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redemption Claudel offers to his sinful heroes. He takes into account the relentless and criminal exploitation of the natives which is the source of all this unnatural and unjust wealth like Koltès. Contemporary political and sociological thought has deprived the selfish from their naïve conviction that privileges are donated by God to the white western men. The dramatic persons do not care. If they have no divine right, then they gain it by their own imposition in a world in which there is no determinism and is governed by chance.

decadent at the time. Leadros cannot bear the thought that he should accept Dominique as a relative or share anything with her accepting it by her assignment. It is severe possessiveness as much as metaphysical aversion. No, this unknown woman will never be his kith and kin. She cannot exist – because she has legal rights he is ready to use violence against her, only he miscalculates. They all miscalculate: Dominique in hoping to find a family, the younger brothers in thinking they are not as unjust and merciless as their elder brother. When he dies they substitute him without scruple and without delay. Dominique was misled by the humanistic side of socialism to do the right thing and count on human solidarity. She should have just employed a lawyer. Men have some kind of it for their own sex. Women are the enemy. This Paradise is certainly not a promised land of any kind: it is rather obviously Hell, in which one struggles for a more privileged circle. The stronger dominates – as simple as that - and may be overwhelmed by fate or history but sometimes he may overcome adversity. The white masters of the colonies think that in these countries where they speculate and have slaves, where there is no tradition and ethics they have to follow if they do not wish it, as social bonds and control are looser than in their native country, feel a step above common human condition, lesser gods with more jurisdiction and possibilities than the rest of humanity. They commit a *hubris* and they often escape *nemesis*. The punishment, if there is any, will come by chance or not at all, if it is not a punishment from their own conscience – and they have not much of it. Sartre was wrong in their cases: Hell for them is not the others – they can suppress them and have no need of their appreciation and love.

Staikos wrote an ostensibly light, witty satirical play to make fun of human egoism and vanity. Dimou was inspired by it to write a powerful drama on the sin of human egoism and vanity, without the metaphysical

women as their companions. Only they are not traditional any more, their tastes have been corrupted by luxury and literature. The women they choose are not young and innocent girls who will become obedient wives and affectionate mothers. They are mature women with experience, who are as cynical in their targets as they are themselves. They want to make a living, to enjoy a material security and the comfort of playing intellectual games with the men in order to satisfy their advanced eroticism and egos. The two couples finally agree and are able to find happiness or so they seem in the end. But will they enter the promised land or will they fail? Staikos's is a literary and intertextual world, however one that has roots in time and place. Greeks born and living abroad, better off and better educated than their compatriots, in a historical period that shook Europe and changed everything, are able to maintain a fantastic life, ridden of life necessities and responsibilities, examining their sinful and harmlessly pervert souls with the sensitivity of a poet. Especially their own poet, who gave this piece of advice: man should enjoy the journey to Ithaca collecting pleasurable perfumes without expecting fulfillment from Ithaca itself. On the other hand, Dimou, strongly influenced by Staikos, is not so indulgent. His is a cruel colonial world, unequivocally patriarchal, in which women cannot even survive, let alone set some rules themselves even if the occasion arises. The Chilas father ignored his wife to death and so did her three sons, although they do not consider that they also had some responsibility towards her. Aristotelis accuses Leandros that his indifference to his own wife, his riveting to his small world, really killed her. Leandros is not even remorseful: so what? The estate and its ownership is all that counts. He uses a native woman for his sexual needs, who cannot claim for anything. Pavlos would like to marry but is incapable of achieving it, while Aristotelis is leading his prodigal life determined not to be burdened with a family or even a companion, again amplified in this attitude by his own poet, who some intellectuals in Greece – Palamas for instance – considered

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based on a genuine and wider realism than the “realism of everyday life”, at the same time presenting a deeper perspective of Greekness, independent of sociological analysis or aesthetic *couleur locale*. He believes that it might be successfully produced abroad. Although realistic recording of contemporary reality is in general outside Dimou’s objective (Rozi 2006: 19, 27-28), in this play he made an exception (Dimou 2004: 7). But his milieu is at the same time the named place, that is the colonial Africa where the bold and adventurous Greeks made their fortunes and became unscrupulous tycoons and an inner land, a desert somehow, where their souls get corrupted and die.

Both plays stress on the first page that the dramatic time is not vague: it is during the second decade of 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the first and the second generation of the Greeks living in Egypt were born (Soulogiannis 1999: 17). These Greeks living abroad, if they still have ties with the metropolis, these ties are loose. There are also the ties with the country they are living in, in which major changes and developments take place during and after the first world war that will inescapably affect their own lives. They are not really interested. They take care only to maintain their privileges and the satisfaction of their vices. It is a patriarchal world. Women have no chance of surviving in it except by the masculine permission. It is an earthly Paradise, in which Eve plays the part given to her by Adam, who is determined that he is the master and only his own needs must be taken care of. In *Ostrich Feathers* the Eves can make a life for themselves by deceiving the men, who consent to it condescendingly and chivalrously. They sense intensely the vacuum of existence and need the women in order to fill it, so they accept the game but not passively: they set the rules or they think they set them, or they demand that the women pretend they set them. Provided their masculine superiority is acknowledged, they accept the

sister, a fact she was informed of only a month ago. But she knew their father: although married or living with another man, her mother had a relationship with him all her life and he visited them from time to time. In fact Leandros was once with him and they felt some strange mutual attraction. The three brothers are shocked by this revelation and express their hatred for this unexpected relative who will inherit their property. Leandros is even thinking to murder her. Then they quarrel bitterly. Leandros accuses the two younger that they chose the easy way and wandered about in Africa leading interesting and adventurous lives while he was left to deal with hardships and difficulties to keep the property intact and take care of a senile and irresponsible father. They express their contempt for him and his selfish narrow-mindedness and they curse and insult each other. Finally they decide to put their differences aside to face the common enemy: this unwanted sister. Leandros offers her money to go away. She offers to share the property with them in equal parts and become a family. Leandros unequivocally refuses. His father had only three sons and his real relatives are the natives, no matter how much he despises them. She is and will remain a stranger. He does not accept offers of sisterly love or stupid socialist ideas about justice. To prove this he hints that the only thing the brothers have for her is an erotic desire, as she is beautiful, and then tries to rape her. In her struggle to escape the incestuous embrace, Dominique kills him with a pin. She becomes frantic with terror. Pavlos and Aristotelis see a unique opportunity to get rid of her. Pavlos forces her to sign a paper that she renounces the inheritance in order to escape prison and is ready to take Leandros's place in the managing of the estate. Aristotelis remains inert, reciting Kavafis, as is his habit, really supporting his brother after some weak defense of Dominique – that the murder was just an accident. Dominique loses her mind, immersed in her despair.

A critic (Ioannidis 2006: 346) wrote that Dimou composed the play



Pavlos is a diamond merchant more like an adventurer really. Leandros has a colored mistress but he has no intention of marrying her. He is aware that the natives hate the white slave-owners and that they stand in some danger from them. Leandros calls the place a Hell, with the Germans and then the English – and to some extent the Greeks who exploit and suppress it. Pavlos feels independent and free, so Leandros has to point out to him that they are always in danger. Aristotelis, the youngest brother has also come from Alexandria where he lives rather prodigally and recites verses by Kavafis to them. The real reason for their reunion is their father's will: almost the whole property goes to this unknown Frenchwoman called Dominique Gobino(t?). The Frenchwoman visits them and offers the story of Strindberg's *Miss Julie* as her own. Aristotelis has an intimate talk with her, in which they reveal and hide at the same time the truth about themselves. Aristotelis left the estate after his mother's suicide and Leandros's wife's terrible death, traveling in many African countries. He finally settled in Alexandria and accepted its unnamed poet as his Mentor: he faithfully obeyed his poetical doctrine that love is fluid and one should never try to build on it. The supposed Julie is even more allusive: she tells that she came to visit her friend Dominique Gobino(t?), that she is an actress and a socialist – she admires Rosa Luxemburg – and tells the symbolic story of some young girls of an African tribe who have a tear on their hand until they get married. The hands cry when they are not caressed. Dominique plays Bach on her violin for the three brothers. Pavlos and to some extent Aristotelis admire her. Leandros is insulting. He has guessed from the very beginning who she is and tries to frighten her in order to renounce her rights on the inheritance and go away. Pavlos understands how vain this tactic is and offers marriage to her and a wonderful plan of how to divide and exploit the property to everybody's benefit. Aristotelis stays out of the negotiation, reciting verses of his favorite poet. Dominique reveals that she is their

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not know Kavafis – they are enough of the dilettante to enjoy intellectual games and verbal plays which arouse their sensuality to the point of ignoring the rules of their class and marry attractive whores. Egypt is the real Egypt of the mid-war years, with its bourgeois class on the verge of decadence and at the same time the promised land in which social barriers and distinctions are broken and erotic fantasies are realized. Still it is the paradise in which they may play out their lives according to their liking instead of having to live it. Because their ancestors worked hard to make a fortune, they have become decadent nobles, performing as if in the theatre their lies upon their lies. They resemble effigies or reflections of real people absorbed in their own charm and realizing a carnival of possibilities which may be life itself, with its masquerades, its intrigues and its play of time (Patsalidis 2000: 479, 481).

Akis Dimou's *The Tear of the Hands* was written in 2000 and produced two years later. The playwright was inspired by Staikos's play together with Claudel's *Partage à midi* and Koltès's *Combat de nègre et de chiens* (Dimou 2004: 7), both taking place in colonial environment. Dimou's is a seemingly realistic play, its action in Khartoum, Sudan in 1917, which was under Egyptian-English occupation. The three Chilas brothers have just buried their father and were informed that the whole property goes to an unknown Frenchwoman, who they think is their father's mistress. She is really their illegitimate sister and comes incognito, hoping to be accepted by them as a member of the family. The eldest absolutely refuses to acknowledge her as such and she kills him by accident as he is trying to rape her.

The play starts with the two elder brothers talking business after seven years of separation. Their father has just died. Leandros bears some malice towards his brothers who did not share with him the last period of their father's decay and senility. Leandros takes care of the property while

possible interpretation of placing the action in the mid-war years would be that Staikos wished to emphasize the similarity of persons and feelings in time and place: the eternal woman whatever her name, the lie of life and death, the annihilation through love, the unwanted truth (Danou 1994: 462; Diamantakou-Agathou 2006: 425-426). Others dispute that this mid-war Alexandria is the real and historical one or that the play has something to say about it: it only a setting for impressive and attractive costumes and scenery (Andreadis 1994: 465; Logothetis 1994: 471) approaching the exotic.

The theoretical critique also consider the dramatic place of Alexandria as either Kavafis' decayed and lustful city, believing that Staikos intentionally and with pleasure historicizes in order really to keep his distance from historical drama (Baconikola 2000: 153). However, the writer defines specifically the dramatic place and time. His dramatis personae are rather typical Greeks living abroad and especially in Egypt: an owner of a family business, a descendant of a commercial dynasty, a clerk-executive in such a company with the typical relationship of these professionals with their boss – intimate and humiliating at the same time –, adventurous fatal women, who try to overcome their insecure condition using their sex-appeal and arousing passion to overcome masculine prejudice and unwillingness to commit themselves with such women. They recruit the magic of the theatre either by pretending to belong to it like Eve, or by posing as women of the world like Chistina-Roxane. In Egypt miracles are being performed. Poor village boys have been coming from the Greek inland since about 1830 and became millionaires and slave owners, whereas their children, second or third generation, are incapable of maintaining and increasing their property, used to wealth and luxurious life. Although their culture may not be high – Argyris is attracted by the actress but is not a fan of the theatre and he does

poet in his place and also Eva, as neither of them is lying enough for his tastes. Takis defends himself and Eva: all was a big lie. The dress story was a fiction, she is not an actress at all but rather an adventuress, Christina is not a red-head but the ex-blonde harlot called Roxane they had met in the past. Argyris is angry: Takis should not have revealed the truth, he should have covered it with a bigger lie. He has disappointed him. Eva comes and tells the same story about Christina, hinting that she would be a perfect match for Takis. Then she asks to be alone with Argyris and paints her lips in order to be understood by him. They confess that they used deceit to make each other happy, but Eva cannot keep it any more because she loves him. She tried to seduce him by pretending to be a famous actress and reciting beautiful lines, and she offers to go back to Athens. Argyris offers marriage. Eva demands that he - or rather she with her own hands - should burn this contract. The contract is burned and the Argyris confesses that it was only a copy; the real contract was already signed for her sake two weeks ago, when they met. They drink champagne to the twin wedding and Takis is not fired after all: he can recite verses by dead poets (he paraphrased Kalvos besides Kavafis at some point).

The constant contradictions and reversions confused some critics, who thought that the play is really meaningless (Sokou 1994: 456) or that it cannot bear a dramatic analysis (Thymeli 1994: 470), lacking in dramatic value and depth. This critic reaction may be surprising after such a long standing experience of the theatre of the Absurd. The academic critique was able to spot it (Sivetidou 2000: 62). Still almost all critics stressed Staikos's intertextual debts to Marivaux's plays. Others thought it successful but incomplete (Christidis 1994: 459; Andreadis 1994: 467). Not everyone is moved by the decayed Alexandria of the mid-war era, offering the eroticism of the affluent Greek emigrants through witty and vitriolic bantering and the fumes of Kavafis's lust (Nikoletatos 1994, 461). A

has a heart disease. He is more anxious about his prestige in case he loses his company or the danger that Eva may stand him up. He is in love for the first time in his life he says and even wishes to become her slave – or her husband, which comes to the same thing. Of course she must abandon her theatrical career – how could a prominent member of the Alexandrian high society have a wife appearing on the stage? (At that same period Marika Kotopouli, the famous protagonist, had a similar problem in her affair with Ion Dragoumis). The deadlines for the signing of the contract are expiring at midnight but Argyris is not eager to face this. Takis hints that there is a rival in his affections, a rather successful rival who has given Eva a luxury dress by Worth, the famous designer, trimmed with ostrich feathers. Eva comes wearing exactly such a dress. She has heard everything, eavesdropping from the next room. She spends some time in witty flirtation with Argyris, in which it is difficult to see the target of each interlocutor. They both seem to try to win the other by displaying affection and then indifference, then jealousy; they complain of the other's inconstancy or possible infidelity, and insert threats of abandoning among their amorous lines. Their bantering in poetical prose is mixed with commonplace colloquial expressions, which interrupt their transcendental flights. Argyris has never seen Eva performing: he owes his information of her impressive talent to Takis, who is a notorious liar however. Eva sings a song, the verses of which imply that she is a born liar. At that moment her friend Christina arrives complaining of the heat. She accuses Argyris that he wants to deprive the theatre of Eva and Eva of the theatre, her real vocation. She also reveals that it was she who lent the famous dress to Eva, a gift from the rich rival to her (Christina) really. The two women are involved in some kind of conspiracy, as is shown by their intimate conversation: Christina invited Eva from Athens to come and make her fortune by marrying Argyris, only he must sign this contract.

Argyris, in a fit of cruelty, threatens to fire Takis and appoint a miserable

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peculiar life of Greeks living abroad did not appear in plays written in the mainland.

Andreas Staikos's *Ostrich Feathers* was first produced in 1994. The dramatic action of the play takes place in Alexandria during the twenties. Takis Anastasiou, the employee and confidant of the almost bankrupt businessman Argyris Vakontios is trying to persuade him to sign a contract selling his tobacco factory to an Italian company. Vakontios is reluctant to part with his family business but what really preoccupies him is his date with Eva Savidi, a beautiful leading actress from Greece. He is even prepared to have a permanent relationship with her, whereas his usual love period with a woman is only two weeks. She is expected to come together with another woman who is her close friend. She arrives with an hour and a quarter delay, dressed in a fine toilette like a genuine *femme fatale* and then comes her friend Christina, who starts a flirtation with Takis. Conversations and a lot of word-play follow, which reveal that the identities of the two women are far from clear. Eva may or may not be a famous actress and Christina is almost certainly a cocotte called Roxane. These doubtful revelations seem to excite the two men's desires even more and make them wish strongly to marry the women. Eva proposes as an ordeal of love that Argyris should burn the contract and he does this. Then he reveals that the contract was really signed some time ago. This masculine ambiguity – or fraud if one wishes to be literal – after the feminine one unites the couples who drink to their own happiness.

The play starts with Takis reciting some of the most famous Kavafis's sensual verses to Argyris. The poet himself (whose name is not mentioned) has sent his poem to Argyris because he appreciates his judgement. Argyris doubts his sincerity – a real poet could not care for his opinion, unless of course he hopes to induce him to pay for the edition or is perhaps a rival for Eva's favor. Takis assures him that this is out of the question. Argyris

**The myth of Egypt as the promised land in two  
modern Greek plays:  
*Ostrich Feathers* of Andreas Staikos and *The Tear of  
the Hands* of Akis Dimou**

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Egypt was the first non-European country which accepted emigrant Greeks, who thrived there, mostly as merchants – as well as in the rest of North Africa, that is Libya, Tunis, Sudan and Ethiopia (Soulogiannis 1999: 17). Although the Greeks did not necessarily become rich, which was often the case especially during the mid-war years, still they were bourgeois, that is businessmen, merchants, bankers or clerks (Soulogiannis 1999: 19). In the second decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century there was a crisis in the Egyptian economy, which at first shook the Greek community as well, and after some improvement in 1912 there came the first world war which unavoidably affected Egypt too (Soulogiannis 1999: 181). The structure of the Greek community in Egypt was formed according to informal but typical rules: relationships of the metropolis of Hellenism with the colony, competition of international interests especially of financial capital (Soulogiannis 1999: 202). From 1899 to 1956 Sudan was under Egyptian-English occupation and the relationships between the two countries were close. Greek merchants had been settling there since 1882 (Politis 1928: 178-185). Although the Greek community of Egypt had a rich and interesting intellectual life, culminating in the poetical production of Konstantinos Kavafis, with famous writers from Greece like Grigorios Xenopoulos and Nikos Kazantzakis publishing in its literary magazines and many theatre groups coming from Greece as well as local ones (Gialourakis 1967: 505-553). The