

departure for the sake of reason.²⁷ In both cases Stamatoula, the victim of a blindly absurd fate, is as authentic a character, as is Venezis's identity as a refugee; she is his creation, old and helpless, subject to repeated displacement as ordained by powers above and beyond her control.

Alongside the anxiety over the actual fulfilment of her migration, Stamatoula undergoes a retrospective self-definition; divided between hope and fear, she engages into a backward synthesis of who she is and how she ended up departing for Virginia. This synthesis also projects forwards the defining characteristics of her image: national origin, religion, and gender. I would like to discuss gender for a moment, especially in view of the protagonist's role as a mother. Although her relationship with her daughter seems flawless, Stamatoula endures their thirty-year long separation so stoically that we may think that she has given up on seeing her only child again. Like the rest of her misfortunes, her separation from her is the combined result of higher power and rational human decision. This double causality, we may infer, also dictated the obvious choice of accepting the wealthy Virginian's offer of marriage (17), a crucial event given surprisingly limited narrative attention.²⁸ The daughter's departure for Virginia (17), just like her own trip there, is viewed by Stamatoula with tragic non-chalance: "The second great war came, worldwide upheaval, occupation, ruin. And everything got displaced, Virginia, Phokes, the land of Attica — they got displaced into the realm of destiny: 'Whatever will be, will be. Whatever is to come, let it come'" (18–19). Stamatoula acts in compliance with the knowledge that everything happens under the umbrella of human inability to control fate; the wisdom of such compliance, if not complacency, with the status quo conforms with traditional perceptions of womanhood and its associations with weakness and silent suffering. As a mother, she lets go of her daughter; as a refugee, she relinquishes her motherland; and as a migrant, she leaves everything behind. In a world where conflict and disaster render personal choices irrelevant, Stamatoula can only accept her defeat and move on. And she does both, with the dignity of the tragic chorus of women from Phokes:

All the women who used to be her neighbours in Phokes, and had shed tears with her on the deserted shore of Attica, had already departed, one by one, for the other trip: they were resting there, behind the small hill, in the barren cemetery of the little town. They were waiting for her. From that group, only two survived, Yianoula and herself. Well now, it appears, she has to step out of the routine, the order of things. The small hill is a few steps away from her cottage. She had gotten used to the idea that nothing else was left to her: that others would take the few final steps on her behalf, to take her to her friends, so that she could experience the ultimate tranquillity. And now, incredibly enough, so late, her route must change: she has to travel to this distant soil, the state of Virginia, this soil

²⁷ In his contribution to the volume of *Νέα Έστία* commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the Asia Minor Catastrophe, the author credits "the passion for native soil" ("τὸ πάθος γιὰ τὸ χῶμα", Venezis, 1972:34) as well as "the spirit of being in bondage" ("τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ ἀλυτρώτου", 35) with the inspiration to Greeks in Asia Minor to persevere against all odds.

²⁸ The theme of a groom coming from far away also occurs in two brief variations in Venezis's 1950 novel *Exodus* (*Εξοδος*, 254).

must receive her. Because, of course, the little old lady knows it well: the trip she is now going to take it is all about the soil. About where she will be buried. (19)

In the following scene, Stamatoula and Yianoula, the sole survivors from this tragic chorus, are confronted with a final moment of acceptance after they have gone through the stages of denial, anger, isolation, bargaining, and depression in a sequence remarkably parallel to the process described in contemporary thanatology.²⁹ The tragic element is inextricably intertwined with discreet yet potent lyricism,³⁰ as the hills of Attica at daybreak awaken in Stamatoula the pathos of her first uprooting:

They fell silent. And then came the dawn. The hills were painted a rosy pink, the colour of angels. Soon the bus would come to take Stamatoula to the big port.

—It's time.

—It's time.

The little old lady gazed at the hills of Attica, her second homeland, now that she was leaving for her third, the final one. Then she realised that a person can be uprooted only once. Twice is too much, unbearable. She saw the hills — they were calm, gentle. And she started crying quietly — because soon the hills would disappear forever. (22)

Venezis concludes the dialectic of separation with an engaging image of emotional and visual landscape. Seated next to each other in silent vigil, the two elderly women wrestle the memories from Phokes to no avail. Their depiction as the live participants in each other's wake, laden with eeriness and despair, serves the additional purpose of liberating the protagonist from her separation anxiety. Not surprisingly, this liberation takes place in the context of memory and recollection: the drama of displacement is played once again, achieving a total recall of the first, more powerful, trauma. Unlike the first homeland, whose loss proves unrecoverable, the second gives its place to the third without much protest: "a person can be uprooted only once" (22).

Despite her helplessness, Stamatoula dominates the scene with her personal connection to the landscape. Her tears for the disappearing hills transfer us to the emotional landscape of migration, where age, gender, ethnicity, and religion become active elements in an emergency of self-definition. And, of course, this emergency is no other than a last look in the mirror before the mirror disappears forever.

²⁹ For the purposes of my analysis, these five stages (Kübler-Ross, 1969:51ff., where the first stage is called "denial and isolation", changed into "denial" in Kübler-Ross Kessler, 2005:7ff.) represent a medium of contextualising Stamatoula's separation from her refugee community. Far from attempting to force direct analogies between her emotional journey and the five stages experienced by terminally ill persons, I am trying to emphasise the identification of migration with virtual death in the short story.

³⁰ Τζούλης (1989:185–86) attributes this lyricism to increased nostalgia for the lost homeland, a literary disposition concomitant with the author's later years as opposed to the harsher style of early narratives like *Number 31328*.

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