
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Gender Representations in Dramatic Texts for Children and Youth

Maria Kladaki¹✉ and Konstantinos Mastrothanasis²

¹Assistant Professor, Department of Primary Education, University of the Aegean, Rhodes, Greece, mkladaki@aegean.gr

²PhDc, Department of Primary Education, University of the Aegean, Rhodes, Greece, pred18001@aegean.gr

Corresponding Author: Prof. Maria Kladaki, **E-mail:** mkladaki@aegean.gr

| ABSTRACT

Theater, including drama, plays for an underaged audience, is considered an active mechanism for reproducing or challenging gender relations in power that reflects the ideological and political beliefs of a society. Under such circumstances, it is interesting to discover whether theatrical texts for children and youth gender fairness and to investigate whether or not traditional and stereotypical perceptions govern the way male and female citizens are presented in theatrical texts. The purpose of this research is to investigate theatrical texts addressed to children and youth as to the way in which men and women are portrayed as citizens. The research material was decided to consist of theatrical texts, namely texts with dramatic features, such as dialogical form, plot, etc., addressed to a juvenile audience, which was published in Greece, by Greek authors, during the period 1985-1995. In order to achieve the individual aims and objectives of the present research, the content analysis method was used. According to the results of the study, the analysis of activities of the heroes in children's theatrical works shows that men have power in their hands, make political decisions, and have active and decisive roles in social life. They are the leaders and those who control the society's fortune, whereas women are generally detached from any serious political, social, and economic activity or decision. The theatrical works for children portray the woman only in the capacity of a mother or housewife without any dynamic presence in modern socio-political life.

| KEYWORDS

Dramatic texts; gender representation; gender roles; theatrical texts

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1. Introduction

In the modern globalised society, two contradictory yet parallel phenomena are observed. On the one hand, the worldwide expansion of the civil and legal right of equality and, on the other, the continuation of discrimination against certain citizens belonging to particular population groups, among which women. In this framework, it is observed that, in spite of the institutional consolidation of equality and equal rights, traditional gender-biased perceptions about roles in the socio-economic environment continue to impose inequalities against women.

Childhood is a particularly important period for the inner perception of gender roles (Starr & Zurbriggen, 2017). It is accepted that construction of the gender schema, i.e., the creation of an organised pattern of behaviour that is used to sort information about the world with regard to gender, begins in the early childhood years (Klaczynski et al., 2020; Korlat et al., 2021). Early in their age, children start developing stereotypical concepts about what it means to be a man or a woman, and this gender-roles socialisation process continues as children get influenced by many resources in their environment. Research shows that the more children are exposed to sex-bias, the more gender-stereotyped ideas they develop (Kneeskern & Reeder, 2020; Lee & Chin, 2019); hence if children are exposed to non-stereotypic models of gender roles, they are expected to develop a more gender equitable view of the world (Burghardt et al., 2020; McCabe et al., 2011; Strouse et al., 2018).

Similarly, it is well established that children's literature contributes to the formulation of social attitudes and stances, hence also in the acceptance and assimilation of standards for masculinity and femininity. Typically, books have shown a greater number of male characters with strong personalities and roles, thus acting towards the perpetuation of rigid gender attitudes and beliefs about typical male and female behaviours (Filipović, 2018; Lee & Chin, 2019). It is difficult to state how extensive the effect of literature on socialisation is, and also, there is no consensus as to the process through which children are influenced by literature in this respect. In any case, children are expected to be affected, as readers who identify themselves with the protagonists or as imitators of behaviours described in the texts, or simply as interpreters considering behaviours and reactions as phenomena that remind them of the real world (Shahnaz et al., 2020). Paraphrasing texts have the power to change gender-appropriate behaviour and attitudes (Earles, 2017; Gomez-Najarro, 2020). Given this framework, it is safe to suggest that exposing children to books that reflect gender fairness helps in promoting gender equality (Ruterana, 2017), and choosing literature for children that portrays modern gender roles works against the creation of stereotypical perceptions and attitudes (Abraham, 1989; Kneeskern & Reeder, 2020; Kostas, 2018).

It can be argued that theatrical books for children form one of the highly influential groups of literature for children, particularly since theatrical books have multiple uses. They can be read or narrated as any fiction book, and in this case, the extensive use of dialogue that theatrical books contain makes them highly vivid, attractive, and easily read the material. Their main use in theatrical performance events may make children create impressions and develop emotions (Göthberg et al., 2018; Papakosta et al., 2019, 2020). Finally, they can be used in educative dramatization processes, in which children participate acting characters (Kladaki, 2013; Kladaki & Fokiaki, 2013). In such cases, they are expected to make children get unique experiences in a text-to-self connection, approaching the characters closely in the book, living the story emotionally and intellectually, making it more personal and immediate (Field, 2019; Kelin, 2007; Liao et al., 2020; Rainer & Walters, 2014). As Franks (2008, p. 25) states:

...drama focuses attention on particular aspects of social interaction. In this process, the drama does not simply reflect a version of a life lived at life's rate; it represents life as seen through a lens... dramatic production, distribution, and reception are, therefore, inescapably ideological processes.

Under such circumstances, it is interesting to discover whether theatrical texts for children promote gender fairness and to investigate whether or not traditional and stereotypical perceptions govern the way male and female citizens are presented in theatrical texts for children in Greece. More particularly, the basic purpose of the research is to investigate theatrical texts addressed to a juvenile audience as to the way in which men and women are portrayed as citizens. In that context, the research interest is focused on gender issues concerning social recognition and participation in socio-economic and political life. It should be noted that in Greece, there are several works (such as Fragkoudaki 1979; Gouviás & Alexopoulos, 2018; Kantartzi 2003; Karintzaidis et al. 2016; Kostas 2021; Mastrothanasias and Geladari 2009; Sakalaki 1998) that consider books for children, and especially schoolbooks of reading, as factors of reproducing gender stereotypes. However, research in theatrical texts is scarce, and this acted as a strong motive for this work.

2. Methodology

The research material was decided to consist of theatrical texts, namely texts with dramatic features, such as dialogical form, plot, etc., addressed to a juvenile audience. The primary research material consists of theatrical texts for children that were published in Greece, by Greek authors, during the period 1985-1995. It was decided to work with texts of this period mainly because this period coincides with the main progress in (a) the legal establishment of equal rights and (b) theatrical education. With respect to the legal establishment of equal rights, it should be mentioned that the early eighties coincided with the activation in Greece of the new Family Law (Law 1329/1983) that was decisive for the establishment of equal rights between men and women in the Greek family and society, as well as with the beginning of operation of the Council of Equality –a public institution that aimed to change attitudes and promote equality. With respect to theatrical education, it is worth mentioning that this period coincides with visible progress in theatrical work for children and particularly with the establishment of the 'Hellenic Centre of Theatre for the Child and the Juvenile' which is a member of the International Association of Theatre for the Child and the Juvenile (ASSITEJ). The above subjects (or cases) of the study were works of original dramaturgy and worked structured as a complete story. Works of original dramaturgy, namely original writings with themes taken from modern reality, such as family relations, ecological issues, themes of war and peace, children's integration into the adult world, etc. These works were expected to portray the modern role of men and women as active citizens. Works structured as a complete story namely works with an introduction, the main body, and a conclusion, separated into scenes or/and episodes and including all the plot features (e.g., the action peak point, the surprise, the unexpected, the conflicts). These features create the dramatic situation, in other words, the conditions that surround the theatrical characters.

The final research corpus was formed by theatrical books which fulfilled the above prerequisites and limitations. Based on these, the final research material consisted of twenty-seven (27) theatrical texts for children, published in 25 Greek theatrical books, all of which are addressed to a juvenile audience and could be followed by children of both preschool and primary school educational levels (see Table 1).

Table 1. The content identity of the theatrical texts reviewed in this research

No	Theatrical books (references)	Keywords	Abstract
1	(Anagnostou, 1994)	Ecology, modern lifestyle.	An explorer, the sun, a small boat, and a swallow have lost their way. The Black Hole threatens them, but the Glowworm and the swallow help them survive.
2	(Antonakou, 1992)	Ecology, Zoology, Forest.	Helped by friends, the forest animals give a lesson to human beings so as not to kill them and to stop burning forests.
3	(Bartzis, 1987)	Society, peace, coexistence, and friendship.	Two ants offer hospitality and friendship to two ladybirds. All four of them, with the support of an ant-scientist, start a peace campaign in the ants' society.
4	(Delonis, 1985)	School, society, and way of life.	Inspired by their desire to have adequate space for playing, a company of boys and girls decide to create their own government, realizing the difficulty in sharing power.
5	(Epaminondas, 1989)	Juvenile, hard life.	Kremmydas, a mean entrepreneur, fires his assistant Vassilis who denies following his advice. Some incidents help Kremmydas to change his attitudes in favour of social welfare.
6	(Hatzihanna, 1989)	Tradition, society.	People of a city try to find the lost blue violin that is said to bring melody, peace, and happiness to their city.
7	(Hatzopoulou-Karavia, 1987b)	Society, power, suspiciousness.	In a military, totalitarian society, the suspiciousness of a censor and his eagerness to reveal secret codes lead to comic happenings.
8	(Hatzopoulou-Karavia, 1987a)	Society, environment, work for a living.	In a class stratified society, a street cleaner tries to unite people so as to protest against the establishment of a factory in a public park.
9	(Hatzopoulou-Karavia, 1992a)	Ecology, friendship, vegetarianism.	Ricky, a mouse, decides to become a vegetarian, motivated by her love for living creatures.
10	(Hatzopoulou-Karavia, 1992b)	Juveniles, adults, dramaturgy.	The schoolchildren decided to make a theatrical group, thus inducing various reactions from their parents that reflected the families' social and economic backgrounds.
11	(Hiou & Giorgaros, 1994)	Society, environment, travel, dream.	Little John dreamed of "the island of wise children," and this motivated him to ask his friends to participate in a game of investigating happiness.
12	(Kalatzopoulos, 1987b)	Family, power, social discrimination.	The long Face is a very ugly but good-hearted person with a gifted voice. He becomes a famous singer and a social hero who helps the country get rid of a dangerous wizard, which is the cause of his ugliness and of many social misfortunes.
13	(Kalatzopoulos, 1987a)	Peace, Power.	Super Bam disturbs the peaceful life of the imaginary planet Ve, but young Irene brings succeeds in restoring peace.
14	(Kantzola-Sabatakou, 1990)	Ecology, nature.	A cuckoo, helped by two small trees and a young bear, saves the fairy forest from damage.
15	(Papakou, 1987)	Society, immigration, illiteracy, lifelong learning.	A letter from Thoma's parents, that had left their homeland, induces the aged citizens of the small village to claim for a teacher to come into the village, to educate not only their children and grandchildren but also themselves.
16	(Papakou, 1992)	Society, family, curiosity, music, dance.	The secret game of a father with his six children, in relation to the high performance of the children at school, makes the neighbours' curious of what is going on and demonstrates the importance of good family relationships.

17	(Potamitis, 1990)	Society, family, ecology, freedom.	Socrates, a dog that lives in a forest, makes a long trip to the city. The hardness and wildness of civilised society make him realise the advantages of a free life.
18	(Stathatou, 1986)	School, technology, human relations.	The substitution of their teacher for a robot initially has brought joy to the pupils of a monograde school. However, soon afterward, they realise that technology cannot replace human relations.
19	(Trivizas, 1995a)	Future, robots, traditional life, technology.	In a future city governed by robots, nostalgia for the traditional life makes an ex-chef cook the last potato in the city. This acted as a motive for a big revolution that signaled the end of robots' empire.
20	(Trivizas, 1995b)	Friendship, society.	In a country where it rained coins, piggybanks who failed to get full of money were forced to immigrate. A full piggybank decides to travel in order to find a friend immigrant piggybank. Together they reveal the mysteries that disturbed life in this strange country.
21	(Tzortzi, 1992a)	Nature, friendship, human relations.	The donkey and the fox dispute about who is going to take care of the flowers. In the end, they decide to become friends forever and cooperate for the benefit of the flowers.
22	(Tzortzi, 1992b)	Nature, sea pollution, fish, ecology, cooperation.	Fish are in despair due to sea pollution. Young pupils that get environmental education and are environmentally aware save the fish.
23	(Tzortzi, 1992c)	Nature, ecology, fire.	A big fire destroys a small tree that provides protection to a squirrel, a bird, and a young child. The three of them decide not to abandon the tree.
24	(Valasi, 1995)	Social relations, family.	A carpenter, a tailor, and a painter make a doll that becomes human. After a long quarrel about who should be the parent, they decided that the best is to cooperate in taking care of the little girl.
25	(Xanthoulis, 1993)	Family, society, ecology.	Saved from a shipwreck, Alice, a young girl, teaches the fish about human civilisation. When and when the sea world started portraying the wildness of human society, Alice decided to talk about love.
26	(Xanthoulis, 1994a)	Family, society, ecology.	In the Cementland, a place with no trees and gardens, Annoula, a young girl protesting against society's indifference, decides to live on the city's roofs. Her behavior makes the population aware of the environment and helps them to work so as to change their city's image.
27	(Xanthoulis, 1994b)	Society, love, happiness.	A drum and a trumpet start a long, adventurous journey around the world in order to find, piece by piece, the sound of happiness that was lost.

In order to achieve the individual aims and objectives of the present research, the content analysis method was used. The use of this method as a technique for text analysis is a procedure that is exploited to decode and categorise research material, aiming at the substitution of subjective analysis with objective one (Krippendorff, 2018; Neuendorf, 2016). In the research, the personality (character) was set as a categorisation unit, whereas the semantic unit was set as a context unit.

3. Results

Since the basic research topic is to illustrate the differences in the participation of men and women in social, political, and economic life, as portrayed in theatrical texts, it was considered worthwhile to examine separately the way each gender appears in such texts and to make appropriate comparisons that lead to conclusions for the gender roles.

3.1 The profile of man as a citizen in the socio-economic environment

As to the role of men, the analysis of theatrical plays for children revealed that men have an intense social life. Men join celebrations (Valasi, 1995, pp. 66, 67) or visit friends (Kantzola-Sabatakou, 1990, pp. 29, 40; Papakou, 1987, p. 55, 1992, p. 23). At times they are found in social events and at times in cultural and artistic events (Trivizas, 1995b, p. 33). In these events, what interests the most is

not the offered spectacle but the people they are going to meet and greet (Hatzopoulou-Karavia, 1992b, p. 106). In public events, the man introduces himself and occasionally undertakes the task of introducing his wife (Kalatzopoulos, 1987a, p. 88). It is worth noting that in common husband and wife appearances, the man always goes ahead, whereas the woman follows along with the children (Hatzopoulou-Karavia, 1992a, p. 51). If the woman with the daughter attempt to go ahead, the man "*brings them back to order*". One reads the following characteristic abstract: "*Mr. Talpas: Good! Let's go! Family! Go on! (Mrs. Talpa attempts to go by holding Riki.) Males go first. Females second! (He exits first with the boys. They follow)*" (Hatzopoulou-Karavia, 1992a, p. 60).

Moreover, the man described in theatrical texts has friends (Epaminondas, 1989, p. 50; Papakou, 1987, p. 40) and often very good ones (Trivizas, 1995b, p. 28) who love him, want to be there for him and help him (Epaminondas, 1989, p. 50; Hiou & Giorgaros, 1994, p. 27; Papakou, 1987, pp. 32, 38, 40; Trivizas, 1995b, pp. 22, 24, 51, 54, 59). Apart from good friends, the man has many acquaintances and a wide social circle (Xanthoulis, 1994a, p. 11). In this framework, he is interested in talking and greeting other men of a high social level (Hatzopoulou-Karavia, 1987a, p. 106). Therefore, we observe that the man offers to treat (Potamitis, 1990, p. 39), orders (Potamitis, 1990, p. 40), and treats -most of the times- his friends (Epaminondas, 1989, p. 61; Hatzopoulou-Karavia, 1987a, p. 138; Papakou, 1987, p. 36; Trivizas, 1995a, p. 116), his relatives (Hatzopoulou-Karavia, 1992b, p. 102), his partners (Trivizas, 1995a, p. 116) or other men he respects (Papakou, 1987, p. 36). He invites friends at home (Papakou, 1992, pp. 15, 17), welcomes them (Bartzis, 1987, p. 27), offers them hospitality (Bartzis, 1987, p. 46), or invites them for dinner (Papakou, 1987, pp. 34, 45).

As to participation in political developments, the man holds key positions in the political life of his motherland. He is King (Kalatzopoulos, 1987a, p. 85; Tzortzi, 1992a, p. 6; Xanthoulis, 1993, p. 33) ruler (Trivizas, 1995a, p. 13), becomes a Governor, and a rather good one actually. He loves people, and animals (Antonakou, 1992, pp. 38–39), distributes money, solves problems, undertakes several projects showing ecological interest, such as planting trees, etc. (Antonakou, 1992, pp. 38–39), and creates civilization through infrastructure works (Bartzis, 1987, pp. 42, 43). At the same time, people love him, and that is why he is selected to govern (Antonakou, 1992, pp. 38–39). In other words, men, apart from supreme rulers under hereditary succession, are elected to govern. In that way, they become Prime Ministers (Xanthoulis, 1994b, p. 10), Ministers (Hatzopoulou-Karavia, 1992b, p. 79; Xanthoulis, 1993, p. 12, 1994b, pp. 10, 38), Members of Parliament (Xanthoulis, 1993, p. 32), Mayors (Hatzihanna, 1989, p. 21; Trivizas, 1995b, p. 24; Xanthoulis, 1994a, p. 12, 1994b, p. 38), or Presidents of the village (Papakou, 1987, p. 16). In other cases, we find them in specific ministerial positions, for example, Secretary of Education (Hatzopoulou-Karavia, 1992b, p. 79). From these high-ranking posts, the adult character exercises power, is the leader, controls the developments, directs, and has the general command in every event (Xanthoulis, 1994a, p. 13). Apart from the elected political positions, the man holds important positions in the military rank as well. Therefore, we find him to be a Major (Hatzopoulou-Karavia, 1987b, p. 15), General of the Army (Hatzihanna, 1989, p. 55), even awarded medals of honour (Xanthoulis, 1993, p. 42), or we hear him say that he was a great army leader in some war that took place many years ago (Tzortzi, 1992b, p. 10).

Apart from holding powerful positions, men participate in trade unions (Delonis, 1985, p. 16). Many times, we see them join unionist events and demonstrations (Delonis, 1985, p. 36). Through their actions, they alarm the capital and try to achieve their goal (Papakou, 1987, p. 46). More particularly, at times, the man goes on a hunger strike in order to achieve what he wants (Stathatou, 1986, p. 84), whereas in other cases, he organizes resistance groups (Trivizas, 1995a, pp. 73, 75) or plans a coup d' état in order to defeat an authoritative regime (Trivizas, 1995a, p. 80). He is ready to undertake a difficult mission for a cause (Trivizas, 1995b, p. 16) and proposes to build a monument to remind his fellow citizens of a difficult period for the country and its citizens so as not to allow anything similar to happen in the future (Trivizas, 1995b, p. 112).

The man makes transactions, but when he faces something illegal, he decides to proceed to justice, suing the one who deceived him (Trivizas, 1995b, p. 88). Moreover, the man is a member of society, which means that he is organised in groups for some common cause; he has concerns and interests in a wider problematic that are not relative only to his unimportant daily routine. For example, the man expresses environmental concerns: he worries about environmental pollution (Anagnostou, 1994, p. 19), he is a member of the nature lovers association (Papakou, 1987, p. 37), whereas in other cases, he is portrayed as having totally different interests that make him the chairman of a hunters club (Trivizas, 1995b, p. 111). In other cases, he is a group leader (Papakou, 1992, p. 8), has friends and allies (Papakou, 1992, p. 8), and wishes to conquer the whole world (Papakou, 1992, p. 8). On the other hand, he is sometimes portrayed as the leader of a gang (Kantzola-Sabatakou, 1990, p. 33; Trivizas, 1995b, p. 104) or a member of a gang (Trivizas, 1995b, p. 95). In general, we observe that men are often organised in groups, very often as their leaders, and not only do they show an interest in global developments, but they also inform their wives on foreign affairs, as they seem to be ignorant (Papakou, 1987, p. 42).

With respect to occupations, this work seems to be in harmonization with other research (Signorielli, 1982, 1990). Thus, in the Greek theatrical texts for children, it is found that they require many qualifications, power, and /or a strong educational and academic background. Men are reported to be businessmen, hotel owners, petrol producers, bankers, doctors of medicine, headmasters, and artists.

Male characters enjoy social recognition not only for their political activity but also for their military achievements (Xanthoulis, 1993, p. 42) and their wealth (Trivizas, 1995b, pp. 32–33). The man is welcomed with honours (Xanthoulis, 1994b, p. 38), is praised (Papakou, 1987, p. 40), and admired (Bartzis, 1987, pp. 43, 93; Papakou, 1987, p. 32). The man's social recognition is usually closely related to his distinctions. More particularly, the man is awarded unanimously (Bartzis, 1987, p. 53), receives medals of honour (Trivizas, 1995a, p. 117; Xanthoulis, 1993, p. 42), and makes important inventions (Bartzis, 1987, p. 90; Epaminondas, 1989, p. 37; Trivizas, 1995a, p. 20) that are admired by the supreme ruler (Trivizas, 1995a, p. 23) as well as by other men (Epaminondas, 1989, p. 38).

3.2 The profile of the woman as a citizen in the socio-economic environment

Regarding the female presence in socio-political life, women in theatrical plays for children do not enjoy the wide recognition of men, nor do they participate as much as men in political developments and social life. In particular, as far as social life is concerned, the woman does not participate actively, nor is she frequently present in public life. When she participates in social events, she is almost always escorted by her husband (Hatzopoulou-Karavia, 1987a, p. 106, 1987b, pp. 100–102, 1992a, pp. 112–113; Xanthoulis, 1994a, p. 11) or by other people very close to her (Valasi, 1995, p. 67). The only case where the woman is not escorted is when she escorts her child herself (Hatzopoulou-Karavia, 1992b, pp. 100–101). The woman never appears alone, and most of the time, she does not even have a name. Instead, she stands beside her husband, defined by him: for example, she is the wife of the Mayor (Xanthoulis, 1994a, p. 12) who takes care of all procedural matters when her husband is in the centre of attention (Xanthoulis, 1994a, p. 13). Occasionally, the female figure, anonymous again, bears the husband's family name as a title of honour. Therefore, in public appearances, the wife stands beside her husband as "*Mrs. Fourfouridou*" (Xanthoulis, 1994a, p. 11), "*Mrs. Talpa*" (Hatzopoulou-Karavia, 1992a, p. 51), or simply "*his wife*" (Hatzopoulou-Karavia, 1987a, p. 106).

Moreover, the woman has no social circle. She has no other friends but a female neighbour (Xanthoulis, 1994b, p. 39) or some lady with whom she speaks on the phone (Hatzopoulou-Karavia, 1992b, p. 53), while even in public events, she only seems to know and greet her neighbours, and the people involved in her trivial daily routine (Hatzopoulou-Karavia, 1987a, p. 101; Xanthoulis, 1994a, p. 11). The only more active participation of the female figure in a social event is in one of the theatrical research works when a female figure (*the Shrimp*) makes a speech in honour of a little girl (Xanthoulis, 1993, p. 75).

Along the same spirit, in the theatrical texts for children, women are not much aware of international affairs, and even more, many of them have never travelled: "*But most of us have never left our village. Where are we going to go in the dark?*" (Papakou, 1987, p. 28). Perhaps that is the reason why we do not find them commenting on events concerning, for example, the political situation of the local area. However, we do find them commenting on social events (Papakou, 1987, p. 15; Xanthoulis, 1994a, p. 11) concerning some people from their own individual surroundings. Similarly, they are not involved in organizing associations or unions unless this concerns their role as mothers. Thus, women are found to participate in the parents' and guardians' school union or in other clubs related to their children's schools (Papakou, 1987, p. 28).

An exception to the above female image is the "*fairly granny*", the grandmother of a girl named Anna, who is the text's main character (Xanthoulis, 1994a, p. 71). Little Anna's grandmother is not alive anymore, but Anna imagines that she lives on the rooftops. This particular grandmother has friends (Xanthoulis, 1994a, pp. 31, 48, 66), makes visits (Xanthoulis, 1994a, p. 31), is very social, and is loved by all those living on the rooftops (Xanthoulis, 1994a, p. 34). It should be noted that in the text, it is stated that this is happening not in reality but in the world of fantasy, a world in which things can be reversed. Hence, when little Anna, the main character of the play, asks her grandmother if all that actually happened, the grandmother answers that this world "*exists in our imagination*" (Xanthoulis, 1994a, p. 78).

Therefore, in their overwhelming majority, women appear socially isolated and mostly detached politically and economically. Thus, when the daughter of the lost master marries a poor young man, the world immediately expresses their admiration for him and chooses *him* to become their governor and not the woman who was the master's daughter (Antonakou, 1992, pp. 38–39). Only in one case, we have a reference to a woman with political power (the "*Mayor Lady*" as she is characteristically called), and in this play, she is blamed for not doing her job properly and for not creating a park for the children to play in (Delonis, 1985, p. 15).

As far as the labor market is concerned, the theatrical texts seem to represent women in their traditional roles, mainly as housewives that do not work outside the house. When the woman works, she is involved in the occupation of low social status and low income or, at best, in traditionally female professions (e.g., teacher).

There is no reference to any woman enjoying social recognition, and especially in some texts, the female figures are universally disliked (Xanthoulis, 1993, pp. 54, 55, 70, 71, 1994b, p. 13). Even in the newspapers, when something is written for a female figure,

this is negative (Xanthoulis, 1993, p. 54). Contrary to men, no woman ever receives praise, medals, awards, or other recognition for her work.

4. Conclusion

Quality children's literature is a stimulus for thought provoking and the creation of perceptions and attitudes toward social phenomena (Kelin, 2007, p. 284; Rainer & Walters, 2014). Theatrical texts for children form a significant sort of literature for juveniles since they provide a highly attractive and effective type of educational material, allowing education through dramatization, hence learning by experience (Drew & Pedersen, 2012; Flynn, 2007; Harvey & Goudvis, 2007; Mastrothanasis & Kladaki, 2022; Ratliff, 1999; Schonmann, 2001; Young et al., 2020; Young & Rasinski, 2009, 2018).

The analysis of the social, political, and economic activities of fictional characters in theatrical plays for children shows that the man is the person that holds power in his hand, takes political decisions, and actively participates in social and economic life. He has the personality of a leader and controls all kinds of developments. On the contrary, women are detached from any political decision or dynamic economic activity.

Despite the gradual but spectacular developments with respect to gender equality, the Greek theatrical books under review insist on portraying women only as mothers and housewives, suppressing women's dynamic presence in the modern socio-political and economic environment. In that way, these books do not help to depict the modern identity of woman, portraying her as a second category citizen, who does not participate in developments, but stoically suffers following other people's decisions. As a result, it is expected that children learn as a natural thing for a woman to depend economically on her husband, trying –mostly unsuccessfully– to reconcile her children's needs and the household with some social life restricted in her neighborhood in a political and economic environment that she does no influence at all.

Taking into consideration the results of international research (Göthberg et al., 2018; Grammatas et al., 2011; Kladaki, 2011; Papadopoulou, 2010; Tsiaras, 2012) which show that the standards demonstrated by literature in general and theatrical plays in particular exercise a substantial influence to the children's self-esteem, we observe that girls, seeing the gender standards demonstrated in the books under examination, learn that, contrary to boys, they may not excel or do something memorable and, most importantly, they form an inner negative image for their own sex.

The basic objective and care of those working for equality are not to prove that all people do care identically. The aim is not to create people with the same feelings, characteristics, beliefs, and political opinions, nor people with predefined future characteristics based on some predetermined criterion, whether it is gender, ethnicity, race, etc. The target is to have individuals that have equal rights, equal opportunities, and the freedom to make decisions and choices. From this aspect, children's theatre "must" not adhere to a rationale that intentionally perpetuates predefined stereotypical concepts but should contribute to the formation of accomplished personalities that promote the basic principles of equality (Kladaki, 2013; Kladaki & Fokiaki, 2013; Mastrothanasis & Grammatas, 2022). In effect, this is the role of art, and especially art addressed to children: to create bridges bringing human beings to bring them closer to each other and to highlight the differences that do not separate men and women but act in an attempt to find paths of cooperation and respect.

5. Limitations and future research

Gender representations in Hellenic dramatic texts during the period 1985-1995 require males and females to comply with the traditional concepts of masculinity and femininity, which no longer fit in modern Greek society. Therefore, new research is needed on dramatic texts published from 1995 to today to see if the stereotypes projected remain the same or have changed in the context of the socio-political changes that have been made to the Greek social contexts. As the Hellenic society is changing, it is the natural law that backward attitudes are discarded and replaced by progressive ones.

The current research is limited in the aspect that the scope of the study is restricted within the boundary of the dramatic texts during a specific time period. In future research, these limitations can be overcome, and comparative studies will emerge which will reveal how and in which direction gender representations and stereotypes have changed. New concepts of masculinity and femininity should allow and encourage both males and females to freely develop their potential and personalities. In these new concepts, males should feel their masculine side in caring for their family members and sharing housework. Females should be respected and encouraged to strive for high social positions. Eliminating Confucian ideologies which downplay females as well as constructing females as the "self" help to bring female identity and perspectives into focus.

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