

# **Childhood Memories of Popular Literature: Discussions with Readers of Greek Pulp Magazines for Children and Teenagers During the 1950s and the 1960s**

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## **1. Social and cultural background**

Greek popular literature magazines for children and teenagers during the 1950s and the 1960s have never been the subject of comprehensive academic research. This fact is due mainly to the underestimation of these magazines by the majority of the scientific circles of Social Studies and Humanities in Greece. So, with the exception of a very few articles in journals and even less announcements at conferences, Greek children's popular literature of the 1950s and 1960s became a research field for journalists, publishers, writers and mainly collectors and amateur scholars. Therefore, a view on those readings by the perspective of the readership, namely a survey based on interviews of old readers has never been attempted. In this article, I examine the results of interviews with old readers and also I will argue that this popular literature played a crucial role in influencing the mentality, ideology and lifestyle of children and adolescents of the 1950s and 1960s. These two decades mark a significant era in Modern Greek history, a period of contradiction and turbulence in the political, social and cultural level. More specifically, during the 1950s, the Right-winged political forces, who had already won the Civil War (1946–1949), established their power, as Greek state gradually was built around an ideology of introvert ethnocentrism. Thus, censorship and persecution of the Left had been very intense, cut-off from any professional position in the drastically growing public sector up to physical violence. This censorship also overshadowed education and the educational system was influenced by this introvert ethnocentrism. But, on the economic front, although the problems were severe, for example, the external and integral migration and unequal distribution of the wealth, a stable rise had been noted, particularly improved living standards. The main result of this growth was an opening of the Greeks towards Western culture and lifestyle in general, mainly the cultural influence of the United States. Consequently, during the early and middle 1960s, this overall tendency for an escape from introversion and conservatism led to a political and social crisis. This crisis triggered some turmoil in foreign policy and, as a result, more and more people left the Right-Wing and fled to the political forces of the Centre and even the Left. This crisis ended abruptly with the enforcement of the military dictatorship (1967-1974)<sup>1</sup>.

But, this turbulent era of the 1950s and 1960s in Greece was also a crucial period for the development of popular fiction. After the economic difficulties of the 1940s, a decade in which many older publishers were forced to stop their activities, the next twenty years can be characterized as an era of prosperity for indigenous popular literature. A rich network of professionals worked to develop publishing companies devoted exclusively to popular

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<sup>1</sup> For a historic retrospective of the 1950s and 1960s in Greece, see Clogg, 145-168

<sup>2</sup> For more information regarding 1950s and 1960s popular fiction, see Kassis and Chanos.

fiction, although only a few of these people were successful and influential. This network had a close link with the Greek Press, as most of the writers of popular fiction were also journalists and columnists in important newspapers and family magazines of that era. However, it was common practice for these writers to use pseudonyms because they wanted to separate their journalism career from their popular fiction, which was considered a product of low culture, despite its success. Nevertheless, due to the organized system of distribution, which was already established by the Press, popular readings were spread to almost every Greek city. Genres that were imported before the Second World War, such as crime fiction and the sensational novel were still famous among Greek readers, but the popular Press achieved an impressive fresh direction towards developing a new readership for indigenous Greek literature that consisted of children and teenagers<sup>2</sup>.

The first steps of this new direction for popular literature in Greece were made already in the turbulent years of the 1940s, when the young and more progressive publishers began to show an interest in children and adolescent readers, an interest which grew fully in the next two decades. The reasons behind this phenomenon are not easy to detect: undoubtedly the influence that European and American popular literature had on adolescent readership was a main factor, but also after the Second World War adults were concerned about children's post-war traumas, which resulted in a renewed interest in the condition of childhood generally. But, no matter the causes for this new trend, many new pulp magazines and readings exclusively for children and teenagers appeared in Greece during the 1950s. Most of them were small, approximately 17x12 cm., printed in cheap newsprint paper, had 20-30 pages and included black and white illustrations between the text, although their covers were regularly colored. Their two main characteristics were: a great variety of genres (historical, western, jungle stories, comics, fairytales etc.) and a strong influence by US popular literature, in terms of themes, fictional characters, narrative structures, etc.<sup>3</sup>

At the same time, Greek high literature for children and teenagers was only slightly developed. Although during the second half of the 19th century, some authors, journalists and intellectuals wrote novels and published magazines directed to children, this effort, without actually ending, lost a great deal of its momentum in the first half of the 20th century. However, after 1950, a body of young writers, mainly professionals in the sector of education, made a new start for high literature for children and teenagers, which presented a chiefly educational perspective and was influenced by both Modern Greek traditional fairy tales and ancient Greek mythology. Nonetheless, this attempt at producing high literature did begin to bear fruit from the 1970s onwards. Until then, any high literature for children was supplanted by the flood of popular fiction.<sup>4</sup> Beginning in the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s, indigenous popular fiction gradually declined, as publishers preferred more and more mainly United States and Italian comics.

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<sup>2</sup> For more information regarding 1950s and 1960s popular fiction, see Kassis and Chanos.

<sup>3</sup> For an overview of Greek popular magazines for children and teenagers during the 1950s and the 1960s, see Vlachos, "Heroic Greek children of the Diaspora".

<sup>4</sup> More information regarding the high Greek literature for children and teenagers, see Anagnōstopoulos.

These foreign works were not only cheaper and more impressive, but expressed the needs and desires of a new generation of Greek adolescents.

## **2. Method and goals of the project**

After this brief presentation of the social, political, economic and cultural background of the 1950s and the 1960s in Greece and a more specialized retrospection of the popular literature of the same era, some important questions arise, regarding the interaction of ideologies, mentalities and cultural views and practices during this twenty years period. For example, how powerful was the influence of ethnocentrism in the mindset of children and teenagers of that era? Under which conditions, did this introvert ethnocentrism coexist with the shift to Western lifestyle? And by what terms did this struggle affect popular literature for children and teenagers?

In order to approach some possible answers to these questions, I turned to the theory and methods of oral history and organized a project of a limited number of freeform, long and in-depth interviews with elder readers of Greek popular magazines for children and teenagers from the 1950s and 1960s in Greece. These oral evidences have much to offer to the social history of this particular era in Greece, especially from the consumer's, namely the reader's perspective, because they could provide primary information and data, which cannot be drawn from official historical sources. Paul Thompson reaches the simple but basic conclusion: "The interview may reveal the truth behind the official record" (Thompson 273). Therefore, these interviews give insights not only into the connection between children and popular literature, but also into the overall experience of childhood during the 1950s and the 1960s in Greece.

Four of the eight interviews were held in Athens, the capital city of Greece, which now consists of above 4 million habitants. The remaining four interviews were conducted in Volos, a provincial town of about 150 thousand habitants. Five of the interviewees are men, while three of them women. Finally, the informants represent a variety of the economic and social layers of Greek society: two former factory workers, a former craftsman, a former private employee, two retired school teachers, a doctor and an author of children's literature. This choice of interviewees was made, in order to ensure a diversity of views based the residence, gender and social position. The structure of the interviews was free and open, as the informants had the opportunity to narrate in depth and detail their personal memories as young readers of pulp magazines during the 1950s and the 1960s, thus the interviews lasted from one to two and a half hours. The interviewer's interference was the minimum possible, just some explanatory questions and a very few interventions, in order to keep the discussion around the central theme of the memories regarding the popular magazines. However, even this interference brings notable changes in the way that the informants shape their memories, a subject that will be discussed below.

The central purpose of this interview project is not to come up with a statistical conclusion, but to explore the mindset and attitude of this interaction that children and teenagers had with popular literature. What I intend to show is how young adult literature became an essential cultural element of everyday life of the 1950s and 1960s in Greece. Therefore, the information given in the interviews on the habits, preferences and feelings

concerning the reading of the pulp fiction magazines is crucial. The conclusions based on this information are organized in accordance with the most influential magazine titles and their circle of distribution and consumption. Of course, some important problems appear regarding the accuracy of these childhood and early adolescence memories, moreover the tendency of the subjects to a nostalgic idealization of their youth. However, the awareness of these problematic elements is not enough to erase the insights gained about the social and psychological impression of childhood memory.

To conclude, by its multidisciplinary approach – a combination of oral history, literature for children and teenagers and popular culture – this interview project will enrich our view on the social and cultural life of children and youth during 1950s and 1960s in Greece. By turning a critical eye to the everyday connection that young readers had with popular literature, we could reach the concept that Raymond Williams characterized as the “structure of feeling” of a generation: “this felt sense of the quality of life at a particular place and time [...] In one sense, this structure of feeling is the culture of a period: it is the particular living results of all the general organization” (Williams 68-69). Williams underlines the importance of culture as the body of ideas, mindsets and lifestyles that collaborate with the various activities of life and with relationships of intercommunication and antagonism. Furthermore, Williams highlights popular fiction as one of the main vectors to shape this new theory of culture, by referring to the “popular structure of feeling” (Williams 90).

### **3. The most influential pulp magazines and their fictional characters**

The most famous popular magazine for children and teenagers of the 1950s and the 1960s in Greece was *Little Hero*, written and published by the journalist and publisher Stelios Anemodouras (1917–2000) between 1953 and 1968. The main character in the 798 issues of this long-lived series was the teenager Giōrgos Thalassis, who takes part in the guerilla resistance against the German Occupation of Greece (1941–1944) and performs a variety of heroic feats against the Axis, to the benefit of Allied Forces, led by the British. His two regular companions in these adventures is a young girl, named Katerina, who is in an innocent and almost platonic love affair with Giōrgos, and also the comic character of Spithas, a chubby and gluttonous boy, which however does not lack of strength and bravery<sup>5</sup>.

In the following quote, Giōrgos answers the proposal made by his greatest enemy, the Nazi spy superhero Seitan Alaman, to betray his country and cooperate with the Nazis for five hundred British pounds per month: “Five hundred pounds?” he bumbles in his enemy’s ear. “Seitan Alaman, you must be joking! I won’t betray my country even for five million pounds. But, you are a Nazi and you cannot understand that the highest value in this world is freedom! For us the Greeks and for all worthy nations of the world, freedom is something that can’t be measured with money and can’t be sold! We prefer

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<sup>5</sup> For more information regarding *Little Hero* and Anemodouras’ life and publicing activity, see Papadakis, Vlachos, Nikolaidis.

death to slavery, hunger to dishonesty, torture to treason! All the wealth of the world couldn't make me betray my country!" (Anemodouras, 48).<sup>6</sup>

Giōrgos Thalassis is indisputably the most beloved character for most of the young readers. On one hand, he expresses the ideals of bravery and patriotism, which in the above quote are propagandized obviously for didactic reasons; after all, didacticism is one of the basic features of literature for children and teenagers. On the other hand, Giōrgos is characterized by physical strength and great ability in battle. Interviewee Mr. Kōstas (1<sup>st</sup>), a 73 years old retired doctor from Athens remembers vividly:

"(Giōrgos Thalassis) was chained in the dungeons of the SS (Schutzstaffel), with chains on his feet, chains on his hands and also guarded... and – I don't know how- he managed to find a hairpin to untie the chains, to "clean" ten guards and to set himself free. Everything was excessive – you understood it even that time, but you were thrilled to read it."

The young readers showed an enthusiastic interest for the adventures of Little Hero and his companions. Mr. Kōstas (1<sup>st</sup>) recalls that many issues ended abruptly at the peak of the action: "The enemy's gun was targeting the head of the good guy, the enemy's finger was almost pulling the trigger and... to be continued in the next issue!"

Here we need to note that a key feature of both the creation and promotion of all products of popular culture, not only in literature but also in film and television, is their serial construction, which approves to be highly diachronic: from the serial novels of the 19th century up to modern television soap operas.

The other two titles that our speakers remember more vividly are *Gkaour Tarzan*, a very free adaptation of Edgar Rice Burroughs's *Tarzan of the Apes* and the Greek edition of *Classics Illustrated*. The writer of the former, Nikos Routsos (1904–1984), has created a companion but also a competitor to the known British Tarzan, a Greek version of him, another superhero who also lives in the jungle and who had also been raised by monkeys, but his origins are Greek, his name is Gkaour. As you might expect, young readers preferred the dark-skin Greek Tarzan, who was presented by the author as more strong and courageous than the original Western one, a true Greek man. The preference of the readers for the Greek Gkaour is a phenomenon indicative of the prevalence of the local popular culture against the foreign one, even if the former is directly influenced by the latter<sup>7</sup>. This is Routsos' representative sketch for Gkaour's appearance and character:

*Who really doesn't know the fearless Gkaour, the superhuman dark-skin Greek with the big heart and the tremendous strength? Who hasn't admired this gigantic and stunning man who brings fear, not only to the beasts and the wilds of the jungle, but to Tarzan himself... Who finally doesn't love Gkaour, the primitive and proud*

<sup>6</sup> The translation of all the quotes of the pulp readings have been made by me.

<sup>7</sup> For more information regarding Gkaour Tarzan and Nikos Routsos life and activities, see Vlachos, "Mr. Nikos, the junglewriter, the rembetis and the storyteller" and Zoiopoulos.

*hero, in whose veins Greek blood flows, the man who glorifies our homeland in the vast and virgin jungle [...] Gkaour eats only nuts and fruits. He doesn't have a knife, like Tarzan, neither any weapon. He doesn't ever lie and he is afraid of no man. He can kill an elephant just with a punch. However, he uses his superhuman strength to do good and to punish evil... He is conscientious, proud and clever; he keeps in his soul the innate kindness of our race. Tarzan hates Gkaour and he wants to exterminate him, because he thinks that he came to the jungle to seize the throne and become the king of men and beasts. On the other side, Gkaour loves and admires Tarzan. He protects him all the time and he has saved his life countless times. (Routsos 17, 31-32)*

This contradictory relationship between Tarzan and Gkaour renders in terms of popular fiction the ambiguous mindset that Greek society of the 1950s and the 1960s had towards the Western culture and lifestyle. The mentality of children and young adults in Greece during that period is highly influenced by this antithesis between ethnocentrism and an opening towards the West.

In *Gkaour Tarzan*, we also meet the classic comic hero, who gained the love of the adolescent readers, Pokopiko, a pygmy with huge paws and a bravery which is suboptimal to his physical strength. Via the funny words and actions of Pokopiko, Routsos parodies many manifestations of the Greek social life of the 1950s and 1960s, for example the invasion of rock n roll music, Hollywood's star system, and even the institution of marriage. The reader interviews suggest that young readers, who were aware of these trends, understood these satirical references to, mainly, popular culture imported from the West. More generally, children and teenagers of this era were in contact with the system of Western influenced popular culture, which included Press, literature, music, cinema, theater, even sports, especially football.

Foreign comics were also imported in Greece during the 1950s. Unlike Greek pulp magazines, which only had a few and mostly black and white images, foreign comics boasted many colorful pictures that made a huge impression on the children in Greece. Mrs. Chrysanthē, a 61 years old retired kindergarten teacher, recalls her preference to the foreign comics and her love for their comic characters:

"When *Serafino*<sup>8</sup> came out, who was flexible, smart, I liked him; and I absolutely loved Donald and his nephews. I liked the colorful pictures."

Also, Mr. Nikos, a 64 years old Athenian retired secondary teacher, remembers:

"When I went to the sixth grade (of the elementary school), the magazines that captivated me the most made their appearance and suddenly I forgot *Little Hero*, I forgot *Mask* and *Mystery*, I forgot everything and I began with these magazines, *Interplanetary Stories*,

<sup>8</sup> Serafino is an Italian comic character created by Egidio Gherlizza. More info: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Serafino\\_%28comics%29](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Serafino_%28comics%29) (accessed: May 18, 2016)

*Strange Stories, Superman*<sup>9</sup>. And, when summer came, I went to the kiosk and I asked my mother to buy one, to read it because I was captivated by this new genre. And all of them were illustrated, with colorful images. On the other hand *Little Hero, Mask* and *Mystery* had only text, sometimes a small sketch.”

The most successful foreign comic was the Greek version of the American *Classics Illustrated*. Almost all of our interviewees believe that became familiar with classic literature via the *Classics Illustrated*, beginning with the works of Jules Verne. Mrs. Elenē, a 64 years old children’s literature writer, admits that “Classics Illustrated got you into classic literature”. Although this assumption corresponds to reality, undoubtedly young readers came in touch with high literature through other sources too, such as school, family and friends.<sup>10</sup>

### 3. The Labyrinth of Memory

However, at this point, we must be especially cautious with our estimations, as personal memory of the interviewees could distort real events. More specifically, because of the mediation of fifty or even sixty years between readers’ childhood and today, the first and direct experience of reading as a child is distorted or rather reconstructed. And the consistent view that the *Classics Illustrated* paved the way for elaborated literature is just an example of this reconstruction. Another vivid example is the opinion, expressed in many of the interviews, that a critical reason for this passion that underage readers had about these magazines was the lack of other stimuli for entertainment, especially of television. Undoubtedly, this view on the antagonism between the popular publications and the popular television is objectively existent, but this fundamental feeling of nostalgia magnifies it.

Social conditions and demands exert a strong influence on childhood memories, thus human memory, especially the long-term one, could be distorted by the intervention of the dominant mentality and culture<sup>11</sup>. In the case of the interviewees, dominant culture is represented mainly by two factors: firstly, the interviewer, which stands as an authority of academic knowledge; secondly, the current view of the media, both traditional (television, the Press) and digital (webpages, blogs, social media) towards the pulp magazines of the 1950s and 1960s and generally the popular literature of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Although this view should be presented and analyzed in a specialized study, it can be briefly described it as a combination of nostalgic

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<sup>9</sup> *Mask* and *Mystery* were the two most successful pulp magazines, concentrated mainly on crime fiction. Both titles begun at 1935. For more information, see Kouzelis.

*Interplanetary Stories (Diaplanētika)* and *Strange Stories (Paraksena)* were the titles of magazines included science fiction and superheroic comics from the United States and published by Atlantis Publications which also imported the *Classics Illustrated* and Disney’s comics. For more information, see Kassis, 134

<sup>10</sup> For more information regarding the Greek publications of *Classics Illustrated*, see Fefferou

<sup>11</sup> On the “False Memories of Childhood experiences”, see: Hyman, Husband, Billings, and James.

idealization of an innocent past and an attempt to reconsider these readings, especially *Little Hero*, as part of the Modern Greek literary canon, because they preserve the fundamental elements of Greek culture. But at the same time, the biggest part of Greek academics still undervalues popular culture and literature and views it with suspicion. It is highly possible that, before the interview, some of the readers searched for information on the Web or on magazines and newspapers, therefore their childhood memories were affected by this contradictory but dominant view. For example, Mr. Kōstas (1<sup>st</sup>) says:

“In these magazines, you couldn’t find such things as strangulations, that one shook hands around the neck of another...” suggesting that the original texts did not contain such scenes of graphic violence. But even in *Little Hero*, there are many scenes, in which Giōrgos Thalassis shoots or throws a knife and kills an opponent, even chokes him with a rope. Possibly, this view concerning the avoidance of violence in these magazines is influenced by the opinion that the purpose of these readings was mainly didactic, to pass on to young readers the ideas of peace and non-violence. This opinion is central in the mindset of the revival of children’s popular fiction in Greece.

Another reader, named Mr. Kōstas (2<sup>nd</sup>), a 66 years old retired craftsman from Volos, explains the deeper meaning in *Gkaour Tarzan*:

“There was some competition, but also a (feeling of) brotherhood between Tarzan and Gkaour, always fighting evil and trying to dominate the jungle. So, for us, it was symbolic: the colonization on blacks and other natives”.

It is very possible that his interpretation of the ideological background of *Gkaour Tarzan* was influenced by something found on a webpage or a blog, as a child reader would not understand notions of colonialism. This hypothesis becomes more certain, because in another part of the discussion, Mr. Kōstas (2<sup>nd</sup>) admits that, before the interview, he had searched for information on the internet, in order to “strengthen” his memory.

This psychological situation, in which personal recollection of childhood and various influences of the current dominant mentalities and cultures are amalgamated, can be interpreted through Svetlana Boyme’s theory about the contradiction between two types of nostalgia: the restorative and the reflective one. The nostalgia on these interviews is mainly reflective, because, as Svetlana Boyme writes “this type of nostalgic narrative is ironic, inconclusive, and fragmentary” (Boyme 15). Indeed, the nostalgic sentiment of our interlocutors is indisputably ambivalent, as it is characterized not only by idealization, but also by doubt and even irony. In a revealing moment, Mr. Kōstas (1<sup>st</sup>) admits that this manichaeistic conflict between good and evil, which defines the imaginary characters and the narrative structures for the most of the stories in the magazines, would surely seem unrealistic to an adult reader.



#### 4. Mentalities of distribution and consumption

The strong sentiment of nostalgia is not unexpected because children began reading these magazines between the ages of 8-10 years, the same age during which they were learning the fundamental skills of reading and writing at the first primary school classes. Mr. Kōstas (2<sup>nd</sup>) admits: “I was necessarily trying to be a good student in reading and writing, in order to read *Little Hero*. Do you catch me?” Another very interesting conclusion is that some of the interviewees confess that they became familiar, to some extent, with the popular magazines at the age of 5 to 6 years, before they even learned to read, via references to these readings in the games that they were playing with older children who apparently were already readers, suggesting a generational element to the texts’ influence.

In general, most of the interviewees came in first contact with these magazines via interaction with older children, relatives (brothers, sisters, cousins) and friends. Besides, these magazines were constantly in plain sight, hanging out of the kiosks of their neighborhoods. More generally, the neighborhood and the wider district was the vital area of activity for children of the 1950s and 60s in Greece, and therefore the testimonies of the readers of these magazines relate to this very vital area. Mr. Giōrgos, a 69 years old former electrician and retired factory worker from Volos recreates vividly and representatively the close connection that all inhabitants, not exclusively the adolescents, had with their district:

“Our place was New Iōnia, Neapolis, Kapakli (these are names of districts of Volos), we didn’t know anything about the center, it was like going to a faraway city. During the 50s and the 60s, not even the grown-up was going downtown, here he had his cafes, here he had clothing stores.”.

The core of the distribution of popular magazines for children and teenagers during this era was the neighborhoods’ convenience stores. Most of the young readers could not get money to buy new issues because their families were experiencing financial difficulties. The readers’ memory that as children they spent their daily pocket money - earmarked for their school snack- on magazines is a standard pattern among the interviewees. So, in order to obtain issues, the readers had to purchase used magazines. The place in which they could get old issues was the convenience store, a common site around Greece. Popular magazines for children and teenagers were sold in convenience stores, along with everyday items such as candies, cigarettes and haberdashery. The readers from Volos testify that in convenience stores were exchanging their magazines with other, used ones, usually giving a little extra money. In contrast, the readers from Athens declare that, convenience stores only sold new issues. In any case, convenience stores were part of the readers’ everyday life and all the neighborhood children were so familiar with their owners, that they had given nicknames to them. Therefore, some of the interviewees recall these owners by their nicknames, such as “Little Old Man” in Volos, because of his advanced age or “Mr. Nikos the Dusty” in Athens, because, as Mr. Kōstas (1<sup>st</sup>) quotes:

“You couldn’t see through the windows of his shop, neither from outside, nor from inside, because of the dust. These window panes had never been cleaned!”

Of course, another way of purchasing unread issues was by inter-exchanging between children. To conclude, this multifaceted exchange activity functioned as a significant factor in the socialization of the children in the areas as well as providing the opportunity to participate in popular culture of the time.

One important connection between these children’s magazines and the construction of child culture was the use of games to “play” the characters these children were reading about. For instance, Mrs. Elenē and Mrs. Chrysanthē, who are cousins and they grew up together in Volos, they recall that they were organizing role-playing games for their friends with the characters from *Little Hero*, while Mr. Giōrgos related how much he enjoyed playing “Greeks and the Germans” with his friends, inspired of course by *Little Hero*. Also during his narration, Mr. Nikos would frequently return his favorite memory - of betting these magazines in a child version of shot-put – a game he was playing with his friends comprised of throwing stones around a line in the dirt. On the whole, the various features of these 1950s and 1960s popular youth magazines had a great influence on children games, from the action moves of a war game to the mindset of team spirit and adventure.

One feature of these youth magazines that not only impacted on children’s games, but reflected the whole social structure of childhood and early adolescence during the 1950s and the 1960s in Greece is the separation of education and culture based on the sex of the child. This separation is one of the basic elements of children’s literature and it also had an influence on the Greek popular children literature<sup>12</sup>. This influence becomes more obvious, when considering that the protagonists of both *Little Hero* and *Gkaour Tarzan* are boys or men. Furthermore, as was the custom at that time, boys and men were depicted more active and they became the main factors for the development of the plot. On the other hand, girls and women were often depicted in more passive roles, usually just waiting with hope and fear inside the house for their male heroes to return. Moreover, the female characters were presented as very sentimental and vulnerable. For instance, Katerina, the main female character in *Little Hero* waits for Giōrgos to return; the writer of the series, Stelios Anemodouras describes her feelings:

*Little Katerina has missed Giōrgos. During his absence, she has realized how important Ghost Child<sup>13</sup> is for her. She feels that he loves him more than anyone in the world! She understands that without Giōrgos, life has no meaning and only the unstoppable struggle against the tyrants of Greece for the liberation of Greek people could give some value to her life. (Anemodouras, 117)*

However, in most of these magazines, the passivity and exaggerated sensitivity proves to be a transient element of the female characters. For instance, in

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<sup>12</sup> Some fundamental considerations on the gendered characteristics of children’s literature: Thyssen

<sup>13</sup> “Ghost Child” is the nickname that Little Hero’s enemies have given to him, because he always manages to remain admirably uncaught.

*Little Hero*, beginning from issue 15, Katerina gradually becomes an active and adventurous character and takes part in the dangerous missions against the Axis powers alongside with Giōrgos and Spithas. Also, in *Gkaour Tarzan*, Gkaour's girlfriend Tatabu, is not only very beautiful, but also heavyset, strong and brave, just like her boyfriend. Her physical appearance alone challenges modern conceptions of what a "normal" female body type is:

*Gkaour and his gorgeous girlfriend prove to be once more magnificent! The dark-skin giant gives his club to Tatabou and his steel punches face the attack of Arahav's cannibals. In every one of his blows, the enemy blacks out and falls down. In the same time, the fearless Greek woman spreads havoc to the sinister intruders with her boyfriend's club. (Routsos 97, 14)*

It is possible that this change of the writers' view regarding the previous passive personalities and actions of the female characters with the widespread fan correspondence that all of that era's magazines had with their young readers. It is very possible that in their fan letters to the magazines, the female readers wished for their heroines to be more active and powerful, thus the writers and the publishers fulfilled their desire, in order to amplify the sales of their magazines. Three of the eight interviewees make a reference to the fan correspondence, mainly written by children to youth magazines of that era and resulted in the evolution of the female characters, based on popular demand. Furthermore, some of these magazines included letters that the readers send to each other, to exchange views about the fictional heroes and their adventures and finally create diverse relationships. Mrs. Elenē, the children literature writer, stated that this direct mailing between the readers was "something like today's Facebook".

All of the interviewees admit that some of the magazines were read mainly by boys, such as *Gkaour Tarzan* or western magazines, among which the most successful was *Little Sheriff*, created by Potis Stratikis (b. 1926). This magazine's main character is the young sheriff Jim Adams, who enforces the law in the Wild West, but he has a Greek ancestry and his native name is Dēmētris Adamopoulos.<sup>14</sup>

Teenagers 16 to 18 years of age and even some young men aged 20 to 25, preferred the detective and mystery stories of the famous magazines *Mask* and *Mystery*. In contrast, popular magazines for girls were much less widely read, like *Needlecraft* about tailoring and *Modern Rhythms*, about foreign pop music. But all of the interviewees emphasize that *Little Hero* was popular with both sexes: "*Little Hero* was unisex" quips Mrs. Elenē.

But, these examinations on presentation of male and female fictional characters in youth magazines leads to a more general question: was this distinction between "boys" and "girly" magazines part of broader oppression and censorship in the reading of popular literature during the 1950s and 1960s in Greece? As I already mentioned, the 1950s and, to some extent, the 1960s, were marked by a culturally introverted attitude and a conservative ethnocentrism, especially in the fields of culture and education. But, as long as the content and ideas that were projected in the magazines did not

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<sup>14</sup> More information on *Little Sheriff* and Potis Stratikis: Routsos etc., 2008, 213. Chanos, Vol. 2, 202

contradict the dominant ethnocentric ideology, there was no need for censor by parents and school. For example in *Little Hero*, the guerilla resistance against the German Occupation is carried out by “Greek patriots”, without distinction between the Right-winged and Left-winged groups. And the interviewees confirm this perspective, by making clear that most of the times there was no ban on popular youth literature, only when a child neglected homework to read popular literature.

Another side of the propaganda of the dominant conservative ideology of the 1950s and the 1960s is the great prosperity of religious magazines and books during these two decades. These publications were published and distributed by very active and influential religious associations. As the interviewees stress, a big part of the popular youth magazine movement of that era included religious-based magazines. According to the readers, these religious publications were distributed mainly by two groups: the widespread Sunday Schools and via people who belonged to religious associations, for example priests, teachers, etc. Several copies of these religious-themed youth magazines were given to children, in order for them to sell to neighbors and friends, but most of the interviewees found the promotion of these readings rather oppressive. For example, Mr. Vasilēs, a 72 years old retired private worker from Athens, confesses:

“Well, I remember that they (religious organizations) gave us magazines to sell and bring the money back to them. But, most of the times I was ashamed to do it and, because we were already working and we had our pocket money, for example I was working in a barber’s shop, I was selling only one or two copies. I was ashamed to sell the other three or four... so I gave my own money and I said that I have sold all of the copies... this was something that bothered me a lot.”

The readers’ opinion regarding the religious-based magazines depends on their family’s relationship with the ecclesiastical circles of the 1950s and 1960s and more general their religious beliefs. However, the pressure to “sell” these religious magazines made them fairly unpopular when compared to the heroic-themed magazines like *Little Hero*.

Almost all of the interviewees indicated that they stopped reading pulp magazines in general between the ages of 13 and 16. The most common cause was their changing of interest, as they grew into teenagers: they began to go out for walks, to go to parties and to flirt with the opposite sex. Some teens also started to work or to study harder for school, so they didn’t have free time to read these magazines. Another reason was their shift in interest to other areas of popular culture, such as family magazines, cinema, music and football and the discovery of the works of high literature.

But it is important to point out that for at least half of our interviewees until their late teens, even early 20s, popular magazines were their only experience of literature in general. Furthermore, Mr. Giōrgos, born in 1947, confesses that until his 20s, he did not have a clear view of what had actually happened during the 1940s, the German Occupation and particularly the Civil War. This ignorance of these traumatic events may be due to many reasons: during the 1940s Mr. Giōrgos’ parents left the urban environment of Volos and returned to the safety of their birthplace, so they also didn’t experience these events; the truth about the Civil War between the Right and the Left-

wing was hidden and censored by the state; people of the previous generation wanted to forget these violent experiences, so they did not talk about them openly, especially with their children. Therefore, the only picture of the 1940s that Mr. Giōrgos was exposed to, especially the Greek resistance against the German Occupation, was shaped by his reading of *Little Hero* and other similar youth magazines. And Mr. Giōrgos is not an isolated case: three of the other interviewees expressed a similar memory of ignorance or incomplete knowledge as children of the historical events of the 1940s

This relation between popular magazines of the 1950s and the 1960s and child traumas is very crucial in the attempt to understand the function of popular Greek youth literature on the cultural attitudes of a readership consisting primarily of children and young people. The traumatic events of the 1940s were communicated to the children of the next two decades via pulp magazines, especially *Little Hero*. But these experiences were also normalized on a psychological level within the texts, which helped young people negotiate these traumas and deal with them.

## 5. Conclusion

The benefit of oral interviews with old readers of Greek popular magazines of the 1950s and the 1960s is the contribution to a more accurate and objective study of many areas of Modern Greek history, mainly the history of the publishing industry, the history of childhood and youth and their connection with popular culture. As this study demonstrates, the most successful and influential titles and their fictional characters were a significant influence on the development of cultural capital among Greek youth. Also this study considers the notion of distribution and consumption of pulp magazines: age and the reasons of reading pulp fiction; the importance of certain urban spaces and spots; the relation that the magazines had with children's games; the censorship and the gendered nature of popular fiction for children and teenagers; the correlations with the traumas of the 1940s.

This study project urges scholars to rethink in a more complex and deep level the life of children and teenagers of the 1950s and 1960s in Greece and their later passage into adulthood and maturity and finally to conceive the “culture of feeling” of this generation, as Raymond Williams suggests. In her article on the “childhood Geographies and Memories in Home Movies” of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century in Great Britain, Heather Norris Nicholson suggest an important consideration regarding the social construction of childhood and puberty: “Exploration of that submerged geography is bounded by perceptions, regulations and circumstances determined by adults [...] What may start as an exploration of children's experiences becomes an exploration of adult hood [...] and discloses other aspects of relations between children and the wider society” (Nicholson 10). A notion that directly applies for this inner and still undiscovered “submerged geography” of Greek childhood during the turbulent years 1950s and 1960s.

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