

‘The Bells Are Ringing for Me and My Gal’: Marriage and Gender in the Contemporary Greek Romantic Comedy

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Abstract: This article takes a comparative approach to the Greek romantic comedy, a genre whose popularity in the 21st century coincided with a resurgence of its Hollywood counterpart. The goal is to study the ideologies of gender in the representation of weddings and of marriage through textual analysis of the three most commercially successful Greek romantic comedies of the new millennium: *The Kiss of Life (To Fili tis... Zois)*, 2007; *Just Broke Up (Molis Horisa)*, 2008; and *S.E.X. (Soula Ela Xana)*, 2009.

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Recent academic work on Hollywood romcoms of the past and present has demonstrated how such films encode significant meanings concerning gender politics, in their plots, characterization, structure, and point-of-view (Harvey, Evans & Deleyto, Beach, Glitre, and Abbott & Jermyn, among others). This paper takes a comparable approach to the Greek romantic comedy, a genre whose popularity in the new millennium coincided with a resurgence of the genre in Hollywood. In particular, I will look at the way ideologies of gender play out in the representation of weddings and of marriage—two linked, but not identical narrative elements—in the three most commercially successful Greek romantic

comedies of the new millennium: *The Kiss of Life (To Fili tis... Zois)*, 2007; *Just Broke Up (Molis Horisa)*, 2008; and *S.E.X. (Soula Ela Xana)*, 2009.^[1]

Before I proceed with the analysis, let me briefly shed some light on the virtually unknown landscape of the Greek romantic comedy, placing the discussion which will follow in a clearer context. (Greek cinematography in general has rarely been explored in the international scholarly bibliography, and the situation is even worse for this particular genre.^[2]) The apogee of the Greek romantic comedy took place during the heyday of the popular Greek cinema of the late 1950s and 1960s. During this decade, films such as *Maiden's Cheek*, *Alice in the Navy*, *I Liza kai I Alli*, *Modern Cinderella*, *Miss Director*, and *Jenny, Jenny* were constantly placed in the domestic box office top ten (Valoukos, 577-81). Most of these films were vehicles for the female stars Aliko Vougiouklaki and Jenny Karezi, but their female focus was hardly feminist; rather, the films served to perpetuate stereotypical images of femininity, upholding the social status quo. As Greek film scholar Athena Kartalou has argued, in films of this era "professional and gender identities of women interact with each other in such a way that good performance in one domain presupposes and/or imposes incompetence and/or crisis in the other" (4-5). If the stars of these romantic comedies appear as strong working women at the start of the film, in the end these women trade in that "good performance" in the professional world for a more appropriate "performance" of femininity in the context of romance, subdued by male authority in the form of love and a marriage proposal.

The emergence of the New Greek Cinema in the 1970s temporarily displaced the romcom as a genre. Films of this era were often explicitly political, and their experiments with form and narrative resisted the conventional (and commercial) appeal of Old Greek Cinema. Resisted it, one might say, all too successfully: unlike the popular films that preceded them, these new films did not manage to attract a comparable audience to the theatres, eventually sending the Greek film industry into something of a crisis. By 1989/1990, only six new releases made their way to the theatres (Valoukos, 594): an unsustainable situation, and one to which Greek filmmakers responded, in part, by reintroducing the romcom.

The second wave of Greek romcoms, which began in the mid- to late-1990s, started by taking a curiously tentative or resistant approach to the genre. As I have argued at length elsewhere, Olga Malea's *The Cow's Orgasm*, *The Mating Game*, and *Rizoto*, which reintroduced the genre to a Greek audience, offered a rather cynical take on love, going so far as to avoid the word "love" and the talismanic phrase "I love you" almost completely. As a result, they failed to exude an atmosphere of romanticism, fantasy and heterosexual companionship, which is a fundamental aspect of the genre (2011). (Perhaps this is part of the reason that Malea is still considered more an "auteur" than a commercial director, despite her box office success.)

The new millennium, however, has witnessed a return to more traditional, upbeat, and Hollywood-like romcoms—and, with them, a commercial renaissance in domestic cinematography. For the first time in decades, Greek films have managed to compete quite successfully with such heavily-promoted American "opponents" as *Ocean's Thirteen*, *Quantum of Solace*, *Sex and the City*, and *X-Men Origins: Wolverine*. In the case of the Greek romcoms I will examine, this commercial appeal seems due to their ability to combine the main structural elements of the American romcom genre with details of plot, structure, and characterization that speak to the films' specifically Greek social and cultural context—and,

in the process, to issues of gender that are playing out somewhat differently in contemporary Greece than they are in the United States.[\[3\]](#)

The Wedding Cycle

According to Rick Altman, a genre film is a narrative with specific semantic and syntactic elements that are shared, at least to a certain extent, by all the films that belong to the same “family.” The semantic elements may comprise common plots, key scenes, character types, familiar objects, or recognizable shots and sounds while the syntactic elements refer to plot structure, character relationships, or image and sound montage (224). If we apply Altman’s theory to the romantic comedy, we can easily recognize that the semantic “ingredients” include a white, middle to upper class, heterosexual male and a white, middle to upper class, heterosexual female, and an urban environment, while the syntax usually follows different versions of the notorious boy-meets-girl, boy-loses-girl, boy-gets-girl-in-the-end scenario. Naturally, these structural elements undergo changes according to the social context of any given film; as Altman jokes, genres did not “spring full-blown from the head of Zeus” (218). Contemporary Greek romantic comedies may keep the structural elements intact (the heterosexual central couple, the obstacles, and the happy ending), but they update the conventional formula by adapting to their specific social environment.

One set of adaptations centers on marriage, both as a lived social institution and as part of the cultural imaginary. Again, some background may be helpful, this time starting in the United States. American writer and actress Rita Rudner has quipped that “In Hollywood, a marriage is a success if it outlasts milk,” but although this quote may ring true if we count the speed with which the vast majority of stars discard and/or change their legal spouses, contemporary Hollywood films often idealize the institution of marriage, perhaps even more so now than at some periods in the past. Romcoms that question what happens after the happily-ever-after end credits are rarer now than they were in the 1930s and 1940s, the heyday of what Stanley Cavell has called the “comedies of remarriage.” [\[4\]](#) And even films such as *Just Married*, *Trust the Man*, *Marley & Me*, and *Couples Retreat*, which highlight the ways that a couple in trouble tackles different obstacles within a marriage, end up offering robust, sentimental affirmations of marriage as an institution *worth* struggling for. This affirmation reflects what one might call an American return to marriage, since in the United States divorce rates “abruptly stopped going up around 1980” and have since fallen, particularly among college-educated women (Hurley). No wonder the climactic scenes of twenty-first century romcoms so often take place in front of the altar or in a Town Hall, with the films thus visibly affirming the public nature of what might otherwise be a private, couple-centered declaration of eternal love.

Between 2001 and 2010, many of the most commercially successful American romcoms took this emphasis on the public nature of marriage one step further. The plots of such films as *The Proposal*, *Sex & The City*, *27 Dresses*, *Made of Honor*, *Bride Wars*, and *Enchanted* revolved, not just around marriage, but around a long-awaited or even unwanted wedding *ceremony*, a ceremony whose primary importance is not religious but consumerist, a matter of material culture. The central focus of these films seems as much

about finding and/or showcasing the perfect venue for the reception, the right dress, or the right cake as it is about finding Mr. or Mrs. Right.^[5] Film scholars have explored how “cycles” emerge within a given film genre, a practice in which the industry capitalizes “on the (often unexpected) success of a film that offers a new twist on an old genre” (Glitre 20) by producing subsequent films marked by what Rick Altman calls “common features” such as “subject matter, character types, plot patterns,” thus gradually “associating a new type of material or approach with already existing genres” (60). In effect, the films I have noted mark the emergence of a “wedding cycle” within the romantic comedy genre.^[6]

Like cycles in other genres, the wedding cycle seems “influenced by the specific cultural situation—a moment at which a genre’s tropes seem particularly resonant” (Glitre 20).^[7] In these films, not only do love and marriage remain “indissolubly linked” (Evans & Deleyto 6), as has long been traditional in the romcom, but both of them are unmistakably linked to an idealized version of consumer culture. The perfect wedding that the wedding-cycle heroine longs for is the utopian site in which her individual agency as a liberal subject in the capitalist marketplace can be reconciled with her romantic selfhood as a woman in love. Sociologist Eva Illouz has argued that “consuming the romantic utopia” (as the title of her study calls it) is a characteristic ideal among postmodern lovers; the prominence of the wedding ceremony and reception in the wedding cycle romcom signals just how “resonant” (Glitre 20) these issues of choice, money, and female sociality now seem to be, at least in the American context.

What, though, of the contemporary Greek romcom, and the Greek context? The three films I wish to discuss, *The Kiss of Life*, *Just Broke Up* and *S.E.X.* might be said to belong to various “cycles” within the genre of romantic comedy—as, indeed one could also argue about the above-mentioned six American productions, since cycles are not exclusive entities). For instance, *Bride Wars* is about how two best friends (Kate Hudson and Anne Hathaway) fight over the coveted venue of their wedding and can also be characterized as a “female friendship” film while *Sex and The City* can also belong to the emerging “mature cycle” of the Hollywood romcom genre since all of its heroines are in their early to late forties.^[8] How can the theorist, then, determine his/her object of analysis? Roman Jakobson’s theory of the “dominant” offers the answer to this theoretical dilemma. According to the Russian formalist, “The dominant may be defined as the focusing component of a work of art: it rules, determines, and transforms the remaining components.” It is “the element which specifies a given variety of language [or any narrative element,] dominates the entire structure and thus acts as its mandatory and inalienable constituent dominating all the remaining elements and exerting direct influence upon them” (751).

Therefore, given how emphatically these films use marriage as a narrative cardinal function which “dominates” the whole plot—and given their shared emphasis on the significance of the wedding *per se*—I will consider them as Greek instances and transformations of the “wedding cycle.” In them, the desire for marriage and the obstacles which have to be overcome before the wedding proposal or the ceremony can be seen to comment on “resonant” tropes in Greek culture; in this case, gender representations which are well worth examining. Altman (26) underlines that “Film genres are *functional* for their society. Whereas producers and exhibitors see genre films as ‘product’, critics increasingly recognize their role in a complex cultural system permitting viewers to consider and resolve (albeit fictively) contradictions that are not fully mastered by the society in which

they live.” In other words, the insistence of the three Greek rom coms on the importance of the institution of marriage may constitute a reflection, a justification, and/or a solution regarding specific societal “contradictions” in contemporary Greece.

One of these “contradictions” may have to do with the tension between the returning popularity of domestically-produced American-style romantic comedy and the actual facts of romantic life in Greece. According to the Hellenic Statistical Authority, the divorce rate in Greece has been steadily on the increase, reaching 24% in 2005 from 8% in the 1980s. Not only does this mean that one in four marriages will eventually be dissolved in a courtroom; it means that the Greek trajectory (in terms of marriage / divorce statistics) is exactly the opposite of the American one, and has been for some time. It is not surprising, then, that the films I will explore take a more divided, even ambivalent approach to the “wedding cycle” than their American counterparts, mixing progressive and conservative elements in ways that make the endings of the films (which tend to be conservative) seem oddly in contrast with material elsewhere.

To Fili tis...Zois [Kiss of Life]

Consider, first, the contradictions at work in *Kiss of Life*. The Greek title of this romcom, *To Fili tis... Zois*, already signals one of the film’s central tensions. “*Zois*,” here, refers to the female heroine, Zoi (Katerina Papoutsaki), whose name is also the Greek word for life—but as the ironic ellipsis signals, the “kiss of life” here is also, potentially, a “kiss of death,” since *Zoi/Life* begins the film as a ruthless contract killer. Independent and uninhibited, Zoi does not like marriage since she “doesn’t want to share the bed with someone or have to sleep first not to hear him snore,”^[9] a multiple inversion of gender expectations. We see a similar inversion in the hero, Pashalis (Laertis Malkotsis), a sweet and harmless agriculturist who, as the film begins, is getting married in three days on the island of Milos. Pashalis accidentally finds himself on a boat to Sifnos with no way of getting back because of a strike and his fear of flying. The film depicts Pashalis as a kind and sensitive man who is not afraid to cry and lives to makes his future bride happy; when Zoi spots him on the boat to Sifnos, she sees him as the perfect cover she needs in order to assassinate the influential magnate Anestis (Themis Anastasiadis).

As the film proceeds, however, these initial reversals begin to shift, and the film’s ambivalent impulses become more and more evident. The first shift concerns Zoi. When her first assassination attempt fails, with Pashalis accidentally saving the magnate’s life, the two find themselves guests of Anestis and his beautiful wife Sofia (Zeta Douka). Zoi begins to feel attracted to the clumsy and naïve Pashalis, who is constantly trying to find a way to get back to Milos and marry Anthoula (Parthena Horozidou), his betrothed. The film invites us to attribute her willingness to succumb to a summer romance with Pashalis—a romance that could upset her professional plans—to several factors: the natural beauty of Sifnos and of Anestis’ house, which provides a utopian, liminal setting conducive to romance (see Illouz 142-45); to the apparently loving and companionate marriage between Anestis and Sofia, which seems, at least at first, to be an alternative to the negative model of marriage Zoi has espoused (Sofia shows her love by caring about her husband’s diet and health and Anestis treats her with understanding and affection); and, ultimately, to the alternative

model of masculinity provided by Pashalis himself. In such contexts, the film suggests, even as hard-edged a woman as Zoi might well soften her stance against love.

However, as the film reaches its climax, this mildly progressive narrative breaks down. Zoi discovers that it was Sofia that had initially hired her to assassinate her husband as she (mistakenly) believed he was responsible for her father's death. Their marriage comes into focus as the cliché of the rich man with a trophy wife, "recasting" Sofia, in a sense, as the classic noir film's *femme fatale*. Sofia's final apology and explanation to Zoi, although sincere and heartfelt, does not persuade the spectator that hers was ever a marriage based on mutual respect, trust and companionship: a failure that would seem to validate Zoi's initial negative feelings regarding the institution. Yet rather than revert to that initial suspicion, Zoi remains committed to love—and the reason the film offers is that Pashalis, too, has changed. Kind and sensitive he may be, but the more we hear his fiancée, Anthoula, screaming and threatening him on the phone, furious that he has not found a way to return for their wedding, the more these qualities in Pashalis seem weak, repressed, and emasculated. He acts, we sense, more out of a sense of duty than out of love. We thus approve when he starts having feelings for the sensual and dangerous Zoi, the complete opposite of Anthoula—indeed, in the only scene where Anthoula appears, an aborted wedding ceremony on a little boat, she is a plain, overweight woman with not even a line of dialogue—and are meant to cheer when he finally becomes more properly "masculine," decisively calling off his wedding to Anthoula by jumping off the boat in the middle of their ceremony, an act that also shows that he has overcome his earlier fear of the sea.

This newfound or restored masculinity is not, I hasten to add, accompanied by traditional alpha-male qualities. Pashalis remains a plain-looking, low-income, kind and sensitive man who simply wants to spend the rest of his life with Zoi. (Perhaps he has one alpha quality: a newfound willingness to claim what is "his.") But the film presents Zoi as oddly eager to ascribe male "authority" to him, as though she fundamentally longed for a return to some properly "feminine" identity. Even though she does not accept Pashalis' marriage proposal, she does agree to start a new life with him on the island where they first met, and the last scene finds the couple in front of a little church—a sign of their eventual formal, legal union. Even more telling, Zoi's confession to the magnate's wife, Sofia, that "once she met a bad guy who taught her a bad job" reduces her to a woman who was always already submissive to male authority, and never an independent individual in her own right. Zoi's white dress in this final scene, which reminds us of the color of a traditional wedding dress, thus connotes her return to an innocent and honest life, a sort of metaphorical "virginity" that might have been taken from her by that "bad guy," but has now been restored to her, just in time for her to step into traditional roles as wife and mother: roles implied earlier by Pashalis, and never refuted by her, and roles which make her unequivocally a figure of life (*Zoi*) and not death (a *femme fatale*).

Molis Xorisa [Just Broke Up]

It's hard to get more old-fashioned, traditional, and conventional than the Valentine's Day setting and release-date of *Molis Xorisa [Just Broke Up]*. As in the United States, this holiday has come to represent in Greece the pinnacle of romantic fantasy and

promises of eternal love: the perfect setting for a romantic narrative, or for a narrative that will explore the mass culture of romantic love. This connection is reinforced by a plot device: February 14 is also the birthday of the film's heroine, Electra (Zeta Makripoulia). Adapted from a successful stage comedy from 1999, *Just Broke Up* resembles a fast-paced seventeenth-century farce *à la française*, characterized like these by "a mixture of skillfully used doses of the comical and the real," as well as an assortment of recognizable and stereotypical character types (Lagarde & Michard 181).

The opening sequence of the film introduces us to several of these farcical features. As the story begins, Electra has been with her DJ boyfriend Petros (Giannis Tsimitselis) for six and a half years. Stereotypically panicked regarding the prospect of marriage, Petros dreams he is married to Electra and has three children, waking up in a horrified sweat. His fears are not entirely unfounded, since Electra's birthday starts, for her, with a positive pregnancy test: playing again to stereotype, the film renders this as something that makes her deliriously happy. As she waits impatiently to break the news to Petros in the club he works, she dreams of her future married life. Unbeknownst to her, however, Petros has decided to break up with her by leaving a message on their answering machine. When her friends and mother come over to throw her a surprise party, they inadvertently hear Petros' message and comically try to prevent Electra from learning the truth.

The English title of *Just Broke Up* might well remind us of the American production *The Break-Up*, a film with rather somber overtones about relationships that deals in-depth with a break-up and its implications, in the tradition of such films as *Breaking Up* and *The Story of Us*. The Greek film, however, has no interest in social or romantic realism. Mixing verbal gags with an Almodovar-influenced set and costume design—a visual vocabulary characterized by the use of vivid and clashing colors, as well as extravagant and/or eccentric costumes^[10]—*Just Broke Up* is overtly stylized, extravagant, even almost campy in its deployment of gender roles and romantic tropes. From the start, for example, Electra is presented as a modern female control freak. She leaves notes to all her friends in the building dictating what presents she wants, she instructs Petros to dedicate a specific song to her on the radio and she walks around the streets of Athens fantasizing about her wedding day. Despite her being financially independent, she is portrayed as a "closeted" housewife who craves for a family more than anything else and states that if ever Petros left her she would jump off the balcony and onto the street. Indeed, when she finally hears the break-up message, she dresses in black and plays the part of the tragic heroine connoted by her name.^[11]

In what sense, then, does *Just Broke Up* belong to the "wedding cycle"? Certainly the film is structured by the viewer's desire for Petros to realize that Electra is "the one" and by Electra's desire, within the film, for the wedding that will give the same public, institutional, and conventional form to their relationship that Valentine's Day gives to romantic love more generally. And, indeed, the film does move towards closure with that much-anticipated recognition on the part of Petros, with a final confrontation, and with the couple's decision to wed in a highly public forum: one of the main streets of Athens. But the film reserves two surprises for its end sequence. Accompanied on the soundtrack by a new remix of a 1974 Greek hit song about the joy of an impending wedding ceremony, the audience witnesses all the characters getting ready for a wedding—but the married couple getting out of the city hall is not Petros and Electra but two gay friends of theirs, Mitsos and Vitor. This gay wedding—which is not yet legal in Greece—seems a welcome subversion in

an otherwise conservative film: indeed, it reinforces our sense that there is something campy or queer about the heterosexual romance we have witnessed so far. What might potentially have been an interesting social critique of Greek conservatism, however, is abruptly interrupted when Electra shouts that she's in labor, trumping the romantic union of Mitsos and Victor with the "real," biological union of Electra and Petros. We may not actually witness the hero's and heroine's ceremony, but we are left with the expectation that this couple's wedding will coincide with the Orthodox baptism of the child: a common practice in the domestic celebrity culture of the last decade, and a two-fold reinforcement of precisely the conservative values that might otherwise seem satirized by the film.

S.E.X (Soula Come Back)

Of the three Greek "wedding cycle" films, only *S.E.X.* centers explicitly on the heroine's decision to wed. The initials in the title stand for *Soula Ela Xana (Soula Come Back)*; in the film, Soula (Zeta Makripoulia) is a beautiful elementary teacher who lives and works in Spetses, an island near Athens. On her 30th birthday, Soula unexpectedly receives presents from four ex-boyfriends, each accompanied by pleas for her to resume the relationship. The four men represent four stereotypically flawed male figures: Manolis (Memos Begnis) is the traditional mamma's boy, a type who is encountered in abundance in Greek society; Apostolis (Kostas Fragolias) represents the eternal Don Juan; Zisis (Manos Gavras) is the insanely jealous guy; and Tassos (Mihalis Marinou) the irritating scrooge. Unimpressed by the gifts (and the men they represent), she celebrates her birthday with her friend Vassilis ([Tzortzis Mouriadis](#)) with whom she shares rather skeptical views regarding marriage. Both find it oppressive and unnecessary, and both regard children a burden. Even as Vassilis leaves her to hit on a sexy woman, Soula seems content and self-sufficient, lighting the candles on her cake and blowing them out at a table surrounded by photos of her loved ones.

As in *Kiss of Life*, however, *S.E.X.* soon robs its heroine of her self-sufficiency. When Soula hears the take-out guy call her a spinster on the phone, she becomes obsessed with her need to get married: a reversal the film explains, in part, by having her re-read a set of letters she wrote to her deceased parents, in which she had promised to get married by the time she is thirty. Like Zoi, in *Kiss of Life*, Soula was thus *originally* a properly feminine subject, who needs only to be restored to that earlier status; she needs to "come back," as the film's full title suggests. However, like Electra, the control freak in *Just Broke Up*, Soula retains agency through much of the film, concocting a plan to take charge of her romantic life by inviting her four exes to the island, along with her two best girlfriends, in order to choose the man she will marry in two weeks. (She may have no choice in *whether* to marry, locked in by the past, but she ostensibly retains some choice as to *whom* she will marry, though even here the past plays what looks at first to be a determining role.)

For a substantial portion of the narrative, *S.E.X.* makes an effort to present the modern Greek woman as an independent individual: one who stands in sharp contrast with the weak, irresponsible, naïve, and sexually confused lead and secondary male characters. The portrayal of these "flaws"—however exaggerated—that Greek masculinity entails should not be easily dismissed, nor should the attribution to female characters of traits

mainly associated with masculinity. These include assertiveness, practicality, courage, inventiveness, and strength, but also sexual desire: a desire that the films seem to ascribe to the female members of their audience as well. Like *Just Broke Up*, that is to say, *S.E.X.* is not only narrated through a predominantly (here exclusively) female point of view, but that point of view is a desiring and even objectifying gaze, as the film contains numerous shots of half-naked and extremely fit male bodies for the heroine's and viewer's shared delectation.

As you might expect, the ending of *S.E.X.* unites Soula not with one of the four flawed "contestants," but with her best friend, Vassilis: the man who shared her reservations about marriage at the start of the film. Soula goes to the church to call everything off once she realizes a simple game is not the way to find her life companion, only to find Vassilis waiting for her in front of the building. He's confident she will not turn him down—which of course, she does not—but unlike the restoration of traditionally "masculine" confidence to Pashalis in *Kiss of Life*, which comes at a cost to Zoi, the end of *S.E.X.* emphasizes the commonality between the two, since as Vassilis stands waiting for Soula he holds her traditional bridal bouquet. The person Soula must "come back" to, in the end, is the one who was most like her at the start of the film, before the "spinster" insult, before her reading of the letters to her parents, and before her decision to marry *someone* for the sake of being married. It's notable in this context that the wedding ceremony itself is never shown onscreen, as though it had been displaced as a *telos*, however slightly, by the union of two characters who started the film as skeptics about the institution.

I do not wish to be unequivocally positive about the sexual politics of *S.E.X.* There is, after all, something odd in the fact that Soula ends up with a man she has not so much as kissed throughout the film, who needs neither to court her or win her "contest." But as the film ends, with all the characters singing and dancing happily during the end credits, it seems as though the film's assertions of female agency and desire—again, admittedly a limited, heteronormative, and hardly radical form—are meant to seem integrated quite comfortably into the broader social order. In the film's fantasy, precisely the characters who find marriage oppressive and unnecessary turn out to be its exemplary representatives.

As each of these films demonstrates, the ending of the contemporary Greek romantic comedy tends to reinscribe the genre's generally conservative nature. *The Kiss* ends near a picturesque white little chapel, *Just Broke Up* closes with the heroine going into labor and *S.E.X.* completes its circle with a song performed by the cast during what seems to be the couple's wedding reception: at a time of rising divorce rates, in these films religious marriage, procreative sex, and communal affirmation of the married couple are all, in some sense, affirmed. Yet if we take into account the full arc of each narrative, as I have tried to do, however briefly, here, we see that all three films also try to renegotiate gender identities. These efforts were not evident in Greek romantic comedies of the 1950s and '60s, nor are they the same engagement with "resonant" social and political issues that we see in contemporary American wedding-cycle romcoms, which tend to focus rather more on the relationships between romantic love and consumer culture.

Although romantic comedies are often discarded as escapist narratives with little depth, I subscribe to David R. Shumway's assumption "that these fictional narratives do in

fact teach readers and viewers even if they are often unaware of the lesson” (2-3). As I have already noted, “Film genres are *functional* for their society” Altman (26); in this case, the romcoms I discussed may well function by providing models of gender behavior and of relationships, which despite their fictional status may be consciously used by the spectator (see Anthony Giddens in Shumway 7). Certainly their happy endings validate the institution of marriage exactly at the time of its crisis in Greek society, and they do so by “teaching” (in Shumway’s sense) that marriage is on every woman’s agenda, however financially and emotionally independent she may be. Of course, as Shumway adds, “what individuals actually do with these various models [or relationships] differs” (5), and as yet, there are no ethnographic studies about how these film narratives are actually perceived. Still, it can be safely assumed that male and female spectators alike are invited to think about, revisit or even re-evaluate their own views regarding marriage and weddings, witnessing the joy that both the male and female protagonists exude in the final cinematic sequences. The contemporary Greek romcom can thus offer the scholar important insight regarding gender relations both diachronically and synchronically, and also a valuable window into how gender identities and romantic relationships are represented and negotiated cinematically in a transnational, twenty-first century context.

[1] The three films were not only the most commercial romantic comedies in their respective year of release but the most commercial Greek films irrespective of generic categories at the same time, grossing \$2,721,704, \$4,587,030, and \$2,151,669 respectively (boxofficemojo.com).

[2] Apart from the internationally acknowledged and awarded director Theo Angelopoulos, Greece is considered a country whose cinematography has little to offer. Suffice it to say that in Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell’s 778-page *Film History* (2003) the country is mentioned only once on page 559 in a larger segment of collective productions and militant films of the 1960s and early 1970s. The same reference is found in Geoffrey Nowell-Smith’s *The Oxford History of World Cinema* (1996) while in Douglas Gomery’s *Movie History* (1991) Greece is not mentioned at all. Only in Edward Buscombe’s *Cinema Today* (2003) and David A. Cook’s *A History of Narrative Film* (2004) does the mention in Greek Cinematography surpass the limits of a single phrase or one paragraph. Nevertheless, the domestic cinema has had a long history which is worth investigating. Drawing from Hollywood models but adapting them to the specific cultural context of each specific era, Greek filmmakers have dabbled in many genres (film noir, comedy, melodrama, musical, romantic comedy) while creating new genres that stemmed from unique socio-cultural roots. On the same note, it should also be mentioned that the Greek bibliography is also limited. The Greek romantic comedy, for instance, has not been the object of systematic scholarly examination with a few notable exceptions that mainly focus on films of the past (i.e. Maria Paradeisi (1993), Maria Stassinopoulou (1995), Elisa-Anna Delveroudi (1997), and Athena Kartalou (2000)).

[3] The three romantic comedies which constitute the focus of this essay were consequently placed in a difficult race. According to the boxoffice.mojo online database, in 2007, *The Kiss* had to compete with such blockbusters, as *300*, *The Pirates of the Caribbean: At World’s End*, *Spider-Man 3*, and *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*. Despite the fierce competition, it placed in the 10th position surpassing *Ocean’s Thirteen*, and *Shrek the Third*, gathering a little less than 3 million dollars which is a significant number in the

domestic landscape. *Just Broke Up* came in 3rd in 2008, surpassing such international successes as *Quantum of Solace*, *The Dark Knight*, *I Am Legend*, *Sex and the City* and *Iron Man*, while in 2009, *S.E.X.* came in 10th after *Angels & Demons* and *Twilight*, but “beating” *Up*, *X-Men Origins: Wolverine* and *Watchmen*. What these numbers prove is that despite the Hollywood supremacy, popular Greek films can easily attract the audience since they can relate to them on a more intimate level despite the mediocre reviews they usually receive by the Press which considers them unworthy of attention (see Dimitris Papamihos 2007, Alkistis Charsouli 2008, and Giannis Vassiliou 2009).

[4] In a corpus I have studied of approximately 200 romantic comedies from the new millennium, *Did You Hear About the Morgans?* and *Serious Moonlight* (both 2009) are among the few that belong to Cavell’s category.

[5] According to the boxofficemojo.com data, these six films grossed more than \$1,453,000 worldwide which is an impressive number if we consider that the most expensive film in this group, *Enchanted*, cost \$85 million.

[6] This observation is based on a corpus which includes more than 150 romantic comedies produced in the U.S.A. and released domestically and/or worldwide from 2001 to 2009 (Kaklamanidou 167-178).

[7] For instance, Glitre (20) argues that “the revival of ‘old-fashioned’ romantic comedy in the 1980s is hardly coincidental in a decade noted for its reactionary cultural and sexual politics (a situation exacerbated by the emergence of AIDS in 1981).”

[8] The new millennium romcom witnessed the birth of a new cycle which renegotiates gender roles through the representation of the mature “cougar” and/or divorced older woman. Films, such as *Under the Tuscan Sun*, 2003, *Prime*, 2005, *Trust the Man*, 2006, *Last Chance Harvey*, 2009, *Rebound*, 2010, among others, showcase how the mature female heroine enters a new life chapter, where romance is discovered, or re-discovered.

[9] All translations of dialogue, from this and the other films, are mine.

[10] For more on the unique use of color, décor and costume in Pedro Almodóvar’s body of work, see Mark Allinson (158-193).

[11] According to ancient Greek dramaturgy, Electra the daughter of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra convinced her brother Orestes to kill their mother and her lover to avenge their father’s murder by the illicit couple.

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Bride Wars (2008)
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Enchanted (2007)
Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix (2007)
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I Liza kai I Alli (1961)
Iron Man (2008)
Jenny, Jenny (1965)
Last Chance Harvey (2009)
Made of Honor (2008)
Maiden's Cheek (1959)
Miss Director (1964)
Modern Cinderella (1964)
Molis Horisa (2008)
Ocean's Thirteen (2007)
Prime (2005)
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Rizoto (2000).
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Serious Moonlight (2009)
Sex & The City (2008)
Shrek the Third (2007)
Spider-Man 3 (2007)

The Break-Up (2006)
The Cow's Orgasm (1996)
The Dark Knight (2008)
The Mating Game (1998)
The Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End (2007)
The Proposal (2009)
The Story of Us (1999)
To Fili Tis Zois (2007)
Trust the Man (2006)
Twilight (2009)
Under the Tuscan Sun (2003)
Up (2009)
Watchmen (2009)
X-Men Origins: Wolverine (2009)