Analyzing a song to a sparrow: ‘I’m for you the girl, you’re for me the joy’

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For example:

§0. I analyze here a song that is visualized inside a very short video-audio fragment taken from a Greek film made in 1960. (I thank my friends Lucia Athanassaki and Ewen Bowie for introducing me to this film.) I say “fragment” here because the micro-story that is being told by the song, within the compressed space of only a little over two minutes, 2:16, is detached here from the macro-story of the film that envelops it. And what is the subject of this micro-story? The answer depends on seeing and hearing the performance of the story in song. The story is in the song, which is meant to be sung by a girl to a sparrow.

§1. The scene for the singing of this song is a typical Greek smoke-filled taverna—not exactly so typical, since we are about to see on our right a silent chorus of children sitting on the floor, visually separated from the adults we already see on our left, sitting there at their tables and preoccupied with their drinking and eating and talking to each other. All of a sudden, a pretty young woman—she is the singer Aliki Vougiouklaki—jumps up from her chair, thus individuating herself from the other adult women and men sitting at their tables. In a youthful burst of manic energy, Aliki is seen heading for a makeshift stage—not a raised stage but merely an empty space on the level floor. This space comes between the adults and the children, and it is situated right in the middle of our viewing screen. Here in this space in between, Aliki will sing her song. Aliki herself is perfectly in-between: we can already see that this pretty adult woman has the face of a child and, as she starts singing, we can hear that she has the voice of a child. Staged in-between, Aliki can sing to all—not only to her makeshift audience of adults and children inside the taverna, and not only to us on the outside, as we see and hear the video-audio, but also to a solitary little sparrow that is also somewhere on the outside. But where on the outside?

§2. Here we come to the story as it is told in the song. I give here the basic facts about the song itself.

Title of the song: "Spourgitáki mou" (Σπουργιτάκι μου; ‘My little sparrow’)
From the film To klotsoskōufi (Το κλωτσοσκόυφι; ‘Kickscap’), 1960, directed by Dinos Dimópoulos (Ντίνος Δημόπουλος).

Music by Mános Hadjidákis (Μάνος Χατζιδάκης), libretto by Álekos Sakellários (Αλέκος Σακελλάριος) and Christos Giannakópoulos (Χρήστος Γιαννακόπουλος).

singing role: Aliki Vougiouklaki (Αλίκη Βουγιουκλάκη)
accompanied by Τρίο Καντσόνε

§2. Here are some sites for the video-audio:
§3. Here is the text of the song Σπουργιτάκι μου 'My little sparrow', followed by my working translation:

**TRANSLATION**

Upon seeing this frozen little thing,
seeing you through the window,
I find that I am a little like you.

Here is a little sparrow,
a solitary little wanderer.
Through my window I see my little one,
the sparrow, the poor thing.

Little sparrow, the moment I take just one look at you,
as you’re shivering there in the nastiness of the snow,
I find that, just a little bit, I’m like you.
I’m feeling, with you, the same freezing cold.

My tiny little sparrow, c’mon,
let’s spread, the two of us, our wings.
I’m for you the girl,
and you’re for me the joy.

Little sparrow, the moment I take just one look at you,
as you’re shivering there in the nastiness of the snow,
I find that, just a little bit, I’m like you.
I’m feeling, with you, the same freezing cold.

But now spring is here,
filled with light and joy.
My tiny little sparrow, c’mon,
let’s spread, the two of us, our wings,

Tsiou tsiou tsiou sings the soloist of the freezing cold.
He trembles and ruffles his feathers.
Through my window I see my little one,
the sparrow, the poor thing.

§4. The words of this song bring the story to life. A girl, who is 'I', starts singing these words to a sparrow, who is 'you', as she looks out through her window and sees the poor little thing shivering in the freezing
cold out there—but he bravely keeps on singing his little song, tsiou tsiou tsiou, in the wide open space outside, while she is singing her song in the warmth of her narrow space inside. The empathy felt by the girl for the boy sparrow, where she starts feeling what he feels, leads to her wish: we should both spread our wings and fly together. We are the perfect match: 'I'm for you the girl, and you're for me the joy.'

§5. In the story of the song as retold in the film, the empathy between girl on the inside and bird on the outside cannot be adequately visualized. Such a visual limitation is understandable. For the maker of the film, the bird was too small to be viewed, especially from the outside, and so a rooster in the inside would have to do. As a further kind of compensation for the outsider who is pictured in the song, we see in the film a moon-faced little boy pressing his nose against the window from the outside. He is avidly peering at the pretty girl as she performs her song inside the taverna. I say the boy is peering, not leering, since he is only a child, after all. If the boy were a man, though, we would be forced to say that the act of peeping through the window here would in fact be a clear case of leering, not just peering. And there would be plenty to leer at, since the body language of Alíki could be seen as sensuous, even erotic, if only she weren't so disarmingly childlike in her looks and even in her voice. And here we come to yet another kind of compensation: the sauciness of the little sparrow who is pictured in the song is replaced here in the film by the sauciness of Alíki herself. We see her in the act of mimicking an opening of her wings as she spreads her delicate arms wide apart and flutters her fingers—all this while perched on a chair, straddling it with legs spread wide apart. Meanwhile, a pensive little girl is seen looking wistfully aside, smiling a knowing smile, almost in embarrassment.

Tags: Álekos Sakellários, Alíki Vougoukláki, Chrístos Giannakópoulos, Dínos Dimópoulos, Mános Hadjidákis, To klotsośkoúfi, Σπουργιτάκι μου, Τρίο Καντόνε

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