

Frangoyannou, like many of Papadiamandis's characters, leaves the reader mystified, uncertain as to how to view her actions. Monstrous in her atrocities yet human in her fear, she embodies the vulnerability of the human condition. Her readiness to be deceived by the power of evil presenting itself as good stands in contradiction to her desire to collaborate and work with the powers of nature, a desire inherited from her mother's masterly use of the magic arts. Her mother emulates the Dryads, nymphs who inhabit the trees; she hides in the hollow trunk of an old pine tree when pursued by some brigands and 'the Dryads . . . whom she perhaps invoked in her spells, protected her, blinding her pursuers and throwing a green mist, a verdant darkness over their sight.' It is from her mother, who 'jumped out of the bushes and fled like a frightened dove with the fluttering of her wide white sleeves', and 'leaped like a deer from bush to bush, barefoot', that she has inherited her affinity with the natural world. Like the Green Man in England and on the Continent, she is a wild relic from an ancient past, an aspect of the pagan natural world that remains untamed and unredeemed by Christianity.

Frangoyannou's familiarity with the earth's secrets is not only revealed through her knowledge of herbs, of the ancient paths carved across the mountains, of all the cavities and hollows and fissures of the earth and the sea caves where the seals take refuge, the trees sheltering the nymphs and fairies, the cliffs and wild places that are the home of eagles and hawks, but also through her kinship with this pristine aspect of the natural world — her nimbleness in climbing rocks, her harmony with the earth, sea and sky, with everything that moves and breathes around her. It is for all these reasons that her accompanying capacity to destroy turns her into an entirely paradoxical and antinomical being, resembling the forces of nature which can equally create and destroy with a benevolent grace and an indifferent cruelty, defying judgement, moving beyond the realms of innocence and guilt.

Papadiamandis charts the course of her life, its ambivalence and self-deception, faithfully and realistically recording events, but never

bringing judgement upon her person. He does the same with regard to her attempts to carve out some form of salvation. The incentive for her attempts remains nebulous and unclear throughout the events unfolded in the story. After murdering her own granddaughter, her first crime, she goes through all the external signs of a repentant sinner — extreme fasting, frequent attendance at church services, deep prostrations — but she keeps postponing the confirmation of her change of heart through the redeeming act of confession. Even when her pursuers are closing in, her decision to seek mercy by appealing to divine justice is tainted by the hope of being smuggled out of the hermitage and delivered to rescuers by the compassionate elder. Just like her predecessors long ago who sought refuge at the altar of an ancient deity, her ultimate motivation for going to the hermitage is to secure divine sanction and protection.

True to his undertaking to present Frangoyannou in all her humanity, the author leaves the question of her salvation open ended. In this also he differs from Dostoyevsky, who makes Raskolnikov go through many stages in his progress to salvation. Punishment is the predictable resolution of Raskolnikov's sin, one based on cause and effect which subjects him to a whole process set in motion by the crime itself, progresses to guilt magnified by fear, and from there to an inner struggle leading to repentance, confession, and redemption. The onus is put on his person to assume the responsibility of his crime and invoke the mercy of God through concrete acts of reconciliation with his divine will. Antithetically, Papadiamandis portrays Frangoyannou in her descent to darkness in the sea cave as unable to reconcile herself with God. She avoids personal responsibility for her actions, even though it is she herself who has set up the parameters within which those actions can be interpreted as being for the common good, imposing her own will on God by asserting her power over creation and taking pleasure, that 'savage joy', in taking life. She is even willing to twist her confessor's words and the teachings of the Church to support her own reasoning; but paradoxically, by following this warped logic, she is fleeing to her