



From Feminine Sensibility to Gendered Evaluation in Modern Greek Poetry Criticism

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Abstract

This article examines gendered evaluation across the broader period 1974–2024 through two clusters of reviews published during 1986–2002 and 2019–2024. It asks whether the decline of explicitly gendered classifications led to a more equal distribution of critical attributes or whether the older associations of “feminine sensibility” were instead recast in apparently neutral or formalist language. The study combines a brief genealogy, extending from nineteenth-century criticism through the interwar period, with a qualitative, comparative close reading of five pairs of reviews, each pair written by a single critic and concerning a woman poet and a man poet. Drawing on feminist theories of gender, literary value, and critical discourse, it examines the critical treatment of form, technique, intellectual authority, embodiment, experience, and universality. The findings indicate substantial but incomplete change. Women poets are increasingly credited with formal control, intellectual force, and poetic autonomy. Nevertheless, gendered asymmetries persist in the ways literary value is conferred. Women’s writing remains more readily marked as bodily, personal, natural, or exceptional, whereas men’s writing more easily enters the unmarked registers of philosophical reflection and universal significance. Gender thus survives less as an explicit classification than as an uneven structure of critical recognition.

1. Introduction

Cultural value and symbolic prestige do not pre-exist as self-evident properties of literary works. Rather, they are produced and distributed within the literary field through institutions, power relations, and practices of validation (Bourdieu, 1992). A key institution in this process is literary criticism: as a public discursive practice, it does not merely describe a work but confers value and prestige upon it, shapes its prospects for recognition and, more generally, legitimises it, potentially securing its inclusion in the national literary canon. The critic participates in a process of selection, hierarchisation, and classification, helping to construct the object of criticism as central or peripheral, significant or insignificant, part of a tradition or a break with it. Despite the relative decline of its authority, criticism continues to affect the visibility and public position of literary works. Its power depends on the prestige of the critic, the institutional weight and readership of print and online publication venues, and the critic’s participation in publishing and academic institutions, prize committees, anthologies, and other mechanisms of legitimation.

In this process, gender is implicated not only when a critic uses the words “woman,” “women’s,” “female,” or related terms. It is also inscribed in evaluative criteria and in the terms through which certain works are selected, invested with value, and recognised as serious, universal, complex, or innovative, while others are confined to the experiential, the private, the confessional, or the bodily and judged to be peripheral. Just as literary value is not inherent, neither are these descriptions intrinsically gendered. Their gendered function derives from the history and contexts of their use and is reinforced through repetition, with consequences for the overall evaluation of a work.

Earlier criticism described works by women through adjectives and nouns that were regarded as natural but had, in fact, been historically naturalised: sensibility, lyricism, tenderness, grace, lightness, emotion, and confessionalism. More recent criticism tends to avoid the direct attribution of a distinctly female nature, but this does not mean that the older descriptors have disappeared. “Feminine sensibility” recurs, and women’s writing may still be associated with emotion, the body, and nature, whereas reason, culture, intellectual power, and universality are more readily attributed to works by men.

Against this background, the article’s principal research question is how the gendered evaluative vocabulary of Greek literary criticism changed between 1974 and 2024. More specifically, it asks whether the decline of explicitly gendered classificatory terms was accompanied by an equal attribution of evaluative qualities—for example, reflective capacity, depth, intellectual power, robustness of expression, boldness, and originality—or whether older connotations of “feminine sensibility” survive in displaced forms. It also examines whether the gender of the critical subject modifies or reproduces these evaluative codes.

This chronological span was selected because of its significance for contemporary Greek history and poetry. The period opens with the Metapolitefsi, following the collapse of the seven-year military dictatorship, the restoration of parliamentary democracy, and the end of censorship, alongside a series of political and social changes that reshaped Greek society. The initial climate of optimism and relative economic and social well-being dissipated with the onset of the financial crisis. The period from 2010 onwards has been marked by a protracted and multifaceted crisis (permacrisis), with particularly severe economic consequences, as well as by the shock of the pandemic, employment precarity, migration and refugee movements, and growing environmental insecurity. More pertinent to the present study, however, are the increased public visibility of gender issues, the presence of new and non-normative subjectivities, the strengthening of feminist discourse, and the development of online literary criticism.

Within the literary field, the same period is characterised by a dramatic increase in poetic production by women and the gradual inclusion of some women poets in the literary canon.

The period therefore lends itself to an examination of whether the dissemination of a more informed vocabulary of gender also altered the terms by which literary value is conferred. The aim, however, is not to provide a comprehensive historical survey of the gendered discourse of criticism, but to offer a selective account of shifts in critical vocabulary in relation to gender.

2. Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

A fundamental theoretical premise is Joan W. Scott’s proposition that gender is neither a mere description of the difference between women and men nor a biographical attribute of subjects. It is a constitutive element of social relationships and a primary way of signifying relationships of power (Scott, 1986, p. 1067). This approach is particularly important because it directs the study towards the symbolic distinctions and hierarchies through which gendered positions acquire meaning. In literary criticism, gender may therefore be inscribed in binary oppositions such as universal/particular and intellectual/emotional without being explicitly named. These oppositions belong to the long tradition of hierarchically organised binaries in Western metaphysical thought. As Derrida observed, the two terms of an opposition do not coexist on equal terms but form “violent hierarchies” (Derrida, 1972, pp. 56–57). Feminist

theory has further shown that oppositions such as reason/emotion, culture/nature, mind/body, and universal/particular have historically been articulated with the masculine/feminine binary (Cixous, 1975). They are not, therefore, gendered in themselves. They acquire a gendered function when they are distributed unequally: when the more highly valued term is repeatedly associated with works by men, while the subordinate term is more often attributed to works by women and thereby confines their significance to the realm of the particular.

Pierre Bourdieu's theory of the literary field provides a second point of reference. It is not used to explain each individual judgement mechanically, but to demonstrate why the differential distribution of evaluative attributes may have consequences for the visibility and prestige of works and for their inclusion in the canon (Bourdieu, 1992).

A further premise comes from Toril Moi. The present study does not seek a uniform women's or men's style but examines how gender participates in the critical classification and evaluation of different works. Moi challenges both the reduction of a work to the biological sex of its author and the assumption of a unified "women's writing" defined by given formal characteristics (Moi, 1985, pp. 1–18; Moi, 2008, pp. 264–267). The category "woman writer" may designate a specific historical and social position, but it becomes restrictive when it operates as an aesthetic essence that precedes both writing and reading. Conversely, the absence of an explicit gender designation does not imply neutrality. The male position may remain unmarked and appear as the universal norm, while women's writing must be identified as a particular case.

The more specific connection between gender and the language of literary evaluation is articulated in Mary Ellmann's *Thinking About Women* (1968). Ellmann begins with the "sexual analogy," a recurring pattern through which qualities attributed to the body and sexuality are transferred to the intellectual and creative activity of the sexes, a pattern especially common in nineteenth-century criticism. Within "phallic criticism," works by women are read as though they bore the author's sex as their primary interpretative feature. Writing may thus be described as fragile, passive, formless, emotional, or excessive, not only because of textual features but also because naturalised conceptions of femininity have been activated (Ellmann, 1968, pp. 2–6, 27–29). Ellmann's contribution is important because it shifts attention from the critic's intention to the operation of available stereotypes and to the way in which they shape the legibility of women's writing.

Elaine Showalter systematises the problem as a "double critical standard." Works by women are judged not only according to the prevailing literary criteria but also in relation to expectations consolidated by stereotypes of "femininity," the themes deemed appropriate to it, and the forms and limits of women's experience (Showalter, 1977). The same formal choice may therefore acquire a different meaning depending on the author's gender. Joanna Russ extends this line of inquiry by identifying the mechanisms through which women's writing is devalued or isolated: the denial or restriction of creative agency, the application of different standards, false categorisation, and the treatment of every recognised woman writer as an exceptional but isolated case (Russ, 1983). These mechanisms are not manifested only in negative judgements. They may also operate through praise that recognises a work as an authentic expression of women's experience while simultaneously confining it to a different and subordinate domain.

2.1. A Brief Genealogy: From the Nineteenth Century to the Interwar Period

The paradigmatic association between women's writing and sensibility took shape in the nineteenth century within the context of Romanticism. The critical reception of nineteenth-century women's poetry has been examined in greater detail in an earlier study. Only the elements necessary for a genealogy of modern evaluative vocabulary are retained here (Roussou, 2014, pp. 787–795).

Critical evaluation became gendered by transferring to the style and form of women's works qualities supposedly natural to female subjects—qualities derived from assumptions

about women's bodies, character, and social role. Sensibility, imagination, emotional intensity, and lyricism initially functioned as attributes of the Romantic poetic subject irrespective of gender. Gradually, however, sensibility ceased to be regarded as an essential feature of men's poetry, or was transformed into lyrical spirit, reflective depth, and poetic vision. In women's poetry, by contrast, it remained a stable term of evaluation and was associated with other naturalised properties of the "feminine": delicacy, refinement, grace, tenderness, purity, innocence, and, of course, emotional excess.

Three characteristic examples show how this operated in critical practice.

Although Kostis Palamas, the major poet and critic of the period, appears to have supported some aspects of women's rights, he praises the poet Fotini Oikonomidou (1849–1883), one of the most popular women poets of the last two decades of the nineteenth century, because she expresses "her suffering soul with manly candour," thus attributing poetic boldness to a masculine quality (Palamas, 1969, p. 448). By contrast, he rejects verses by Virginia Evangelidou because they lack "the principal virtue, feminine sensibility, which would render them works of art" (Palamas, 1969, p. 114). Read together, the two judgements make the gendered criterion explicit: poetic boldness is validated through a masculine attribute, whereas aesthetic value in a woman's work is made conditional upon "feminine sensibility." Sensibility thus functions not merely as description but as a gender-specific prerequisite for artistic legitimacy.

Konstantinos F. Skokos (1854–1929), a writer and publisher, comments on another poet of the period, Aganiki Mazaraki (1838–1892): "she wrote chiefly for herself, without any literary pretensions [...]"; in her work, he sees "an atmosphere of love, tenderness, and purification" (Skokos, 1893, p. 206).

Finally, Kallirroï Parren (1861–1940), a leading advocate of feminism, a writer, and the publisher of the important *Ephēmeris tōn Kyriōn* (*Ladies' Newspaper*, 1887–1917), writes of another significant late nineteenth-century poet, Marietta Betsou (?–1889), and her collection: "as in a fragrant bouquet, all the grace of the refined female spirit, all the sensibility of the poet's heart" (Parren, 1889, p. 1).

The nineteenth century thus established an explicitly gendered evaluative regime: "sensibility" enabled women to enter the literary field, while at the same time confining their writing to the realm of the particular, the emotional, and the gender-specific.

Indeed, this evaluative pattern did not recede either at the end of the nineteenth century or in the early twentieth century. During the interwar period, women's presence in literature, journalism, the feminist movement, and the public sphere more broadly increased. Under these conditions, criticism adapted but did not abandon the distinction between "women's" literature and the implicitly normative literature of men. Its evaluative vocabulary became more systematic and was recalibrated. Criticism was compelled to renegotiate the boundaries of so-called "women's literature" without abolishing the gender hierarchy embedded in its criteria (Vasileiadis, 2006, pp. 393–396).

The differentiation in terminology is itself indicative. Whereas "women's literature" appears as a distinct category into which works by women are placed, no corresponding term, "men's literature," is used. The male operates as the unmarked general standard, while the female appears as a particular case requiring explanation (Vasileiadis, 2006, pp. 155–157). Women's literature is associated with lyricism, tenderness, simplicity, purity, confessional sincerity, sensibility, and the spontaneous expression of the "female soul" (Vasileiadis, 2006, pp. 62–120).

Of particular significance is the way women's formal accomplishments are interpreted. Drawing on interwar critical texts, Vasileiadis notes that Giorgos Themelis (1900–1976) attributes the technical achievement of Anthoula Stathopoulou-Vafopoulou (1908–1935) to an instinctive "sense of rhythm," while Giorgos Kotzioulas (1909–1956) explains Maria Polydouri's (1902–1930) "flawless execution" in terms of intuition rather than experience.

Technique is acknowledged but detached from conscious formal labour and creative agency (Vasileiadis, 2006, pp. 116–120).

In works by men, by contrast, criticism foregrounds clarity, lucidity, density, measure, robustness, and, above all, the controlling presence of thought. Sensibility is not excluded, but is subordinated to reason and transformed through formal elaboration into objective or universal significance.

The period between Greece's entry into the Second World War and the Metapolitefsi (1940–1973) is not examined as a distinct period in the present study. The war, the Occupation, the Civil War, post-Civil War political upheavals, and the dictatorship created particular conditions for the production and practice of literary criticism. These require separate and more systematic investigation, both of the relationship between this period's evaluative vocabulary and that of the interwar years and of its reconfiguration under the pressure of political and ideological conflict.

3. Methodology

3.1. Corpus and Selection Criteria

The study is based on a small but purposively selected corpus of reviews of poetry by women and men during the period 1974–2024 (see also Papalexandrou, 2021, for the reception of Greek women's poetry during 1974–2000). Within this broader chronological horizon, it examines two clusters of critical texts: 1986–2002 and 2019–2024. Precisely because the corpus is not extensive, the present study does not seek to map the production of critical writing comprehensively. It nevertheless traces the mechanisms through which the vocabulary of critical evaluation acquires a gendered dimension. Pairs of critical texts by Kostas G. Papageorgiou, Giorgos Veis, Giorgos Aragis, Anna Griva, and Vangelis Chatzivasileiou were selected, each pair concerning one man poet and one woman poet.

The reviews were selected according to four criteria: they concern poetry, belong to the period under examination, contain a sufficiently rich evaluative vocabulary, and allow comparison of how the same critical subject assesses works by authors identified or self-identified as women or men. The adequacy or acuity of the reviews is not judged; rather, the distinctive language of each critic is examined. The inclusion of one woman critic, Anna Griva, makes it possible to consider the gender of the critical subject as one variable in critical assessment, but it is not treated *a priori* as a causal explanation. The sample is therefore diagnostic and case-based; it does not claim to offer fully representative evidence of Modern Greek criticism as a whole.

3.2. Comparative Analytical Procedure

The analysis is qualitative and comparative and is based on systematic close reading. It draws in particular on Lazar's feminist critical discourse analysis (2007) to investigate how linguistic practices naturalise or contest gendered relations of power. For each text, the analysis records explicit references to gender; evaluative adjectives, nouns, and metaphors; verbs that construct or restrict creative agency; terms relating to form, technique, robustness of expression, the power and depth of reflection, and universality; and references to the body, experience, emotion, the private, and the confessional. It also examines the force and modality of each judgement, the position of each description within the text, and its effect on the overall evaluation of the work.

For analytical purposes, the study distinguishes between explicit and implicit gendering in critical evaluation. The former occurs when criticism directly names gender through terms such as "women's poetry," "poetry by women," "female nature," or other gendered categories. The latter operates without such designations, through the unequal distribution of evaluative attributes, the attribution or restriction of creative agency, and different possibilities for generalisation. The distinction is analytical rather than absolute, since the two mechanisms may

coexist within the same critical text. Their effects are examined within the specific context of each review.

The comparison proceeds on two levels. First, within each critic's discourse, it compares the descriptions applied to works by women and men. It then compares the two chronological clusters in order to determine whether explicitly gendered terminology recedes and what apparently neutral or formalist terms may replace it. No description is regarded as sexist or gendered in itself: its gendered function must be established through its context, unequal distribution, and, insofar as possible, repetition and evaluative consequences.

Unless otherwise indicated, translations from Greek are the author's. Greek titles are romanised according to the ALA-LC system and are followed by an English translation at first mention; author-preferred or established romanised forms of personal names and published English titles are retained where available.

4. Results and Discussion: Comparative Analysis of Critical Texts

4.1. Kostas G. Papageorgiou: Maria Kyrtzaki and Giorgis Manousakis

The two reviews considered here, written by the critic, anthologist, and poet Kostas G. Papageorgiou (1945–2021), were published in the journal *Grammata kai Technes* in 1986. One concerns Maria Kyrtzaki's (1948–2016) collection *Perilēpsē gia tē nykta* (*Summary for the Night*) (1986) (Papageorgiou, 1986b, p. 23), and the other Giorgis Manousakis's (1933–2008) collection *Taricheutērio pouliōn* (*Bird Taxidermy*) (1982) (Papageorgiou, 1986a, pp. 21–22). The fact that both were written by the same critic, appeared in the same venue, and were published in the same year limits extratextual variables and makes the two texts particularly useful for comparative analysis. The difference in their length is noted but is not treated as evidence of an evaluative hierarchy, since it may be due to editorial or other factors.

In the review of Manousakis, the poet's discourse is described as “friendly, intimate, private, without ever becoming idiosyncratic,” and his poetry is said to originate in “the uncertain, vulnerable security of his personal enclosed space.” Papageorgiou calls Manousakis “a poet of interior space” and observes that “his enclosed personal space [...] is itself constantly at risk of losing its tranquillity and being overturned.” Yet this inwardness does not function restrictively: the critic explicitly clarifies that it does not imply thematic poverty and acknowledges “remarkable thematic variety.” Although Manousakis's distance from “current” issues is attributed to intense “existential anguish,” his choice is evaluated as the product of “sincerity and boldness.” The concluding judgement, “a true and, above all, profoundly human voice,” ultimately transfers the personal and private sphere to a broader human scale (Papageorgiou, 1986a, pp. 21–22).

The text on Kyrtzaki takes as its point of departure the dialogue, acknowledged by the poet herself, between the collection and the work of the psychiatrist and poet Giorgos Cheimonas, especially the essayistic work *Six Lessons on Discourse*. Papageorgiou does not, however, interpret this intertextual relation as dependence. On the contrary, he states that Kyrtzaki's discourse is “self-sufficient and autonomous,” that it exceeds the limits of commentary, and that it “takes on the mantle of poetry.” The overall assessment is clearly positive: the poet is credited with boldness, confidence in her abilities, and the capacity to transform commentary into autonomous poetic discourse and ultimately to stand on “firm ground.” This recognition, however, is expressed with evident ambivalence. The critic believes that the poet invokes her sources in order “to legitimise (to herself) her possibly ‘erudite’ mode of commentary [...] which overlays the deepest tremors and innermost processes” of her psyche. At the same time, he reintroduces the possibility that the work might be confined to “the thankless role of a commentary” and ultimately leaves it to the reader to discern the poet's confidence. Emotional intensity is not evaluated negatively, but is presented as opening a way “into the deeper strata of the poet's discourse and psyche.” Kyrtzaki is thus recognised and positively assessed, but her autonomy and poetic confidence are subjected to repeated critical testing (Papageorgiou, 1986b, p. 23).

The comparison does not, therefore, oppose an emotional woman poet to an intellectual man poet: both collections are received through the personal, inward, and emotional element and are ultimately evaluated positively. The difference lies in the terms of recognition and in the scale of critical generalisation. In Manousakis's case, the critic rejects from the outset the possibility that interior space might imply thematic restriction, explicitly broadens its scope, and concludes with the "profoundly human" voice. In Kyrtzaki's case, autonomy, boldness, and confidence are acknowledged, but only after the risk of dependence on another—and specifically male—discourse and of confinement to commentary has been considered. The positive judgement thus retains a residue of reservation, while the work's value is linked primarily to the "deeper strata" of the poet's discourse and psyche.

In Scott's terms, gender need not be named in order to participate in the organisation of power relations; it may be inscribed in the unequal distribution of the particular and the general (Scott, 1986, pp. 1067–1068). Drawing on Beauvoir's account of man as the Subject and woman as the Other, Moi defines the mechanism more precisely: the male may function as the general human norm, while the female appears as a gendered particularity (Beauvoir, 2011; Moi, 2008, pp. 264–267). In this pair of critical texts, inwardness is not inherently feminine, nor is it devalued when attributed to a woman poet. Its gendered function lies in the unequal terms of recognition: the man poet's private world expands directly into the "profoundly human," whereas the positive assessment of the woman poet carries a greater burden of proof regarding her autonomy and poetic confidence and remains connected to a particular psychic horizon. This finding concerns the structure of critical recognition and generalisation, not an intention on Papageorgiou's part to devalue the poet on grounds of gender.

4.2. Giorgos Veis: Maria Laina and Antonis Fostieris

From the same period, the study examines a pair of critical texts by the poet and critic Giorgos Veis (b. 1955). The first, on Maria Laina's (1947–2023) collection *Diko tēs (Hers)*, was published in the literary journal *Diavazō* in 1986; the second, on the collection *O diavolos tragoudēse sōsta (The Devil Sang in Tune)* by Antonis Fostieris (b. 1953), appeared in the same journal in 1987 (Veis, 1986, pp. 65–66; Veis, 1987, p. 57).

The text on Laina is generally positive. Veis acknowledges the strength and steadiness of her poetic discourse and, as in Kyrtzaki's case, her boldness, but speaks of the "tremors of a suffering personality [...] seeking vindication." Her themes—"our deeply personal, bodily and psychic torments"—are recognised as "classic themes" that have also occupied "other accomplished women poets [...]." The references to Zoe Karelli and Kiki Dimoula place Laina among important women's voices, without comparing her to male peers. The critic interprets the collection as a record of successive phases in the erotic life of a "perpetually unsatisfied woman" who eventually seeks the fulfilment of her desires "in her own person, in her own sex." This phrase, together with a series of observations—for instance, grief at the loss of a "sexual partner," rather than an "erotic" one, as is usually said—shifts the reading away from the composition and articulation of poetic discourse by a voice and towards the sex, body, and sexuality of the poetic subject itself. The observation that the poetic persona is called Maria additionally raises the question of whether she should be identified with the poet. Although Veis states that he does not expect complete confession, he calls for greater clarity and sincerity from the collection's "confessions." Poetry is thus treated as a discourse required to disclose the author's personal or experiential truth (Veis, 1986, pp. 65–66).

Here Joanna Russ's observation may be recalled: works by women are often not rejected outright but reassigned to categories that diminish their scope and prestige. In this case, the significance of Laina's poetry is broadly recognised, while it is simultaneously read through the lens of confession and personal sexual experience. Formal difficulty, suggestion, and ellipsis are not treated solely as elements of a distinctive poetic technique; they also become signs of incomplete disclosure and insufficient personal sincerity.

Reference to the body and erotic desire is not problematic in itself, since both are fundamental axes of the collection. The text acquires a sexist inflection when it moves from linguistic and formal organisation to psychological and biographical conjecture and identifies the gender of the poetic voice with that of the author. At the end, moreover, the strong initial recognition is curtailed when the collection is described as “a presentable proposition.” The phrase is positive but restrained: it acknowledges the work as polished and of interest without extending its significance into a broader poetic or philosophical register.

The review of Antonis Fostieris proceeds differently. Here too, love, the body, and desire are central to the work, but they are neither connected to the poet’s personal life nor treated as requiring confessional disclosure. Instead, these themes are reframed as an ontological and metaphysical problem. The “devil’s love” is presented as an extreme form of Eros and as an attempt to enter “the body of Evil.” The poetic body becomes the site where Being and non-Being, the angelic and the demonic, knowledge and the impossibility of attaining it meet. No disclosure of biographical detail, private life, or the poet’s sexual identity is required, because he is taken from the outset to be speaking about a general human condition, and to do so not in confessional but in philosophical terms (Veis, 1987, p. 57).

Although Veis recognises and positively evaluates both poets, the lexical difference in his assessments is evident. In Laina’s case, erotic experience is individualised, embodied, and linked to the poet’s sex and personal truth. In Fostieris’s case, erotic experience is depersonalised and transformed into an ontological inquiry with universal force.

In Scott’s terms, the difference lies not in the presence of the body and love but in their unequal movement from the particular to the universal: Laina’s experience remains tied to a specific female body, while Fostieris’s represents human existence without further qualification. Moi’s anti-essentialist position shows that the feminine is not an inherent quality of Laina’s writing but is produced by its critical marking as personal, sexual, and confessional. In Bourdieu’s terms, metaphysical and philosophical terminology ultimately confers a different symbolic prestige upon Fostieris’s work (Scott, 1986, pp. 1067–1068; Moi, 2008, pp. 264–267; Bourdieu, 1992).

4.3. Giorgos Aragis: Ioannis Sevastianos Rossis and Iro Nikopoulou

In his essay “Two New Poetic Voices,” published in *Nea Hestia*, Giorgos Aragis (b. 1936) discusses the collections *Ē monē phloga* (*The Only Flame*) by Ioannis Sevastianos Rossis (b. 1954) and *Anemou* (*Of the Wind*) by Iro Nikopoulou (b. 1958) (Aragis, 2002, pp. 497–500).

Rossis’s trajectory is organised around the concept of apprenticeship. The poet possesses a “sound education,” has studied the modernist tradition, and is placed within a genealogy that includes Seferis, Elytis, and, to a lesser extent, Sachtouris. This association with major male poets already confers prestige upon Rossis. His poetic development, demonstrated by his mature collection, is presented as the gradual attainment of individuality through study and the overcoming of early influences (Aragis, 2002, pp. 497–499).

Within this framework, sensibility, formerly associated primarily with women’s poetry, is explicitly attributed to Rossis. His distinctiveness is defined as a “combination of reflection and sensibility.” Sensibility appears, however, as an instrument for investigating the relation between self and world, but only in conjunction with reflection, which gives it depth, perspective, distance, and control. A man poet may therefore be described as sensitive without the term diminishing his poetic authority, because sensibility is linked to thought, education, and control and is thus transformed from passive receptivity into an active means of cognition.

Nikopoulou’s case presents an inverse but equally significant shift. Aragis notes that Nikopoulou does not possess the “poetic training” identified as Rossis’s essential equipment. He nevertheless recognises “a clear philosophical ballast” in her writing and associates her poetry with questions of being, the self, absence, death, and human fulfilment. Philosophical thought, traditionally one of the strongest poles of masculine evaluative vocabulary, is therefore attributed to a woman’s work. Nikopoulou is not confined to the realm of emotion,

nor is she described merely as sensitive or confessional. Aragis's assessment of the collection is clearly positive and departs from the older pattern in which the man thinks and the woman feels (Aragis, 2002, pp. 499–500).

A difference nevertheless remains in the account of the two poetic subjects' development. Rossis's development is attributed to his education and command of his means. Nikopoulou's is more often described through lyrical metaphors: as a transformation from larva to chrysalis, as rebirth, and as a process initially heralded by a "chirp," which links Nikopoulou to nature and indirectly to lyricism. At the same time, her achievement of poetic maturity is highlighted through her turn towards "personal experience" and "private material." Thus, although she is credited with a philosophical dimension, the final interpretation of her poetry returns to its association with nature, inwardness, deprivation, and the search for fulfilment.

Following Scott, gender need not be sought here in explicit descriptions of women's writing, but in the relational organisation of difference. The distinction is not, of course, absolute, since the man poet possesses sensibility and the woman poet philosophical reflection; yet the superiority of Rossis's systematic education is implied. Thus, although the categories have already begun to shift, the language and terms through which value and prestige are attributed to the two authors still differ.

Moi's anti-essentialist position enables a more precise evaluation of this shift. Sensibility is not a natural feature of women's writing, nor is reflection the exclusive property of men's. Aragis's criticism demonstrates that the two qualities can be assigned to different writers and perform different functions. At the same time, however, it shows that this redistribution of terms—that is, of attributes—does not automatically abolish older hierarchies. What matters is the other concepts with which each descriptor is associated and the kind of recognition to which it leads.

4.4. Anna Griva: Vicky Katsarou and Giorgos Alisanoglou

Anna Griva (b. 1985) discusses *Papousa* by Vicky Katsarou (b. 1987) and *Kypseles* (*Beehives*) by Giorgos Alisanoglou (b. 1975) in a review from the second chronological cluster, 2019–2024. Both books receive relatively brief treatment (Griva, 2022). The initial evaluation is equally positive in both cases, and both collections are organised around a single figure or symbol.

In her discussion of *Papousa*, Griva foregrounds two themes: the "nature of the female," identified with creative power, and the solitude of every being that desires freedom. The historical figure of the Romani poet Papusza becomes the exemplary embodiment of a free woman and the bearer of a magical female nature that is misunderstood, excluded, and punished in patriarchal societies. The critic thus brings to the fore a female genealogy of witches, healers, philosophers, and poets, culminating in reverence for the "womb of life," symbolised by the female body. She recognises female power and resistance to patriarchal oppression: the feminine does not appear weak or deficient, but creative and insubordinate.

This positive reversal of the older hierarchy does not, however, eliminate the risk of essentialism. The category of woman is once again associated with nature, magic, birth, and the body. These terms now carry a positive value, but the connection is presented as a property of "the female." *Papousa* addresses patriarchal violence, women's creativity, and the body, and the critic's gendered reading therefore corresponds to its subject. The crucial point, however, is that Griva adopts, without evident critical distance, the equivalence female–nature–womb. In this way, the feminist intention of the reading coexists with the renewed naturalisation of the very category it seeks to revalue.

The picture is different in *Beehives*. The beehive and the bees become an allegory "through which to speak about humanity." The male poet's creative work is not designated as male. It opens out towards humanity, the self, time, memory, experience, and desire. The collection maps small interior worlds, family and erotic relationships, losses, places, and times. The body is present here too, but it does not function as a biological or symbolic explanation of the poet's

gender. It becomes one element within a broader constellation of existential concerns. Similarly, nature is not presented as a masculine essence, and the beehive becomes an elaborate allegorical construction of social organisation.

The unequal attribution of value is therefore evident primarily in naming and scale. Katsarou's poetry is credited with political force and is indeed presented as a form of resistance to patriarchal persecution, but it is read through the explicitly marked category of the female and through the female body, whereas Alisanoglou is read through the unmarked generality of "humanity" and society. The comparison demonstrates that visibility and positive evaluation can preserve the older gendered hierarchical distinction between the particular and the universal: the woman represents the female, the man the human. The fact that the critic is a woman confirms the theoretical premise that the gender of the critical subject does not mechanically determine the language of assessment. Available symbolic codes may be reproduced, reversed, or challenged by critical subjects of any gender.

This case exemplifies both Ellmann's "sexual analogy," since bodily attributes are carried over into the evaluation of poetry, and Showalter's "double critical standard," since praise for the woman poet and the man poet is organised within different horizons of generalisation (Ellmann, 1968, pp. 2–6; Showalter, 1977).

4.5. Vangelis Chatzivasileiou: Athina Papadaki and Stavros Zafeiriou

Vangelis Chatzivasileiou (b. 1959), in his paper on *Skia psychēs* (*Shadow of the Soul*) by Athina Papadaki (b. 1945), offers a strongly positive, form-centred reading. He begins, however, with an extensive gendered premise: from her first collection in 1974 to 2023, Papadaki avoided identification with what was called "women's poetry." According to the critic, this distancing does not imply the absence of features associated with the female sex; rather, it indicates that the poet quickly freed herself from the constraint of foregrounding her gender (Chatzivasileiou, 2024).

This introductory move has a dual function. On the one hand, it rejects the simplistic inclusion of Papadaki within a homogeneous women's writing and recognises the continuity and autonomy of her poetics. On the other, it first delineates a gendered category, then confirms that a major poet has transcended it. *Shadow of the Soul* is presented as a work from which every notion of gender or distinction is absent, because the relevant labels did not shape Papadaki and because her poetry had "different priorities." The formulation is revealing: neutrality and high aesthetic value are secured through disidentification from the female category. The mechanism of exception described by Russ is thereby activated: the woman is fully recognised, but as a case exempted from the norm governing women's writing more generally.

Once this distancing has been completed, the critical text employs the established vocabulary for conferring aesthetic value in relation both to technique and to thematic concerns—time, memory, existential void, and the combination of politics and History. Papadaki is thus assigned precisely those qualities that the older evaluative system distributed less readily to women: formal control, density, political and historical scope, and ontological depth.

Comparison with Chatzivasileiou's review of *Ta physika pragmata* (*Natural Things*) by Stavros Zafeiriou (b. 1958) is particularly illuminating (Chatzivasileiou, 2019). In the case of the man poet, no introductory discussion of gender or declaration of departure from a particular category is required. The starting point is his capacity to compose large-scale works and engage with a poetry of ideas. The critic praises his treatment of political guilt and innocence, the limits of language, art, memory, and modernity, as well as his dialogue with philosophical, patristic, and literary texts.

The evaluative distinction here is not that the man is praised while the woman is devalued, but that the route to universality differs. For Zafeiriou, the poetry of ideas, philosophy, and human existence are immediately available categories. For Papadaki, they are preceded by the

assurance that she is not confined to women's poetry and that gender is not among her priorities. Apparently neutral formalist criticism therefore does not necessarily abolish the gender hierarchy but reorganises it as a prerequisite for entry into the universal.

For Russ, this is recognition through exception. For Moi, Papadaki's disidentification from "women's poetry" shows that the feminine remains marked; in Bourdieu's terms, exception becomes a condition of symbolic legitimation (Russ, 1983; Moi, 1985; Bourdieu, 1992).

4.6. Five Modes of Transformation in Gendered Evaluative Vocabulary

The joint examination of five pairs of critical texts by five critics reveals five different modes of addressing gender, even when it is not always explicitly named as a factor of evaluation. The first, in Papageorgiou, is a pattern of unequal paths to positive recognition: Manousakis's privacy expands directly towards the "profoundly human," whereas Kyrtzaki's autonomy, boldness, and poetic confidence are recognised only once she is shown to have become independent of the male discourse she mediates. The second, in Veis, is the different critical recoding of the erotic and the bodily: in Laina, into the personal, sexual, and confessional; in Fostieris, into the ontological and universal. The third, in Aragis, is a redistribution of older descriptors: sensibility is attributed to a man and philosophical reflection to a woman, although their routes to legitimation are not fully equalised. The fourth, in Griva, is positive evaluation accompanied by a return to an essentialist view: female nature is invested with creative power and a capacity for resistance but remains associated with nature, the body, and the womb. The fifth, in Chatzivasileiou, is recognition through exception: Papadaki is praised for her technique, turn towards history, and the ontological dimension of her work once she is deemed to have distanced herself from "women's poetry."

The five cases involve different mechanisms of gendering, both explicit and implicit. In Papageorgiou and Veis, implicit gendering operates through the unequal attribution of evaluative qualities and different possibilities for generalisation. In Aragis, older descriptors are implicitly redistributed, without, however, equalising the terms on which the value of the two works is recognised. In Griva, the mechanism is explicit naming and the positive revaluation of the gendered category. In Chatzivasileiou, by contrast, explicit classification operates through exception: the value of Papadaki's work is affirmed through her dissociation from "women's poetry," rather than through a positive revaluation of the category itself.

Explicit gendering thus operates primarily through naming and classification, whereas implicit gendering operates through the unequal attribution of qualities and the varying ease with which a work moves from the particular to the universal. The two mechanisms are not equivalent, nor do they have an intrinsically restrictive or emancipatory function. Their effects depend on the context and on the value assigned to the relevant terms and categories in each case.

These modes do not form a linear historical sequence. This is particularly evident in the last two examples: Chatzivasileiou's form-centred reading is contemporaneous with Griva's explicit naturalisation of the female. Explicitly gendered terminology sometimes restricts women's experience and at other times seeks to invest it with positive value. Correspondingly, neutral terminology sometimes genuinely broadens recognition and at other times presupposes that a woman has abandoned the particular domain of her gender. Change across the period 1974–2024 therefore takes the form of coexistence and overlap between older and newer modes of evaluation: old categories do not disappear but recur under a new name, with a new valence, or in a different position within the critical judgement.

Gender hierarchy arises when domains such as the body, nature, emotion, and experience operate as limits for works by women, while in works by men experience or the body is readily translated into philosophy and universality. Conversely, the recognition of political, formal, or intellectual power in a woman poet is not neutral when presented as evidence that she no longer belongs to women's poetry. The question is not which of the two vocabularies should

disappear, but whether all works have an equal capacity to move between the scales of private and public, bodily and intellectual, particular and universal.

5. Conclusion

The central question of this article concerned the transformation of gendered evaluative vocabulary and, more specifically, the survival of the connotations of “feminine sensibility.” The small comparative corpus demonstrates change, but not the complete disappearance of critical reservations about women poets. The attribution of delicacy or emotionality as natural female qualities, characteristic of the nineteenth century and systematised during the interwar period, is no longer the sole or dominant mode of evaluation. Women poets are credited with technical achievement in form and language, as well as with discursive force. At the same time, however, the older opposition is reorganised: the feminine continues to be marked more frequently as body, nature, maternity, relationality, and particular experience, while the masculine remains unmarked and is more readily associated with theory, History, compositional power, and the universal human subject, even where men’s poetry is itself strongly embodied.

The five specific modes identified by the comparative analysis above can be summarised as three broader movements through which the transformation takes place. First, “feminine sensibility” may reappear with a new, positive valence as creative nature, embodied knowledge, and resistance. This shift constitutes a revaluation and carries emancipatory potential, but it retains the risk of renaturalising the category of woman. Second, gender difference may shift from adjectives to verbs and scales: the woman speaks, feels, and communicates, while the man confronts, transcends, and reconstructs the historical or philosophical field. Third, neutral criticism may recognise a woman writer as a figure of universal significance on condition that she is presented as an exception to “women’s poetry.”

The main conclusion is that the decline of explicitly gendered vocabulary does not entail the disappearance of gender hierarchy. Change therefore concerns the relation between overt classification and less visible structures of recognition. Explicit gendering may confine a work to the realm of the particular, but it may also confer visibility and positive recognition. Yet even when an explicit reference to gender carries a positive evaluative valence, the woman poet’s gender remains marked, whereas men’s poetry is more often referred to simply as poetry. Conversely, the absence of an explicit reference to gender is not evidence of neutrality: apparently neutral aesthetic judgements may continue to confer literary significance, universal status, and authority on unequal terms.

The paired readings also confirm that the gender of the critical subject does not reliably predict the type of evaluation. A woman critic may reproduce the opposition between nature and the universal, just as a man critic may attribute high value to a woman poet.

The conclusions necessarily remain limited. The corpus is small, and the works are not aesthetically or thematically identical. The study therefore substantiates neither a comprehensive history of Modern Greek criticism nor a stable pattern in the work of the individual critics. It does, however, document mechanisms that may be tested across a larger body of material. In this sense, the transition from “feminine sensibility” to neutral criticism is not a completed process. It is a field of negotiation in which old and new terms coexist and shape different possibilities for literary recognition.

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