

SPYRIDON PERESIEADIS

Spyridon Peresiadis was born in Mesorrougi village, Achaia, Greece in 1854 and died in Athens in 1918 due to the Spanish flu pandemic that swept the world at the time. He was the third of four children born to Sotiris Peresiadis, a paralegal at the District Court of Nonakrida, and Dimitra Kanellopoulou, sister of Georgios Kanellopoulos, a hagiographer and scholar from Akrata. He spent his early years in his village, where he attended the local primary school and then continued his studies at the Hellenic School (Scholarchio) of Akrata.

In his childhood, he suffered his first tragic blow: during a group game (known as “klitsika”), one of his playmates accidentally struck him in the eye with a sharp wooden stick, referred to in other regions as a “tsiliki”, resulting in the partial loss of his vision. Much later, in 1879, during an amateur theatrical performance in Akrata, in which he participated, a fragment of a blank cartridge exploded from a stage prop firearm during a dramatic scene and lodged in his healthy eye, adding to the tragedy.

For medical reasons and in hopes of improving his gradually deteriorating vision caused by traumatic cataracts, he moved to Athens, where he worked either as a judicial clerk or as a civil servant at the Ministry of Finance (according to G. Sideris, *Modern Greek Theatre*, Zacharopoulos, p. 289). According to Anastasios M. Georgantopoulos, a scholar who studied Peresiadis' life and work, disheartened by the lack of results from treatments and as his sight slowly failed him, Peresiadis asked his paternal uncle to help transfer him closer to his family. He subsequently worked as a secretary in the Municipality of Nonakrida and also as a village schoolteacher in Peristera village for a while.

After his mother's death in 1887, he settled in Akrata, where he became active in cultural affairs, founding the cultural association “Eos” and, in 1891, launching the weekly newspaper *Astrapí*. Around this time (1892), his literary creativity awakened, and he tested his talent by writing his first dramatic romance, *Margarita*. In 1893, having almost completely lost his vision, he dictated *Golfo* to a relative. His creativity blossomed, and his journey toward recognition and lasting fame had begun.

In 1897, he permanently settled in Athens, close to his sister Aspasia, who cared for him. Over the following years, he experienced the success of his work firsthand. Nevertheless, he died in deep poverty, as the Hellenic Parliament had denied him a state pension as early as 1914. His funeral, paid for by the state, featured a eulogy delivered by Babis Aninos, president of the Greek Society of Playwrights, although only a handful of friends and acquaintances accompanied him to his final resting place.

The Municipality of Athens named a street in his honor. Akrata followed suit by erecting a bust of him in 1979, paying minimal but due tribute to the great creator. In Mesorrougi, his birthplace, a commemorative plaque has been embedded where his house once stood.

Works

Spyridon Peresiadis wrote seventeen plays. His most famous work is *Golfo*. His writings belong to the genre of dramatic romance and “komidyllio” (vaudeville), of which he is the last chronologically significant representative, following in the footsteps of Dimitrios Koromilas.

The sentimental and highly melodramatic tone of his stories made him immensely popular with general audiences of the time—a popularity that endures today through *Golfo*.

GOLFO, 1893

A pastoral drama and the work that brought him fame.

It was first performed at a private theatrical gathering in Akrata by an amateur troupe that included Peresiadis himself (1893). Its official premiere took place in Athens on August 10, 1894, at Paradeisos Theater by the “Proodos” troupe of Dimitrios Kotopoulos. The play achieved great success and was performed later that summer in Smyrna with the author present. In October 1895, it was staged in Constantinople, and on Christmas Day in Odessa, starring Evangelia Paraskevopoulou, who went on a grand tour in Abyssinia, South Africa, and Australia in 1900. By 1911, its 500th performance was celebrated at the Municipal Theater of Athens. On January 26, 1913, it was performed in Thessaloniki at Edem Theater by the National Drama Troupe.

Golfo was performed many times in Athens, Thessaloniki, Paris, America, and elsewhere. It continued to inspire theatrical reinterpretations, both faithful and adapted ones, into modern times. Among the most notable ones was Simos Kakalas’s rendition with references to Japanese manga (2004–2007), and Nikos Karathanos’s production at the National Theatre (2013).

In 1915, *Golfo* was adapted into the first Greek silent feature film by Smyrniot entrepreneur Filippo Martelli, directed by Konstantinos Bachatoris, starring Olympia Damaskou. Filming took place partly at the “Fountain of Golfo” on Mount Helmos. Unfortunately, the film is now considered lost. A second version with sound was made by Finos Film, directed by Orestis Laskos, and starring Antigone Valakou. It was a major success, bolstered by Takis Morakis’ music and songs performed by Dimitris Zachos, Zoe Maggou, and the Trio Melody (1955).

The play was translated into Turkish and performed multiple times in Constantinople, reportedly moving even Sultan Abdul Hamid to tears. It was also translated into Hebrew and staged in Smyrna for the city’s large Jewish community.

Golfo was further adapted as a libretto by Orestis Laskos with music by Georgios Vitalis in an operetta of the same name, and later as a novel by Aristeides Kyriakos.

Works in Chronological Order:

- Margarita (1892)
- Golfo (1893), G.D. Fexis Editions, 1903
- The Slave Girl (I Sklava) (1894), M.I. Saliveros Editions, 1902
- Esme or The Turkish Girl (1896), G.D. Fexis Editions, 1915
- Morfo (1898), M.I. Saliveros Editions, 1898
- Moscho (1898)
- The Fairies (Oi Neraides) (1898), M.I. Saliveros Editions, 1899

- The Dance of Zalongo (Choros tou Zalongou), G.D. Mexis Editions, 1903
- The Queen of Flowers (I Vasilissa ton Antheon) (1906), M.I. Saliveros Editions
- The Enchanted Shepherd (O Magemenos Voskos) (1909), M.I. Saliveros Editions
- Parga (1911), M.I. Saliveros Editions
- Anastasis (1913)
- Homeland (Patrida) (1914), M.I. Saliveros Editions
- The Double Wreaths (Ta Dipla Stefana) (1914), M.I. Saliveros Editions
- Volunteer (Ethelontis) (1914), M.I. Saliveros Editions
- The Village Elder (O Proestos tou Choriou) (1916), M.I. Saliveros Editions
- New Laurels or Poems of the Balkan War 1912–1913 (1913), M.I. Saliveros Editions — Poetry collection

Note:

Due to his well-known visual impairment, Spyridon Peresiadis began dictating his works to relatives and friends who transcribed them, eventually making them available to the theater-loving and reading public. According to Fotini Peresiadis, those who acted as his scribes included:

- Konstantinos Peresiadis (his nephew)
- Georgios Roufogalis
- Georgios Roumpas (a relative)
- Konstantinos Christopoulos (primary school teacher and friend of the author)