴμου σκλάβος σου και δούλος μπιστικός σου / κι ουδένα πράμαν έκαμα δίχως τον ορισμό σου (I 311-312)]**.

He goes even further; in the manner of a serf, he makes a gift of his person

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<sup>31</sup> Marchello-Nizia (1997: 149).

<sup>32</sup> Duby (1992: 250) explains the courtly model as a social necessity in response to a crisis in male-female relations in 12<sup>th</sup> century France. The medieval model of *fine amour* (refined love) was renamed as courtly love to describe the “emotional and physical” relations between men and women.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., (251).

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., (251).

**[μ' αντίς εκείνα την ψυχή και το κορμί μου δίνω / της αφεντιάς σου χάρισμα, πρόθυμα πάντα ομάδι / σ' πάσα μικράκι σου ορισμό να κατεβού στον Άδη (I 368-370).]**<sup>35</sup>

In the beginning Panaretos bases his responses on her glances, “το πρόσωπο ἔδα τ' ὄμορφο, κ' ἡ σπλαχνική θωριά τση / μου ἔδειχνε πως εστέρευγε τον πόθον ἡ καρδιά τση” (I 299-300), taking them as evidence that she was capable of reciprocating his feelings. Having the first sign of her potential interest in him, he will strive further to prove his chivalry and valiant nature. In his endeavours to win the love of his lady he uses every art of rhetorical dexterity, and his eloquence added to his other virtues make him an admirable representative of Renaissance man. Low<sup>36</sup> states that in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries vast changes in the concept of people's private sphere started to “crystallize into recognizably modern form.” These changes<sup>37</sup> were according to scholars, due to further shifts in various areas such as economy, science, politics, and religion in early modern times. Humanistic education of the time described the new man as a wondrous creature.<sup>38</sup> Castiglione portrayed this ideal man as a person who, apart from his grounding in Latin and Greek, would also be competent as a poet, historian and orator and dexterous in writing prose and poetry in the contemporary language, abilities that would contribute, besides his own satisfaction, also to women's admiration since they favour cultivated men.<sup>39</sup> Carpophoros, the confidant of Panaretos, corroborates this assumption in referring to women's “vulnerability” to nice wording and considers eloquence as the instigator

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<sup>35</sup> Bancroft-Marcus' translation: humbly knelt (I A 307); Since, as your servitor and faithful slave, I've never done one deed without your bidding (I 311-312); Instead, my soul and body I present as gifts to you, my lady; both prepared at your command to venture down to Hades!. (I 368-370).

<sup>36</sup> Low (1993: ix).

<sup>37</sup> Kelly-Gadol (1977: 161). Though Kelly-Gadol recognises these changes in Renaissance Italy, she states that the “procapitalistic economy, its states, and the humanistic culture” did not promote women's power but rather contributed to “mold the noble woman into an aesthetic object: decorous, chaste, and doubly dependent.”

<sup>38</sup> Payne (1970: 92).

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, (92).

of passion among young girls: “τέτοιας λογής και τσι καρδιές, τα λόγια που γροικούσι / με τάξη απού τσ’ αγαφτικούς οι κορασές, κινούσι / στον πόθο πλια παρά ποτέ περιτοπλιάς πωμένα / να ’ναι με τέχνη κι όμορφα περίσσα σοθεμένα” (I 327-330). Panaretos, on the other hand, refuses to exploit rhetoric when addressing Erofile and claims that passion and suffering have made his language skills seem eloquent and authentic.

Other favourable circumstances arise subsequently to allow Panaretos to demonstrate his chivalrous virtues and convince Erofile of his “fine Amor”. A war with Persia<sup>40</sup> would provide an opportunity for him to reveal his potential and to impress the King and his daughter by putting his own life in danger as commanded. When the war finishes and he returns triumphantly to his country, a joust<sup>41</sup> organized by the King provides both a new challenge and a beneficial outcome. Though he proved himself in the war as an excellent warrior, his humble presence in front of the princess and the expression of his full submission to her, in keeping with chivalric practice, aim to enhance his image.

This is the last but one phase in the amorous conquest of Erofile. She responds, in a commonplace manner in romantic poetry of Chortatsis’s time, by giving Panaretos a valuable amulet<sup>42</sup> or “γκόλφι”<sup>43</sup> from her own bosom, as a first token of her affection. The precious jewel is the first hint of her secret priceless love and carries connotations of women’s power to “dispose their own wealth” and carry their dowry in the form of a “title, property, jewel gifts or cash out of the natal family to alien households after their marriage.”<sup>44</sup> The poet skillfully introduces the challenges of war and the “giostra” to allow Panaretos to prove his heroism and also to express his full submission to the princess

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<sup>40</sup> Chortatsis makes deliberate use of anachronism when placing the war in Persia.

<sup>41</sup> Puchner (1998: 437) distinguishes between “torneo” and “giostra”. The former represents Group-tournament (Gruppenkampf) while the latter is rather one-man tournament (Einzenkampf).

<sup>42</sup> In the twelfth century romance of Thomas of Britain, *Tristan and Isolde*, there exists an exact parallel when Isolde gives Tristan before separating a ring of green jasper and promises to love him with the perfect love: “Je vos pramet par fine amor” (line 2722).

<sup>43</sup> Bancroft-Marcus (2000: 354) links *golfi* with *enkolpion*, which could be a Byzantine reliquary.

<sup>44</sup> King (1991: 49).

through the verses “Μ’ απείς η μάχη εσκόλασε...; Μ’ απείς η γκιόστρα εσκόλασε” (I 297, I 359), which reflect the gradual and industrious endeavours and the difficult ordeals he had to endure to build up his image and secure the love of Erophile. A further hint of Panaretos’s strategic plan, aimed at evoking mutual feelings in the heroine, is seen when he, as the winner of the tournament, visits her immediately “ζυμιόν”.<sup>45</sup> He kneels down as a sign of his full submission, expresses his gratitude once again and apologises for not being able to offer her the “prizes” or “χαρίσματα”<sup>46</sup> (I 362) of the tournament since they are not appropriate or useful to a maiden. The inadequacy of Panaretos’s material possessions, symbolised here by the “giostra’s gifts”, are balanced by his offer of his whole existence, “his body and soul”, “η ψυχή και το κορμί μου” (I 368), to his lady. He admits to only fighting for her honour and says that his reward – the love of his lady – will form the highest of the rewards he could ever expect.

On the other hand, Erophile’s resistance to the attack of *Eros*<sup>47</sup> is described in her spoken verses as very active. Chortatsis portrays his heroine striving to resist the amorous feelings because she foresees the social consequences:

Χίλιες φορές μ’ εδόξευγε, χίλιες να πιάνει τόπο  
στο νου μου δεν τον άφηνα μ’ ένα γή μ’ άλλο τρόπο  
χίλιες τ’ αφτιά εμολύβωνα, για να μηδέ γροικούσι  
τσι σιργουλιές του τσι γλυκειές, τα μέλη να πονούσι  
χίλιες με την πορπατηξιά, χίλιες με μια και μ’ άλλη  
στράτα τη θέρμη του έσβηνα στο νου μου τη μεγάλη (III 19-24).<sup>48</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Reflecting the popular folk saying “το γοργόν και χάρη έχει.”

<sup>46</sup> Puchner (1998: 442) mentions tournaments whose prize was a wife, “Brautgewinnung”. Panaretos refers to his material prize though.

<sup>47</sup> Peri (1999: 130). Peri, referring to *Erotokritos*, argues the close connection between *Eros* and disease and illustrates in his scheme five main functions of *Eros*, namely the “attack of *Eros*, the passive reactions of the person in love, the active resistance of the enamored, the domination of *Eros* and the surrender.”

<sup>48</sup> Bancroft-Marcus’ translation: Love shot a thousand darts; a thousand times my mind refused to let him gain a foothold; A thousand times I sealed my ears against his honed-eyed coaxing to indulge my yearning. A thousand times I tried, by walking or some other way, to quench his heat within me.

The power of *Eros*, as it is delineated in the chorus of the tragedy, justifies the dynamic and defiant character of the heroine. The omnipotence of *Eros* in all human beings and gods, the ruler of all earth and water and animator of fauna and flora requires strong characters who enamoured will strive to unite with their beloved withstanding any impediments.

Furthermore, *Eros* is powerfully presented in the tragedy as an archer (μ' εδόξευγε), a soldier (ήτο του πολέμου; στρατιώτης), a master in love matters (μάστορας καλός) who makes his victims suffer (μ' επιάιδευγε) until they give in. On the other hand, *Eros* is also illustrated as sweet (γλυκύς), as a small child (παιδάκιν ίσα)<sup>49</sup> and as a friend (φίλος). He is described as a teacher (εδιδασκάλευγέ με) and as a manipulator of the human mind “χίλια ακριβά τασσίματα μου 'τασσε κάθα μέρα / και χίλια μου 'κτιζε όμορφα περβόλια στον αέρα”<sup>50</sup>.

Chortatsis's protagonist might be said to represent the Renaissance woman who would not be allowed as a young girl to bear sexual feelings for a man nor to fulfil her deepest desire in her private life. Matthews-Grieco<sup>51</sup> points out that sexuality during the Renaissance period became a matter of concern for both “secular and religious authorities” and the human body was the object of a “conflicting attitude”. The Medieval mistrust of the body because it was considered weak and “ephemeral” still survived in people's mind, while on the other hand, the Renaissance rediscovered the nude body and rehabilitated its physical attractiveness. However, sexuality was only acceptable in combination with marriage and “then solely in the function of procreation”. Erophile's sexual desire for Panaretos echoes in the language as “τα μέλη να πονούσι” (III 22); “τη θέρμη του έσβηνα στο νου μου τη μεγάλη” (III 24) and emphasises bodily reactions more than the spiritual. The omnipotence of *Eros* forces Erophile finally to surrender and admit her strong mutual feelings towards Panaretos, and a secret marriage by exchange of wedding rings

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<sup>49</sup> The child is Cupid, the Latin name of *Eros*, the ancient god of love and desire, son of Aphrodite. He is often represented blindfolded symbolising that love is blind.

<sup>50</sup> Alexiou 1988: (III 19; III 25; III 30; III 25; III 31; III 29; III 30; III 28; III 38; III 33-34).

<sup>51</sup> Matthews-Grieco (1993: 46).

and vows comes to crown their unconditional love and deep devotion.<sup>52</sup>

Undoubtedly, the recipe for a good tragedy often relies on the inescapable destiny of a strong female character captured in a passionate relationship and refusing to compromise in any way. Erophile combines all these. She is in love; she fights for her right to make her personal choices and leaves no scope for compromise. It is striking that she makes frequent use in her rhetoric of the negative particle *δεν* (“not”) (act II, throughout the second scene) when justifying her secret marriage and passion for Panaretos. These continuous negations delineate Erophile’s unyielding character and her defiance of social convention, which determine the course of the tragic plot. Nena, Erophile’s nurse<sup>53</sup> exhibits in her spoken verses the lucidity of a Renaissance woman in foreshadowing the tragic end and acknowledging the role of women:

Να ρίζει ο κύρης το παιδί σ’ όλους μας είν’ δοσμένο  
κι όποιο παιδί το θέλει αλλιώς, είν’ καταδικασμένο (II 61-62).

McKee states in her historical article concerning women in Crete, under Venetian occupation in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, that Greek women were ranked lower than Greek and Latin men, and explains that this is due to the intention of the conqueror to downgrade the natives in social, juridical and economic areas. Women had to suffer doubly in this situation, by virtue of being Greek added to the disadvantage of being women.<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, women should honour and obey their fathers, brothers, or husbands, who for their part were responsible for the woman’s well being, which was in most cases “translated” as agreement to an arranged marriage in order to compensate the responsible men for the years of

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<sup>52</sup> There is no mention of a marriage ceremony. The secret marriage included an exchange of wedding rings and vows leaving us to wonder if it would have been legally accepted. An illegitimate marriage would be easy to cancel, but Erophile strongly rejects this when Nena suggests it to her by way of “correcting her mistake”.

<sup>53</sup> Holton (2000: 124-125) points out that the Cretan poets selected names for their heroes appropriate to their character, social status or profession. Hence, the name of Erophile’s nurse Chironomi makes allusion to her role as a wise woman, advising her mistress to accept the social rules applicable to women of that time.

<sup>54</sup> McKee (1998: 37, 41).



“sheltering and protecting” their female family members. Besides, marriage served as an implement of social and economic advancement, a process in which women were treated as a marketable commodity.

Despite her full conviction as to the flawlessness of her decisions, Chortatsis reveals his heroine’s doubts and fears through her dreams. Her nightmares reflect her agony of knowing too well the full extent of the consequences that would be sure to follow upon revelation of her secret marriage; this indeed would be the catalyst to the wrath of her father. Her dreams prophesy her tragic destiny. The dangers she is exposed to in her nightmares symbolise the real confrontation of insuperable obstacles in her real life. Darkness, ghosts of dead kings from the past, lions, wild animals, blood, dark caves and wild waves in the sea<sup>55</sup> announce her vulnerability and her awareness of the perils of fighting against the whole “dark” patriarchal system. Therefore, her nightmare with the two doves functions as prophetic as it is a delineation of her current situation. They symbolise her and her beloved and portray their relationship. The way the two doves die is crucial to the interpretation of the dream. One of the doves has been devoured after being badly mauled by the wolf. Panaretos’s death will follow the same pattern. He not only will be killed by the vengeful King, but also be mangled and offered as a gruesome wedding present to Erophile. It is striking that Erophile’s interpretation of the dream bears witness to her awareness of her social role and of the consequences of her defiance of the predestined gender role of a noble woman. She defines herself and her beloved as the prey and her father as the predator:

λούπης μην είν’ ο κύρης μου τρομάσσω και φοβούμαι,  
κ’ εμείς τα περιστέρια αυτά κι ομάδι σκοτωθούμε (II 161-162).

The double death of the doves evincing their unconditional love and devotion, alludes to the theme of *Liebestod* and foreshadows the fatal end of the lovers.

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<sup>55</sup> In Kornaro’s verse romance *Erotokritos*, which was influenced by Chortatsis, the heroine Aretousa also dreams of the wild sea which symbolizes the danger to which she is exposed, *Erotokritos* (IV, 53-76).

Indeed, a defiant daughter, uncompromising and till the end combative for her right to be her own master, “ορίζουσιν άλλοι την εμαυτή μου” (II 59), while trying to escape her social boundaries, will face the cruelty of her only close blood relative. It is obvious that both lovers consciously gave in to their “inappropriate” love, increased the potential for tragedy by a secret marriage and further provoked their destiny by being absolutely uncompromising thereafter. A love affair that is ratified by a “marriage” and furthermore consummated leaves no scope for retrieval and irreparably harms Erophile’s “marriageability”. The fact that she cannot further serve her father as an exchangeable object since there are no negotiable “remains” of his noble daughter challenges her destiny<sup>56</sup> and contributes to the condemnation of Erophile.

On the other hand, Cretan tragedy, through the depiction of a strong woman who defends her right to her private life, could be reflecting the endeavours of contemporary noble women to participate in the social changes that took place during the Renaissance period<sup>57</sup> on the island. Although Erophile’s actions surpass women’s behaviour of her time, the fact that her private choices and desires were not heeded and there was no support from her family environment, added to the fact of the condemnation by her father, confirms the view of Kelly-Gadol that women did not have a Renaissance since the Renaissance concepts of love and social behaviour articulated the submission of women to their “male-dominated kin groups and served to justify the removal of women

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<sup>56</sup> Betts, Gauntlett & Spilias (Kornaros Vitsentzos, *Erotokritos*, translation, 2004: xx). Although fate, fortune, destiny, chance and luck are not underlying themes in *Erophile*, as they are in the verse romance *Erotokritos*, they are very often mentioned in a variety of different nouns such as ριζικό, μοίρα, τύχη, κακομοιριά, accompanied by adjectives or phrases such as ασβολωμένη, πρικαμένη, κακορίζικη, τροχός της τύχης, τον κύκλον του ριζικού.

<sup>57</sup> At the very dawn of the 17<sup>th</sup> century two Venetian women published a work asserting women’s equality with the opposite sex. They were Lucrezia Marinella and Modesta Pozzo (Moderata Fonte). The former wrote the combative discourse *La nobilita et l’ eccellenza delle donne*, and the latter the dialogical work *II merito delle donne*. Both dealt with topics that were especially controversial at the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century regarding women’s rights and abilities, and sought to counter contemporary misogynistic attitudes.

from an ‘unlady-like’ position of power and erotic independence.”<sup>58</sup>

In addition, the King’s confession to his advisor of his intention to “give away” his daughter confirms further women’s subordinate social role. He expresses his deep love for his only child, an affection that has held him back hitherto from marrying off his daughter, although many noble men had asked for her hand. The King though, due to his old age, has to secure his kingdom and to ensure new alliances through the husband chosen for his daughter. On the other hand, Erophone’s age, described as “δότομη<sup>59</sup> οι χρόνοι πλιότερα την κάμασι κ’ εγίνη” (I 537), makes the decision to give his daughter away unavoidable. Referring to family life in Renaissance Crete, Maltezou states that a young girl’s purpose is to reach maturity quickly in order to get married and to engage herself at a very young age in all the responsibilities and burdens of marital life.<sup>60</sup> A girl in Venetian Crete was considered to be a child till the age of 12 when she reached puberty, but many girls got married at an earlier age to avoid the possibility of pre-marital loss of their virginity<sup>61</sup> inasmuch as “family interest weighed heavily on fathers, and marriage was one of the chief weapons in the arsenal of family strategy.”<sup>62</sup>

The King, though, being in ignorance of his daughter’s secret marriage, has already scheduled a marriage for her, in his capacity of the only male representative and head of his family. As the “giver of Wife”<sup>63</sup> he proceeds to exchange the female member of his family, regardless of his personal feelings for his daughter, in order to ensure a peaceful kingdom in the future and strengthen alliances through her marriage. Her worthy marriage “άξα παντρεία”, (III 360) is the crux of the conflict between father and daughter since the interpretation of the word “worthy” follows divergent priorities and values. He most probably would have expected her immediate agreement to the marriage and he would further

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<sup>58</sup> Kelly-Gadol (1977: 137).

<sup>59</sup> Alexiou (1988: 256) finds the etymology of the word “δότομη” given by M. Parlamas to be quite accurate. Δότομος comes from the classical δότιμος, δόσιμος. It could be translated as mature / ready to be given away.

<sup>60</sup> Maltezou (2000: 15).

<sup>61</sup> Bancroft-Marcus (2000: 351).

<sup>62</sup> Chojnacki (1988: 133).

<sup>63</sup> Levi-Strauss (1969: 233)

have wished for his daughter to meet all her needs for affection and love with this chosen husband. Indeed, wills and testaments in late Medieval Venice are evidence for the fact that it was rather the rule and not the exception that mutual feelings of love developed between patrician couples even if the way they were brought together and married was through arrangements made by their families.<sup>64</sup> The vain endeavours of Erofile to cancel the matchmaking, “τσι προξενιές τούτες να ξηλωθούσι” (III 187), fully illustrate women’s submissive social role, inasmuch as their wishes and needs are ignored and their refusal of an arranged marriage is interpreted as very common and proper “girl behavior” as saying “no” and spilling tears form part of the whole arrangement and forced procedure. The end-result is the inescapable degradation of women. This attitude is also reflected in verses spoken by Nena:

Συνήθιν ἐν’ των κορασώ, Πανάρετε, να κλαίσι,  
όντα τσι προξενεύγουσι, κι “όχι” όλωνώ να λέσι,  
μα στο ἴστερο συβάζουνται κ’ εἶν’ ευχαριστημένες  
τσι τύχης τῶνε τσι καλής, πως εἶναι παντρεμένες (II 299-302).

After the revelation of the secret marriage of his daughter, the King’s rage is tremendous. He will carefully prepare his plans for revenge in order to punish both lovers for their disobedience. As a tyrant or an absolute ruler of a country, he exercises all three powers: executive, judicial and legislative. Between the lines of the tragedy is exposed the obvious corruption of the King as well as the absolutism of the political system. The King carries all the traits of a vicious monarch; he is absolute, merciless, cruel and unjust. Erofile and her lover will be confronted by the King as criminals. Trying to give a definition of the word “crime” in regard to women in the Renaissance Castan<sup>65</sup> connects it with the “behavioral norms” of the period. Further, the statement that crime is not “only violations of the law subject to judicial punishment but also [...] various kinds of misbehavior and deviancy subject only to the sanctions

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<sup>64</sup> Chojnacki (1988: 127).

<sup>65</sup> Castan (1993: 475).

of social control”<sup>66</sup> also applies to Erophile’s “crime”. Her secret marriage with Panaretos and the consummation of their love form a violation of the religious and social morals of the time. Castan touches upon the vulnerability of “Daughters and widows” who “were the first to feel the effects of institutional repression when public scandal threatened.”<sup>67</sup> In the Renaissance period women, whether belonging to the low, middle or upper social classes, were under the control of the *paterfamilias*, who strictly watched over the maintenance of the family law and punished deviation in moral behavior that “were it to become public, would have impinged upon the honor of the family itself.”<sup>68</sup>

Hence, Chortatsis offers his protagonist ample rhetorical space to develop her defence arguments. In her lengthy defence speech, comprising 152 verses, she reveals her defiant nature and dynamic character. In the first stage of her defence, in contrast to her past claims to her Nena, she admits to having acted badly by marrying Panaretos without the consent of her father:

Κύρη, με τον Πανάρετο δίχως το θέλημά σου  
δεν ήτο το πρεπό ποτέ να παντρευτώ χωστά σου.  
Κατέχω το και λέγω το κ’ είμαι μεταγνωμένη  
και τούτο μόνο, σήμερο, με κάνει πρικαμένη (IV 263-266).

She senses that the only chance she has is to soften her father’s heart by showing a humble and apologetic attitude. The verbs “κατέχω το” and “λέγω το” “I know it” and “I confess it” are not haphazardly used here by the poet. Erophile admits through these verbs her awareness of the impropriety of her acts and utters it aloud as in a court,<sup>69</sup> confessing

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., (475).

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., (477).

<sup>68</sup> Graziosi (2000:167).

<sup>69</sup> Papamanousakis (1991: 506). Papamanousakis describes the defence of Erophile as follows: “So from a juridical point of view *Erophile* is nothing but a sensational court case. This schematic illustration of the trial... is not far from the existing rules in an autocratic monarchical country of the time, where there is no independent judiciary or individual rights.... But we must recognise that in any case a procedural line is kept which aims at the confirmation of the offence, the potentiality of an apology and perhaps advocacy and the execution of the sentence after the judgment.” (The translation

her “social and moral crime” in front of the King-Judge, most probably hoping for a reduction of the sentence.

The loss of family protection, the deprivation of all benefits according to her social status and the threat of degradation from a princess to a slave form the first punishment if not the danger of losing her very life. Since the King remains unmoved and harsh, Erophile proceeds to the emotionally strongest stage of defending herself, namely an entreaty to him to show mercy. In the last stage of her defence, Erophile recognises that any further striving to soften her father’s heart would be in vain and gives up. His daughter is of no further use as an exchangeable object since her marriageability has been irrevocably harmed:

Και τούτων είναι απού πονεί κ’ εμένα πλια περίσσο,  
γιατί τσι μάχεζ έλπιζα και τσ’ έχθηρητες να σβήσω  
με τέτοιο τρόπο μια φορά, κι αγάπη στο λαό μου  
ν’ αφήσω με το γάμο τση κιας εις το θάνατό μου (IV 499-502).

If we examine other Cretan works of the Renaissance period,<sup>70</sup> we observe that Erophile is not an exception but conforms to a pattern of cruelty and victimisation suffered by female members of a family. In the

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from Greek is mine.)

<sup>70</sup> In the verse romance *Erotokritos*, we find that the female protagonist Aretousa, though a princess, is imprisoned and physically and verbally abused by both parents. Aretousa does not face the death penalty since her “crime” is still reversible and she remains viable as marriageable merchandise, while the incorrigible nature of Erophile’s “crime” determines the course of her tragic destiny. In the tragedy *Rhodolinos*, the heroine’s mental and physical equilibrium is cruelly violated by her lover. She has to respond to three contradictory agendas, one set by her father, one by her lover and one by her future husband, while she is in ignorance about the role she is destined to play in their transactions. Her exposure to various kinds of exploitation by men, who should in fact be protecting her, leads her to commit suicide. Even in the Cretan pastoral work *Panoria* it is remarkable that daughters encounter mental and verbal abuse if they challenge the masculine order and refuse to comply with an arranged marriage. Thus Panoria, the only daughter of the shepherd Giannoulis, refuses to accept the wealthy Gyparis as her husband, which causes her father to explode into misogynistic expressions, while Gyparis in cooperation with Frosyni, the matchmaker, will unfold his cunning plans to cheat and manipulate his beloved into fulfilling her destined social role and surrendering to the power of *Eros*.

works of Chortatsis's contemporary, Shakespeare, the brutality with which fathers treat their daughters is also evident. In *Erophile*, the way in which the King plans his revenge against the two lovers further illuminates women's vulnerability to becoming victims of retribution and rage from men. In the fifth and last act of the tragedy there is a culmination of horror, and all the gruesome details of the murder of Panaretos by the King reveal his despotic and inhuman nature. The harm to his honour and the damage to his absolute power could only be alleviated through the eternal condemnation and suffering of the two lovers.

Due attention must be paid to the fact that in his tragedy *Erophile* Chortatsis presents *Eros* and *Thanatos* as binary opposites. At the very beginning of the play, he acknowledges the power of death over all human beings, the temporality of human nature and the vanity of human existence. Allegories of Death from antiquity and the Middle Ages now evolved into an on-stage protagonist, "humanity's grand antagonist", to quote Neill.<sup>71</sup> Death is no longer an abstract term but envisaged as a merciless, ruthless and cruel creature. Omnipotent *Thanatos* is here personified<sup>72</sup> in the medieval manner as a monstrous, dark and emaciated creature holding a scythe. The Triumph of Death in *Erophile* is already assured from the Prologue. Personified as Charon, the lord of the underworld, death forewarns the audience and foreshadows on stage the end of the tragedy.

Though "the decline and decay" of every human being and the degradation of mortals have been much discussed over the centuries, the Renaissance period produced many variations on the confrontation of death.<sup>73</sup> The omnipotence of *Thanatos* is manifested anew in the final act of the tragedy through the last verses spoken by the chorus of young women, where they extol his superiority over everything living:

Γιατί όλες οι καλομοιρίες του κόσμου και τα πλούτη

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<sup>71</sup> Neill (1997: 4-5).

<sup>72</sup> Binski (1996: 126-127). Macabre art featuring death personified was an artistic legacy of the late medieval disaster known as the "Black Death", a plague estimated to have affected between one third and two thirds of the population of Europe.

<sup>73</sup> Engel (2002: 14).

μια μόνο ασκιά 'ναι στή ζωή την πρικαμένη τούτη,  
μια φουσκαλίδα του νερού, μια λάβρα που τελειώνει  
τόσα γοργό όσο πλιά ψηλά τσι λόχες τση σηκώνει.

(Final Chorus, 671-674)

The chorus of young women will define the cruel death of Panaretos and the ensuing suicide of their mistress as an offence against divine and moral law and will exact a very public form of vengeance by mercilessly killing the ruthless King on stage, thereby gaining “the illusion of agency”<sup>74</sup> against tyranny and injustice. *Eros* once again becomes associated with violent and terrifying acts of vengeance in *Erophile*, as in many other Renaissance plays, and “its corrupting entanglement with Realpolitik, ambition, lust, and murder” reveals the preoccupation of tragedians with the “self-destructive and tyrannical power of love” rather than the ideal manifestation of *Eros* in their plays.<sup>75</sup> Love is described in the whole tragedy as a form of martyrdom. Vocabulary borrowed from religion comes to strengthen this deadly or morbid dimension of love:

κ' έλεγα η τόση παιδωμή πώς θέλει μ' αποθάνει. (I 204)  
Ψυχή δέ βγαίνει εκ το κορμί με τόση λύπη, κρίνω. (I 211)  
κι αναστενάζω μοναχάς και ν' αποθάνω κράζω. (I 428)  
Σώνει τα πάθη οπού 'χουσι τη δόλια την καρδιά μου (II 97)  
Θεέ μου, τέτοια παιδωμή μη δώσεις στο κορμί μου,  
μα πρώτας με το θάνατο τέλειωσε τη ζωή μου. (II 361-362)  
Ω Άδη και τση Κόλασης τση σκοτεινής καημένες  
Ψυχές, με λόχες και φωτιά πάντα τυραννισμένες,  
καινούργια ακούσετε φωτιά και λόχη πλιά μεγάλη  
και παιδωμή χειρότερη παρά ποτέ κιαμιά άλλη. (II 431-434)  
Τό θάνατο και τη σκλαβιά τόσα πρικιά δεν κράζω  
σαν έν' πρικύ το βάσανο που τώρα δοκιμάζω. (III 103-104)

Furthermore *Erophile*'s lament over the dead body of Panaretos with its exaltation of the beauty of his lifeless body alludes to the erotic nature of death and the yearning of the protagonist to be united erotically with her

<sup>74</sup> Findlay (1999: 55).

<sup>75</sup> Forker (1975: 213).



beloved in eternity. Ariès<sup>76</sup> touches upon the erotic meaning of death in the late fifteenth century where, especially in the iconography “death raped the living”, there was an association of *Eros* and *Thanatos*: “these... erotic macabre themes... which reveal extreme complaisance before the spectacles of death, suffering and torture.” *Thanatos* in his ugliness (“ασκήμια” V 450) holds an erotic attraction for the living, obsesses them to the extent of inspiring a conscious desire to end their own lives:

Πάντα, ακριβέ μου, ταίρι μου, μ' έθρεφεν η θωριά σου  
τώρα στον Αδη τη φτωχή με βάνει η ασκημιά σου (V 449-450).

Erophile's heartbreaking verses when facing the mutilated body of her lover have much in common with the words of Shakespeare's female protagonist in the contemporary tragedy *Romeo and Juliet*.<sup>77</sup> “Καρδιά μου, πώς δε σκίζεσαι, μάτια μου, πώς μπορείτε / τέτοια μεγάλην απονιά σήμερα να θωρήτε;” (V 401-402).<sup>78</sup> Death seems to be the only way out of the martyrdom of love. The women's chorus uses a well-worn saying to describe the capacity of *Thanatos* to assuage human pain:

Πώς; Δεν τελειώνει ο θάνατος πάσα καημό και πόνο;  
Βοτάνι τονέ κράζουσι πούρι στα πάθη μόνο (V 181-182).

Taking this further, Chortatsis allows his heroine to have the last word and to dominate the scene through her spectacular on-stage suicide. Her body becomes a tool for manifesting resistance and her struggle against discrimination and injustice; and her self-destruction displays her feminised silent revenge against her tyrannical father. The mortal temporality is juxtaposed to the triumphant omnipotence of *Eros* in *Thanatos*. Erophile's suicidal act of stabbing herself, stirred by her desire to reunite with her beloved, reveals the *Liebestod* motive and alludes to the sexual act:

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<sup>76</sup> Ariès (1974: 56-57).

<sup>77</sup> Belies (2007). Greek translation of act 3, scene 2 of *Romeo and Juliet*. “Αχ καρδιά μου σπάσε! Τα 'χασες όλα, σπάσε! Κι εσείς, μάτια μου, στην φυλακή, ποτέ να μη δείτε λευτεριά!”

<sup>78</sup> Bancroft-Marcus' translation: My heart, why don't you break? My eyes, how can you bear to witness such inhuman cruelty?

Πανάρετε, Πανάρετε, Πανάρετε ψυχή μου,  
βουήθα μου τση βαρόμοιρης και δέξου το κορμί μου (V 523-524).

In the second act of the opera *Tristan und Isolde* Richard Wagner for the first time uses the term “*Liebestod*”<sup>79</sup> to describe the yearning of two lovers to unite in death, unable to confront the hostility of the world and the insuperability of the obstacles to their love. Since then the term has been overused in literature for its very symbolism of the perfect love. Linda and Michael Hutcheon identify Wagner’s *Liebestod* as “the ability for the lovers to transcend individuation, to lose the self in a unity with a larger force-passion.”<sup>80</sup> The *Liebestod* pattern demands absolute romantic love, clashing with social norms and refusing to conform, until checked and finally ruined by destiny.<sup>81</sup> Erophile and Panaretos fulfill the substantial requirements; their absolute romantic and unconditional love is in conflict with the contemporary social norms, where love and difference in social rank are incompatible, where women are treated as second-class citizens and where the political system enables leaders to exercise absolute power over their vassals.

In Chortatsis’s tragedy both protagonists die in the end. Though their death is not simultaneous and only Erophile commits suicide, both lovers express their deep and unconditional love all through the tragedy, and their suicidal thoughts and words manifest that “love is an absolute for which they are willing to suffer and die.”<sup>82</sup> Panaretos had in various ways in the past expressed his wish and determination to die if deprived of his beloved. The following verses manifest these suicidal wishes and thoughts in the event of his failure to achieve union with Erophile:

κι αναστενάζω μοναχάς και ν’ αποθάνω κράζω (I 428).

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<sup>79</sup> O süsse Nacht, ew’ge Nacht! / hehr erhab’ne Liebesnacht! / Wen du umfangen, / wem du gelacht, / wie- wär ohne Bangen / aus dir je er erwacht? / Nun banne das Bangen, / holder Tod, / sehndend verlangter / **Liebestod!** (Richard Wagner, *Tristan und Isolde*, act 2, scene 2).

<sup>80</sup> Hutcheon Linda & Michael (1999: 281).

<sup>81</sup> Bijvoet (1988:5).

<sup>82</sup> Bijvoet (1988: 5).

κι αληθινά α δεν έβλαφτα την κόρη τη δική μου,  
 με το σπαθί μου ετέλειωνα μιαν ώρα τη ζωή μου (I 407-408).  
 Χίλια κομμάτια πλια καλλιιά τα μέλη μου ας γενούσι  
 κι όχι ποτέ τ' αμμάτια μου να τηνέ στερευτούσι (I 493-494).  
 Στον Άδην έχω πλια καλλιιά πάντα να τυραννούμαι,  
 παρά στον κόσμο ζωντανός δίχως τση να κρατούμαι (II 247-248).  
 Θάνατος μόνο το λοιπό, τούτο ανισώς και λάχει  
 να δώσει τέλος σ' τση καρδιάς μόνο μπορεί τη μάχη.  
 Κι ο θάνατος τα πάθη μου πως να τελειώσει τάσσω,  
 γιατί ανισώς κ' οι ουρανοί κ' η μοίρα μου να χάσω  
 μ' αφήσουσι την κόρη μου, δεν εν' παρά καλλιιά μου  
 να πάψει κιας ο θάνατος ζιμιό τα βάσανα μου.  
**Τούτη έχω την απόφαση στο νου μου καμωμένη (II 457-463).**

His *Liebestod* intentions are clear in the last verse, where he confesses to having already decided to end his life. Love forms for him the absolute meaning in his life and although he is executed by the King, his death could easily be characterised according to his spoken verses as a “silent suicide” and representative of *Liebestod*, as opposed to Erophile, who commits the crime against herself in a very active way and forms a triumphant example of the *Liebestod* motive.

Consequently, Erophile’s physical death is a result of her emotional death when facing the dead and mutilated body of Panaretos. Like her beloved, she had wished for and thought of *Liebestod* as her previous verses attest. Being more intuitive than her lover, she foresees her own death in the following verses:

Γιατί κατέχω σήμερα πως έχω ν' αποθάνω  
 και πως σ' αφήνω δίχως μου σ' τούτο τον κόσμο απάνω (V 285-286).

Her wishes of *Liebestod* make her intentions and deep devotion obvious. *Eros* will be the instigator of her suicidal thoughts:

μιαν απού τσί σαΐτες σου φαρμάκεψε και ρίξε  
 μέσα στα φυλλοκάρδια μου και φανερά του δείξε  
 με τον πρικό μου θάνατο πως ταίρι του απομένω,  
 και μόνο πως για λόγου του στον Άδη κατεβαίνω (III 165-168)

and finally of her theatrical suicide, the last act of the protagonist:

Μα κείνο που δε δύναται τόσος καημός να κάμει,  
θέλει το κάμει η χέρα μου και το μαχαίρι αντάμι,  
στον Άδην άς με πέψουσι, κι ο κύρης άπονος μου  
τη βασιλείά του ας χαιρέται και τσι χαρές του κόσμου (V 511-514).

Through her on-stage suicide, the deadly aspect of *Eros* together with the erotic aspect of *Thanatos* are strongly manifested at the end of the tragedy and triumphantly corroborate the nexus between love and death in the play. Erophile's decision to end her life perfectly aligns her words with her deeds and underlines her dynamic nature even in this tragic way.

Finally, through the tragic suicide of the heroine, the destiny of women who rejected the rules constraining their sex is highlighted. The social circumstances did not allow Erophile scope to negotiate her wishes and to balance her inner longings for union with her beloved. As a woman, she failed to play the role of an obedient and compromising woman willing to conform to the characteristic Renaissance female model. Her body became a weapon against tyranny and injustice and with her voluntary death she freed her existence from all the social restrictions imposed on her sex. Unlike the protagonists in various other Cretan works of the Renaissance period, Erophile suffers the severest of punishments because her "crime" is irreversible. The consummation of the couple's love invalidates the key component in her arranged marriage. The loss of her virginity thwarts her father's plans and triggers his horrible revenge. Erophile performed her last act of resistance with her suicide on stage, a location that most probably served as a conduit for the distribution of liberal ideas such as those expressed in this play by Chortatsis. Her suicide highlights the intractability of the social norms and rules and could be said to represent the extremes to which the female voices of resistance to the patriarchal system needed to go in order to be heeded.

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