

Creative writing in the Correctional Institution: a Greek example

Escritura Creativa en la Institución Correccional: un ejemplo en Grecia

L'escriptura creativa a la Institució Correccional: un exemple grec

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Abstract

Creative writing is a field that has been flourishing over the last years in Greece. Creative writing projects are being implemented in many different institutions and a continuously increasing number of partakers engage in them. A special case of such a project is the one that takes place in the 3rd Second Chance School (SCS) of the Correctional Institution of Diavata. There, in collaboration with the University of Western Macedonia in Greece which imparts a Master's in Creative Writing program and the voluntary participation of many students of the program, creative writing activities give the chance to the inmates that are involved in them, to express their thoughts and communicate their ideas to the world outside of the prison. This paper aims to present one of the numerous creative writing activities that were carried out during the project in the SCS of Diavata, an activity that evolved around the notion of *truth*.

Key words: Creative writing, Second Chance Schools, truth, correctional institution.

Resumen

La escritura creativa es un campo que está floreciendo en los últimos años en Grecia. Los proyectos de escritura creativa se están implementando en varias instituciones y un número cada vez mayor de participantes se involucra en ellos. Un caso especial de estos proyectos es el que se lleva a cabo en la 3^a Escuela de Segunda Oportunidad (E2O) en la Institución Correccional de Diavata. Allí, en colaboración con la Universidad de Macedonia Occidental en Grecia que imparte un programa de Maestría en Escritura Creativa y la implicación voluntaria de muchos y muchas estudiantes del programa, las actividades de escritura creativa dan la oportunidad a los reclusos y las reclusas que participan en ellas, de expresar sus pensamientos y comunicar sus ideas al mundo fuera de la prisión a través de sus escritos. Este estudio trata de presentar una de las numerosas actividades de escritura creativa que se realizaron durante el proyecto en la E2O de Diavata, una actividad que evolucionó en torno a la noción de *la verdad*.

Palabras clave: Escritura creativa, Escuelas de Segunda Oportunidad, verdad, institución correccional.

Resum

L'escriptura creativa és un camp que ha florit els darrers anys a Grècia. Els projectes d'escriptura creativa s'han vingut implementant en moltes i diferents institucions i un nombre cada vegada major de participants s'hi involucra. Un cas especial d'aquest tipus de projectes són els que tenen lloc a la 3a Escola de Segona Oportunitat (E2O) a la institució correccional de Diavata. Ací, en col·laboració amb la Universitat de Macedònia Occidental a Grècia, la qual imparteix un Màster en Escripció Creativa i la participació voluntària de molts i moltes estudiants del programa, les activitats d'escripció creativa donen l'oportunitat als reclusos i les recluses que hi participen, d'expressar els seus pensaments i comunicar les seues idees al món fora de la presó. Aquest article tracta de presentar una de les nombroses activitats d'escripció creativa que es van dur a terme durant el projecte d'E2O a Diavata, una activitat que va tractar sobre la noció de *veritat*.

Paraules clau: Escripció creativa, Escoles de Segona Oportunitat, veritat, institució correccional.

1. Introduction

Education is a universal human right. As such, it follows the core principles of all human rights, which determine that they should be accessible to all with no distinction, and that no individual should be exempt of their rights under any circumstance. The Second Chance Schools (SCS) are an institution that embraces this philosophy. Initially established in 1995 by the European Commission with the intention of giving a second chance to education to those who had dropped out of school or had been excluded for some reason from education, especially young adults (European Commission, 2001), the SCS have extended their presence to many European countries ever since. In Greece, the SCS have been functioning over the last two decades following the standards set by the law 2776/1999 (Greek Government Gazette, 2008) and in accordance with the European directives. As the law states, a flexible educational program is provided to all adult citizens over the age of 18 who have not completed the compulsory education. Attending the SCS for two years gives the adult students the opportunity to acquire a degree equivalent to that of the Greek secondary school. In addition, based on the idea of equality, the participation in the SCS programs aims at the acquisition of the appropriate qualifications, skills and knowledge that are essential for the integration of excluded adults in the labor market and for their social integration; as Bitsakos assures "taking into account the perspective of the impact of the institution of SCS [...] on the multifaceted development of the individual, we conclude that it is the training to complement the existing knowledge, skills and competences of the adult learner with new ones, providing resources that are prerequisites for avoiding social and labor marginalization" (Bitsakos, 2021, 3). Furthermore, the engagement in the SCS programs is concentrated on the empowerment of the participants' self-esteem, so as to

stimulate their involvement in social development and give them a chance to improve their well-being (Greek Government Gazette, 2008).

Most importantly, the function of the educational plans in the SCS revolves around what is essential to the learner. According to Bekris (2003) the aim of the SCS programs is to adjust the educational activities to the needs of the participants because this is a vital condition that assures their active engagement in the acquisition of the knowledge and skills that could benefit them in a more holistic sense. As research has shown, apart from the practical gain in skills, participating in such a way gives the students the chance to communicate, analyze, reflect, express thoughts and feelings, interact, share ideas, socialize, accept criticism and respect others (Grompanopoulou, 2021). To achieve this, the program of the SCS does not use any specific school books. Instead, the content of the lessons and the educational activities relies on the choice of the educators who organize their teaching considering the necessities of the students (Grompanopoulou, 2021).

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Today, out of the 76 SCS that operate throughout the Greek regions, 12 are encountered in Correctional Institutions (Youth and Lifelong Learning Foundation, 2022), abiding by the law 2776/1999 which also ensures the right to education to all those who are imprisoned in the Greek penitentiaries. To complement it, the *Code of Basic Principles for the Treatment of Prisoners* states that their education should aim not only at the acquisition of knowledge but also, and most importantly, at the development of their body, mind and soul to that extent that would provide them with a chance to become responsible and independent persons, ready for their re-integration into society (Kouroumichaki, 2020).

In the SCS in the correctional institutions, the educational program follows the same curriculum as the one in every other SCS, fostering training and education in Greek language, Mathematics, English language, Information technology, Social education, Environmental education, Physical sciences and Cultural-Aesthetic education (Youth and Lifelong Learning Foundation, 2022), for all the inmates who are interested in participating. These fields cover 20 hours weekly, leaving two hours for counseling services and three for the implementation of different artistic or cultural activities in the form of projects, which depend on the flexibility of the educational program in combination with the creativity and the dedication of the professors and many times, of that of volunteers.

2. Creative writing in the 3rd Second Chance School of Diavata in Greece

An example of such a project takes place in the 3rd Second Chance School, which functions in the penitentiary institution of Diavata. In collaboration with the University of Western Macedonia in Greece which imparts a Master's in Creative Writing program, a project of creative writing for the inmates of the correctional institution of Diavata who attend the SCS in it, started being implemented in the academic year of 2012-2013. There, with the guidance of the then Associate and now Regular professor and director of the Master's program Triantafyllos Kotopoulos, the assistance of the director of the school and the voluntary participation of many students of the Master's program, a weekly project that evolved around literature started (Kotopoulos & Mavroudis & Balai, 2015).

In this first attempt, the main aim was for the inmates to come to an understanding of literature and poetry and the core elements of various literary texts. While doing so, the participants were also instigated to produce their own texts, narrating their personal stories, a fact that had a staggering outcome, since many of them were immigrants or refugees that had been through a lot of ordeals (Kotopoulos & Mavroudis & Balai, 2015). And that was only the beginning of a long tradition of creative literature in the SCS of Diavata; ever since, the literary program has been successfully continued with the participation of both men and women inmates as well as that of the Master's students, along with the engagement of many different poets, writers and artists, that enrich the project with ideas from many different artistic fields.

The most outstanding effect of the project is that it gives the inmates the opportunity to express themselves. Being enclosed in the environment of a prison is a condition that produces a lot of negative feelings. The reaction is mostly linked to depression due to the fact that an enclosed person cannot but be excluded from an ordinary life, separated from the family and the loved ones and also isolated from society (Voutsas, 2019). In addition, the obligatory coexistence in a limited space with a big number of unknown people makes everyday life even harder, leading often to sentimental numbness, boredom, aggression and lack of will (Voutsas, 2019). A creative getaway is, therefore, an excellent counterpoint; and, in the case of the SCS of Diavata, this has been the project of creative writing.

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Creative writing has the ability to turn the negative feelings into creation. As a result, it can have a healing effect on the writer. Writing creatively can give "a symbolic or aesthetical meaning of feelings or ideas instead of just a description of them" (Costa & Viegas Abreu, 2018, 73) which brings the

author closer to the inner self. Taking into consideration that the produced text is addressed to the one that creates it and not to a third party, the emotions are most likely expressed in a spontaneous and sincere manner (Chryssantopoulou, 2014) which can be very relieving. Besides, the fact that the thoughts take a direct form in written right when they are developed in the mind, makes creative writing a very familiar procedure and thus one of the most important therapeutic techniques (Xesfiggi, 2020); that is because "a story in written demonstrates the way in which a person conceives the facts [...] and it is often only through writing that (someone) can express all that is difficult to be said [...] (and so) the created text is going to be the reflection of the writer's personal truth"¹ (Xesfiggi, 2020, 16). And that is exactly what the inmates in a correctional institution need; a chance to be creative and communicate their own life stories, their own personal truths. Such an activity could help in that the scars caused by the life in prison heal.

So, developing to a further extent the initial idea of the literary program in the SCS of Diavata which now focuses specifically on creative writing in imprisonment, the project has already completed ten

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years of successful presence. From what it seems, it has a long way to go. Research that has been conducted on the effects of creative writing on the prisoners has shown that participating in such a project has made them escape from the reality of the correctional institution. Apart from helping the partakers better their skills in the Greek language and learn to discuss and collaborate with their fellow inmates (Grompanopoulou, 2021), the creative writing project has also

boosted their self-esteem, has given them sentimental stability and made them reflect on their feelings and redefine their behavior towards them (Balai & Alevriadou, 2018).

But, most importantly, the creative writing project has given them a voice to be heard by the others. Because participating in this project, not only has provided the inmates with the chance to adopt the role of the writer instead of that of the prisoner and to express themselves by producing their own texts where they narrate their ideas, thoughts and personal experiences (preface of the book *Sentimental shades*, 2019), but it has also given them the confidence to share all this with the rest of the outside world: "for the voice of the prisoners to be heard out there, that we are also human beings with feelings as everybody else. Yes. We are not ruthless criminals put here because we are

¹Original Greek text: " Μια ιστορία «στο χαρτί» δεν είναι παρά ο τρόπος με τον οποίο το άτομο αντιλαμβάνεται τα πράγματα [...]. Συχνά, μόνο μέσα από τη γραφή καταφέρνει να εξωτερικεύσει όλα όσα δυσκολεύεται να εκφράσει προφορικά [...]. Το κείμενο που θα δημιουργηθεί θα είναι η αντανάκλαση της δικής του αλήθειας".

not good for society"² (Balai & Alevriadou, 2018, 670). The outcome of the creative writing project every year, starting from 2015 until today, year 2022, is the publication of a compilation of the texts produced in this project. The publication is the result of the collaboration of the SCS of Diavata with the University of Western Macedonia and different Greek publishing houses, which take over the financing of the publication and its presentation in several events. Even though it is not mandatory for any of the participants to publish their texts, they are all very proud of themselves to do so: "It was something very beautiful to me. I did not expect to feel so good. This is the first time that something I have done myself goes public in general, in any field, let alone in writing. I put some of my experiences in these texts, some of my feelings, and it feels nice that someone else reads about them and reflects on them"³ (Balai & Alevriadou, 2018, 669).

The result of the creative writing adventure of the inmates in the SCS of Diavata has led to the publication of six compilations of their texts; *Keys to liberty*, *#Front_page*⁴, *Chance to escape*, *Dreams of getaway*, *Sentimental shades*, *Breaths of writing*⁵, through which the SCS students connect the life in prison with the one they used to have or dream of having away from it. No words could express that better than those of Hektoras, one of the participants:

The lack of the sense of living as a human being makes you long for an everyday life. I dream of sleeping on a normal mattress so that I don't hurt in the morning from the humidity; of waking up by the sound of the alarm clock and not by that of the lock, that the guard opens and then counts us as if we were sheep; [...] in lunch time, of choosing my food and not eating it as a civilized dog in plastic plates and with plastic spoons; in the afternoon, of going for a walk to feel the spring and look at the color that the trees and the flowers take and forget the smell of mold; [...] at night, of going for a night swim and lying on the sea and enjoying the glow of the stars, because I am tired of lying at night and counting the cockroaches. And all these are dreams that I desire and make me a real human being⁶. (Cover page of the book *Dreams of getaway*, 2018)

²Original Greek text: " Για να ακουστεί η φωνή των κρατουμένων προς τα έξω, ότι κι εμείς είμαστε άνθρωποι με συναισθήματα όπως όλοι. Ναι. Δεν είμαστε τίποτα συγνοί εγκληματίες που μας βάλανε εδώ γιατί δεν είμαστε καλοί για την κοινωνία "

³Original Greek text: " Ήταν κάτι πολύ όμορφο για μένα, δεν το περίμενα ότι θα νιώσω τόσο ωραία. Πρώτη φορά εκδίδεται κάτι που το κάνω εγώ γενικά, σε οποιοδήποτε τομέα, άλλο τόσο που είναι στη γραφή. Πέρασα κάποιες εμπειρίες στα κείμενα, κάποια συναισθήματα και μ' άρεσε πολύ που κάποιος άλλος κάθεται και τα διαβάζει αυτά τα πράγματα και τα σκέφτεται "

⁴Word play with the words exterior and page which when they are combined mean front page in Greek. The word play is lost in the translation from Greek to English.

⁵The titles of the books and the following quotes from one of them are all made by the author of this article. None of the books or the texts found in them has been translated to English yet.

⁶Original Greek text: " Η αίσθηση που σου λείπει να ζεις ανθρώπινα, σε κάνει να ποθείς την καθημερινότητα. Ονειρεύομαι να κοιμάμαι σε στρώμα κανονικό για να μην πονάω το πρωί από την υγρασία· να ξυπνάω από το

3. Creative writing activity: Talking and writing about Truth

3.1. Day of the project

In May 2022, on one of the Fridays that are dedicated to the creative writing project, the writer of this article visited the SCS of Diavata to voluntarily participate in the project. As it was arranged beforehand, the creative writing activity of the day would focus on the notion of *truth*. The participants in the class had all attended regularly the creative writing class before and were familiar with the process. However, for them to meet with a new instructor and talk about an idea as strong as the truth is, revealing their thoughts and their feelings to a complete stranger, would not be an easy undertaking and for that it needed a careful handling. In the environment of a correctional institution, it is common to face the incredibility of the inmates. Being enclosed, in their majority, for a long period of time in the limited area of the penitentiary while being deprived of their freedom, it is only normal that they develop a sense of mistrust towards the people that come from the outside world (Kotopoulos & Mavroudis & Balai, 2015).

The first step was to make the initial introduction and to get to know each other before starting to talk about truth. Due to the SCS schedule on that day and the fact that the COVID-19 pandemic had caused some disruption to the typical program, only five of the regular participants (X, A, T, G, K)⁷, who usually reach up to the number of fifteen, were present. From the participants, two were Albanians, two Greek Romani and one Kurd, the four of them between the age of 30-35 and only one at the age of 50. All of them have already served a sentence of between two to ten years, have limited educational background and attend SCS in order to get a high-school degree. The subject of the day made them think that the instructor was a psychologist who was trying to find out truths about them through the activity. That made them a little bit reluctant and suspicious at the beginning. But once it was made clear that the instructor was an educator participating in the project as a student of the Master's in Creative Writing program, they started relaxing, showed a lot of interest in the subject and were willing to engage in a discussion.

ξυπνητήρι και όχι από τον ήχο της κλειδαριάς, που ανοίγει ο φύλακας και μας μετράει σαν πρόβατα [...] το μεσημέρι να διαλέγω εγώ το φαγητό που θα φάω και όχι να τρώω σαν ένας πολιτισμένος σκύλος με πιάτα και πιρουνία πλαστικά· το απόγευμα να βγαίνω βόλτα και να αισθάνομαι την άνοιξη, να δω τι χρώμα παίρνουν τα λουλούδια και να ξεχάσω τη μυρωδιά της μούχλας [...] τα βράδια να πάω για νυχτερινό μπάνιο, να ξαπλώσω πάνω στη θάλασσα και να απολαύσω τη λάμψη των αστεριών, γιατί βαρέθηκα τα βράδια να ξαπλώνω και να μετράω τις κατσαρίδες. Και όλα αυτά είναι όνειρα, που ποθώ και με κάνουν άνθρωπο αληθινό”.

⁷For the purposes of this paper, the full names of the participants are going to be omitted. The initial letter of each one's name is going to be used instead. It is a policy of the SCS of Diavata that the names of the participants in the projects are fully published for the first time only when the book which comprises their texts is published. The book with the texts of the participants of this project has not been published yet.

3.2. Procedure of the activity

3.2.1. Brainstorming about *Truth*

Since the purpose of the activity was to instigate the reflection of the participants around the notion of *truth*, in order to start a dialogue among them, the first step was to let them express their initial thoughts. The participants were asked to think about how they would define truth and to feel free to express their opinion about truth as they see it. Brainstorming around truth started a vivid conversation. K said that there is no concrete definition because the truth is a multi-dimensional idea. A said that the truth is not only one and it is different for each person. T seemed to agree to that but added that there are some things that could be considered by everyone as universal truths; to support his opinion he gave the example of the sun rising every day. X declared that he cannot say many things about truth because to him everything is a lie; at least this is what his life has taught him. G agreed that there is no truth in this world and that everybody is lying to get what they want because people have lost their values. K then added that this is an exaggeration and that not everything is as negative, that there is still honesty in this world and that we should not generalize and put everyone in the same position. Liars might prevail sometimes, he admitted, but the truth is always revealed in the end.

3.2.2. Images open the way to the idea of *Truth*

The following part of the activity was based on a visual stimulus. The participants were shown three different ambiguous images that provoke optical illusions and as such, can have many interpretations. After looking at each image for a few seconds, the participants were asked to write down, without commending anything, the first idea that came to their mind. In the first image, X said he saw the face of a woman with beautiful lips whereas G saw a bird nest and birds flying towards it; then K added that the woman's face was made of the birds and the nest in the tree and that her lips were actually a bird flying with the wings wide open; A, the poet of the group, confessed that the image made him think of his mother and the warmth that a mother and a family brings.

In the second image wild animals, birds, fish, a tree and the sea were distinguished. T said that the fact that the image had no other colors but black and white gave him the sensation of anxiety and made him think that there are two limits in life, it is either black or white and nothing in between, meaning that if you are lucky, you are on the right side and if you are not, you always have to struggle. A said that the image of the wild makes him think that the world is a jungle and that we all have to struggle to survive because life is not easy. G then commended that even if life is difficult there is space for everyone, this is why in the picture all these different species seem to live together in the same environment in absolute harmony.

The third image provoked an even stronger impact. It was an image filled with many different colors that made K think of paradise; he confessed that this is how he wished his life to be. T saw the nature blossom in springtime while A distinguished a face among the flowers. X then said that the leaves and the branches of the tree in the centre of the image had the shape of a human brain; and G added that all these colors reminded him of his childhood in the village where he grew up and brought him a memory of happy children playing in the fields.

3.2.3. Discussing about *Truth*

So, who is telling the truth? Based on the comments on the images, this question opened the discussion about truth. A said that everybody was telling the truth, it was just that each one sees things in a different way. K agreed and added that this happens because people's minds create different ideas according to the experiences they have encountered in the past and the knowledge they have accumulated over the years.

But how could that be happening when everyone had the same stimulus, hence the same experience simultaneously? Since we all look at the same thing but still see it in a different way, who is telling the truth? And how could that fact relate to the truth? X commented that this is why at the beginning he supported that there is no truth. Because even in the same incident people come up with different ideas and one can never know who is being honest and who is not. At the end, it depends on the moment and the person to choose what and who to believe in each time.

T then argued that even if that is the case, that does not mean that there is no truth. Even if two people have opposite views of the same thing this does not imply that one is lying. It just happens that there are always different points of view and different people express different ones. K then commended that he cannot go along with that idea because to him different points of view distort the truth and make people believe in things that are inaccurate. He gave the example of history books that describe an incident of discordance among two countries, where each of the countries describes the occurrence in a way that favors its own side, while at the same time, outlines the menace that the other one incarnates.

Since we all look at the same thing but still see it in a different way, who is telling the truth? And how could that fact relate to the truth?

X then commended that what is important is not whether the truth is honestly and absolutely said but whether the one that hears it, is willing to believe it. Since the beliefs of each person relate to their personality and their life experiences, the truth is always affected by them. To support his opinion he gave an example of the court and argued that in many cases, the prejudice towards foreigners and law offenders, and even more in the case of those who combine both of these

characteristics, makes justice biased towards them. As a result, they end up being charged with harder charges even when they confess the truth and they have no way of making anybody believe that they are not lying.

K agreed to that and said that sometimes it is better not to tell the truth even if you know it because you might get into trouble. Most importantly, he added, sometimes you could tell a little lie if you know that it will not cause any problems but instead it might make life easier and make someone happy. To lighten up the discussion with a sense of humor, he gave the example of a woman that asks if her dress looks good on her when she is about to go out. In that case, he said, one should always answer yes because the gain will be double; he would make a person happy and also save himself from some nagging afterwards.

This comment then led to the question whether they themselves would like to be told the truth always. If a small lie keeps someone away from trouble, than it should be accepted by everyone since it could make their life easier. X said that he cannot distinguish any more the truth from lies because they have been very mixed in his life, he has been repeatedly deceived and he has believed in the wrong thing or person so many times, that now he is being very cautious and doubts everything he is being told. A then said that this should not make someone embrace the lies because when people get used to lying, they end up losing their humanity. It is his belief that everyone lies at some moment and there is no exception to this truth. But if the lies are of no significance and they do not hurt or lead to any irreversible negative consequences than they are acceptable.

X then spoke up and said that he completely disagrees with that. He confessed that for him it is a big disappointment when he realizes that somebody has lied to him. He added that when this happens he always loses trust in that person and finds it unlikely to regain it, no matter the effort he might put into it. He acknowledged though that he himself does not always tell the truth because sometimes it is easier to lie and also because some people are not worth it. T then interrupted him and argued that no one is perfect but in every case, we cannot ask from people to behave towards us in a way that we do not behave towards them. It is only to expect, he added, that if someone's attitude and habit is to hide the truth, distort it or even present some chosen parts of it, then this is the behavior that he should await from the others too.

3.2.4. Writing about *Truth*

The discussion was really interesting and the participants showed very eager to go on with the subject. The limited time though made it impossible to continue that same day so a promise to meet again in the near future was made by both sides. To conclude on the activity the participants were

asked to write an idea they would take with them from all that was discussed about truth during the project. Their suggestions were expressed as follows⁸:

- Truth hurts and it cannot be easily told because if you tell the truth you end up losing⁹.
- The truth is the face of people¹⁰.
- Truth, a word that, to a large extent, is absent from today's world. People now live mostly in lies to have a better quality of life in many fields, such as their profession or their personal affairs¹¹.
- The smell of a jasmine is the truth.

Forget the lies that are told

Sunrise that is falling in your eyes are the words

It takes courage to express it

I feel happy near it

Priceless ideal

Truth is what each one believes and what one sees for himself¹².

4. Comparing former inmates' writings about Truth

The frustration and the difficulties that the imprisonment represents find their expression in the writings of the inmates. The backgrounds of their ideas and mostly their life experiences have a lot in common (Kotopoulos & Mavroudis & Balai, 2015). It is not thus a surprise that the perceptions of the participants in the project collide with the ones of other inmates that had taken part in a similar project in the past. Once more, the mistrust is evident: "I do not trust anybody because the truth in our days is lost. No matter how hard one might try to be honest, their real self (face) is not

⁸From the participants in this project, only one is a native Greek speaker. The other four come from neighbor countries. As a consequence, they have not developed their writing abilities in the Greek language to an extent that would make them produce large texts. Even so, their participation in the creative writing project is helping them better their skills along with the fact that it gives them a way to self-expression. In addition, the text of one of the participants is lost so it cannot be presented in this paper.

⁹ Original Greek text: " Η αλήθεια πονάει και δεν λέγεται εύκολα γιατί πας χαμένος".

¹⁰ Original Greek text: " Η αλήθεια είναι το πρόσωπο του ανθρώπου".

¹¹ Original Greek text: " Αλήθεια, μια λέξη που λείπει από τον τωρινό κόσμο σε μεγάλο βαθμό. Πλέον ο κόσμος ζει με περισσότερα ψέματα για να έχει καλύτερη ποιοτική ζωή σε πολλούς τομείς, όπως στην επαγγελματική και την προσωπική του ζωή".

¹² Each verse of the poem starts with a letter of the word truth (ΑΛΗΘΕΙΑ) in Greek.

" Άρωμα γιασεμιού είναι η αλήθεια

Λήθη στα ψέματα που ειπώθηκαν

Ηλιοβασίλεμα στα μάτια σου οι λέξεις

Θάρρος χρειάζεται για να την ξεστομίσω

Ευτυχία νοιώθω κοντά της

Ιδανικό ανεκτίμητο

Αλήθεια είναι ό,τι πιστεύει ο καθένας και ό,τι βλέπει ο ίδιος "

important. I have lost my trust in everyone and everything"¹³ (Amaya in *Sentimental shades*, 2019, 30)¹⁴. The belief that the lies prevail in life is also constant: "The only truth of my life at this moment is a light that will lead me out of prison. I believe that only then the truth will be evident because until now I only see lies. It hurts a lot, because I am locked in a cell and I am away from the hearts of my people who wait for me to get out of here"¹⁵ (Teresa, p 30).

The existence of a sometimes prejudiced judicial system where truth and lies are mixed is also a frequent issue: "I was convicted to thirteen years in jail. When I went to the court house I told them my truth. They did not believe me and they convicted me. I went to the appellate court after four and a half years, I talked to my lawyer, I told him the truth and instead of making my conviction smaller they added a year to it. Maybe if I had told them lies I would be out of here now"¹⁶ (Maria A, 30). On the other hand, honesty is still a valuable virtue for many: "Truth is the nicest and most important word for me. I like to always tell the truth and be honest. The same thing I expect from the people that I love and who are close to me. I want them to respect me and to tell me at least half of the truth they see in their lives. If they do that, I will always be there for them"¹⁷ (Angie, 31). Hope is also vital for most of the prisoners; because it is the one thing that keeps them going and enduring: "I will write about the truth of my sister Alice. She is doing life in prison and the only hope she has, that is keeping her alive, is her little angel. This little kid is what keeps her in life"¹⁸ (Gardenia, 31).

¹³Original Greek text: " Δεν εμπιστεύομαι κανέναν γιατί η αλήθεια στις μέρες μας έχει χαθεί. Όσο και να προσπαθείς να είσαι ειλικρινής δεν μετράει σήμερα το αληθινό πρόσωπο που βγάζεις. Έχω χάσει την εμπιστοσύνη μου σε όλα και σε όλους".

¹⁴The quotes in this section are all taken from the book *Sentimental shades*. The book has been published and the writers have agreed to the use of their names in it. As mentioned before, it is the policy of the SCS of Diavata to use the full names of the participants in the creative writing project only after the book that includes their texts has been published.

¹⁵Original Greek text: " Η μόνη αλήθεια της ζωής μου αυτήν την στιγμή είναι ένα φως που θα με βγάλει από την φυλακή. Πιστεύω πως μόνο τότε θα φανεί η αλήθεια γιατί προς το παρόν υπάρχει μόνο το ψέμα. Πονάω πολύ, γιατί είμαι κλεισμένη σε ένα κελί και είμαι μακριά από τις δικές μου καρδιές που με περιμένουν να βγω έξω".

¹⁶Original Greek text: " Καταδικάστηκα σε δεκατρία χρόνια φυλακή. Στο δικαστήριο όταν πήγα είπα την δική μου αλήθεια. Δεν με πίστεψαν και η έδρα με καταδίκασε. Πήγα εφετείο μετά από τεσσεράμιση χρόνια, μίλησα με τον δικηγόρο μου, του είπα την αλήθεια και αντί να με κατεβάσουν χρόνια με ανέβασαν έναν χρόνο επιπλέον φυλάκιση. Ίσως αν έλεγα ψέματα μπορεί να έβγαινα από εδώ μέσα".

¹⁷Original Greek text: " Η πιο ωραία και σημαντική λέξη για μένα. Μου αρέσει πάντα να λέω την αλήθεια και να είμαι ειλικρινής. Το ίδιο θέλω και για τους ανθρώπους που αγαπώ και τους έχω κοντά μου. Θέλω να με σέβονται και να μου λένε τουλάχιστον τη μισή αλήθεια που υπάρχει στη ζωή τους. Αν το κάνουν αυτό θα είμαι για πάντα δίπλα τους".

¹⁸Original Greek text: " Θα γράψω για την αλήθεια της αδερφής μου, της Αλίκης. Έφαγε ισόβια και η μόνη ελπίδα που έχει για να συνεχίσει να ζει είναι το αγγελούδι της. Το παιδάκι της είναι αυτό που την κρατάει στη ζωή".

Poetry too can flourish behind the walls of a correctional institution:

What is the truth I wonder?
Does it really exist?
Does the truth hurt?
It brings joy and tears.
This is my truth¹⁹. (Sveti, Angie, 30)

Because there are a lot of «Truths locked in the cells»²⁰:

- My truth is that the others don't believe me.
- My truth is that I am in jail because of my mistakes.
- The truth hurts.
- The truth is that I was selling drugs and I got caught.
- The truth is that I am scared.
- The truth costs one euro.
- The truth is that nobody can feel you in these four walls.
- The truth is that I have two children and I miss them.
- The truth is that I have one brother and I miss him.
- The truth is that I was drinking outside and I was telling lies to people.
- The truth is my mother. (compilation, 80)²¹.

5. Conclusions

What was interesting is the fact that at the end of the activity, when the participants shared their writings among each other, they admitted that thinking and writing about truth made them have second thoughts about the perceptions they had about truth before doing the activity. Creative writing has the ability to provoke that effect. As Kotopoulos & Mavroudis & Balai suggest: "We all have our personal story that influences our perception of the world and of ourselves. But sometimes

¹⁹Original Greek text:

" Τι είναι άραγε η αλήθεια,

Υπάρχει πραγματικά;

Πληγώνει η αλήθεια;

Φέρνει χαρά και δάκρυα.

Αυτή είναι η δική μου αλήθεια "

²⁰ Compilation of the ideas of eleven men and women inmates.

²¹ Original Greek text: " «Αλήθειες κλεισμένες στα κελιά»

-Η δική μου αλήθεια είναι που δεν με πιστεύουν οι άλλοι.

-Η δική μου αλήθεια είναι πως βρίσκομαι στη φυλακή από τα λάθη μου.

-Η αλήθεια πονάει.

-Η αλήθεια είναι πως πουλούσα ναρκωτικά και με πιάσανε.

-Η αλήθεια είναι πως φοβάμαι.

-Η αλήθεια έχει ένα ευρώ.

-Η αλήθεια είναι πως κανείς δεν μπορεί να σε νιώσει μέσα στους τέσσερις τοίχους.

-Η αλήθεια είναι ότι έχω δύο παιδιά και μου λείπουν.

-Η αλήθεια είναι ότι έχω έναν αδερφό και μου λείπει.

-Η αλήθεια είναι που έπινα έξω και έλεγα ψέματα στους άλλους.

-Η αλήθεια είναι η μάνα μου. "

our inner voice is not right. Writing makes us process our stories and reformulate them [...]. Through their writings people realize who they are and where they want to go. Writing is a way of correcting life"²² (2015, 246). So, T said that he will take his time and rethink of what was discussed because as he admitted, he might be exaggerating about truth. X suggested for everyone to reflect and then re-write something about truth to share with the others in a following meeting. K said that the idea of truth being the face of the people made him think of different people he has met and that some of them were really as sincere as they seemed. That brought him a sense of hope, he added.

G said that the experience of life in prison makes people more careful because they constantly need to be mindful of whom they trust but even in that circumstance, he added, one can create honest friendships. A, who was left last to help arrange the class, admitted that he had lied about his identity to the instructor and that he had not even given his real name. The fact that the instructor had no reason why doubting him and believed him, made him think that a lie sometimes can seem to be the truth, but it could also make the liar feel bad when it is addressed to someone how has been honest towards him. To correct his former behavior he then felt the need to share some personal details about himself and his family life outside of the correctional institution. He swore he was now telling the truth!

A sole visit and a limited in time project cannot lead to generalizing conclusions. However, the first impressions of the outcome of the activity collide with the ones of past research that has been done in correctional institutions. The need of the inmates to express their feelings was obvious. Letting aside their initial discomfort in front of a stranger asking them to talk about their truths, the participants quickly got involved in the discussion and shared their ideas and even some personal experiences without hesitating. This proves that their desire to communicate is stronger than their suspicion, especially when they take part in something that connects them with the outside world and makes them forget their imprisonment for a while. For the same reason, they are eager to let their writings and their engagement in the creative writing program be published because it is an escape from their everyday reality and a chance to approach the life that they are being deprived of and are missing.

On the other hand, the power of art once more has proven to be a great stimulus to reveal the thoughts and the feelings of a person. The first part of the activity that was dedicated to the focus on the ambiguous images was in practice very triggering and served as a great starter to talk about a

²²Original Greek text: " Όλοι έχουμε μια προσωπική αφήγηση που διαμορφώνει την άποψή μας για τον κόσμο και τους εαυτούς μας. Αλλά μερικές φορές η εσωτερική φωνή μας δεν έχει το απόλυτο δίκιο. Το γράψιμο μάς υποχρεώνει να επεξεργαστούμε τις ιστορίες μας και να τις επαναδιατυπώσουμε [...] Μέσα από τα γραπτά τους οι άνθρωποι συνειδητοποιούν ποιοι είναι και πού θέλουν να πάνε. Η γραφή είναι μια πορεία διόρθωσης της ζωής".

notion as deep as the truth is. It was impressive how the image of something in appearance irrelevant to the truth could bring all these ideas and interconnections to the conversation. But also writing, which constitutes another form of artistic creation, manifested its power in revealing people's views and ideas and more importantly, showed its ability to make them revise their beliefs. This leads to the suggestion of researching academically and more in depth the connection between creative writing and transformative learning both in the general population in programs of lifelong learning, and in the SCS in the environment of a correctional institution.

The truth is that talking about truth could be an everlasting discussion. Writing about it could be an everlasting task too. Maybe A was right when he said that there are many truths because people see things in a different way. It could be then that the truths are as many as the ones that speak them. But one thing is certain: everyone should be free to express their truth and communicate it to the world. Maybe this would make us see that the truth is that those who spend part of their life in a correctional institution are not that different from the ones that have the chance to live freely away from it.

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Anthology of texts written in the SCS of Diavata

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 #Εξω_Φύλλα [#Front_page], 2016.
 Φυγής ευκαιρία [Chance to escape], 2017.
 Όνειρα απόδρασης [Dreams of getaway], 2018.
 Συναισθηματικές αποχρώσεις [Sentimental shades], 2019.
 Ανάσες γραφής [Breaths of writing], 2022.

Images used for the purpose of the activity

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