

***Love That Turned into a Double-edged Knife*¹**

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In 1955, at the Cannes Film Festival, Mihalis Cacoyannis², together with the avant-garde of his time³, presented Melina Mercouri in the film *Stella, Femme libre*.

Stella, a singer “of life, love and death” at the *Paradise* music hall, “wants to dance and sing so as to see young men get stabbed over her at her feet.” The men who love her should neither transform her “into a lady or a housewife” nor “possess her.” Nevertheless, she longs to get lost in love’s labyrinth without limits. At a wedding, some men dance in the background; her gaze meets that of Miltos, Olympiakos football team’s best striker. It is love at first sight. “It doesn’t happen with just any partner or with just any image.”⁴ Stella, for Miltos, fulfills the components of Freudian mythology: a woman at the edge of “free morals,” who belongs to another man; tough and unyielding, like his mother. They enjoy their encounters. But “[j]ouissance of the Other,” [...] is not the sign of love.”⁵ Thus, Miltos will soon want to possess Stella, making her a “prisoner of his soul.”⁶ He arranges the date of their marriage with his mother, without asking Stella. His threat is clear: she either becomes his or he’s gone. For love, “when it is played out seriously between a man and a woman [...] always entails the stake of castration.”⁷

A little later, she learns from his mother that they will live far from *Paradise*, and that with the possible arrival of children, she will have to forget all about her job.

On their wedding day, Stella does not show up. She dances foxtrot all night long in Athenian clubs, while Miltos dances *alone* in *Paradise*, feeling humiliated.

¹ “Αγάπη που ’γινεξ δίκοπο μαχαίρι”. The title of the Greek rebetiko song by Vasilis Tsitsanis that is the main theme of the film. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VtWd6M2ADuY>

² Renowned Greek Cypriot writer, theatre and film director, producer and actor (1922-2011).

³ Author Iakovos Kambanellis, composer Manos Hadjidakis, and painter Yanis Tsarouchis

⁴ Lacan, J., *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book I: Freud's Papers on Technique*, ed. J.-A. Miller, trans. J. Forrester, New York: Norton, 1988, p. 182.

⁵ Lacan, J., *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX: On Feminine Sexuality, The Limits of Love and Knowledge*, ed. J.-A. Miller, trans. B. Fink, New York/London: Norton, 1999, p. 4.

⁶ Naveau P., *Drame de la jalousie*, “prisonnière de l’âme de l’homme”. Available at : <https://www.lacan-universite.fr/wp-content/uploads/2010/12/LENVERS-DU-SOCIAL-6.pdf>.

⁷ Lacan, J., *Talking to Brick Walls*, trans. A. R. Price, Cambridge: Polity, 2017, p. 98.

At dawn, the couple meets outside *Paradise*. Jean de Baroncelli, writing in *Le Monde*, notes that this scene evokes an ancient tragedy. “The adversary of love is not hate, it is death, Thanatos.”⁸ In their dramatic encounter, Miltos, threatening Stella with a knife, demands that she either leave or tell him she has regretted her behaviour, Stella remains silent and keeps walking. After the stabbing, Miltos, delirious, embraces her, muttering “my love”, as she weakly whispers “kiss me.” With this passage to the act, murder and suicide intersect and the sexual relationship stops not being written.

The drama of this love ends with the community of the neighborhood mourning over Stella's lifeless body as if they mourn the lost opportunity for these two icons of modern Greek reality to make the transition into a *new love*,⁹ one that, set against the backdrop of lack and impossibility, would have allowed them “a new alliance with jouissance”.¹⁰

⁸ Miller, J.-A., “Violent Children”, *The Lacanian Review* 5, 2018, p. 37.

⁹ Term used by Rimbaud in his poem *À une raison* and quoted by Lacan in his Seminar, *Book XX: On Feminine Sexuality, The Limits of Love and Knowledge*, ed. J.-A. Miller, trans. B. Fink, New York/London: Norton, 1999, p.16.

¹⁰ Miller J.-A., « *L'orientation lacanienne. Choses de finesse en psychanalyse* », lecture given at the Department of Psychoanalysis, University Paris VIII, lesson given on May 6, 2009, unpublished.