My Story (review)

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tions and the misprints. Warhaft notes that her annotations are sparse out of deference to the wishes of Kavadias's sister, who felt that many personal references should remain unexplained. Yet *im*personal references often remain equally unexplained. This not only impoverishes the volume for the reader; it also leads occasionally to infelicities in translation, as when the ending to the poem "Salonika," «μάταια θα ψάχνεις το στρατί που πάει για το Dépôt» is given as "you'll search in vain for the road to the depot" (162–163) whereas proper research would have revealed that the Dépôt in this city is not a depot at all, but the terminus for buses coming from the banlieue—in this case from Kalamariá, where the poem's protagonist once knew a girl who said to him, "I love you." Occasionally, glosses are deftly inserted in the verse itself, as when «Χόρτο ξανθό τρίποδο σκέπει μαντικό» becomes helpfully "Pale grass covers the Pythian tripod" (214–215); generally, however, one wishes that this volume had received the scholarly care lavished, for example, on Walter Arndt's translation of *The Best of Rilke* (Hanover, New Hampshire: University Press of New England, 1989). As for the misprints, these betray an irresponsible publisher. We are confronted with "1943" instead of "1934," «Καβαφικά Αὐοσχόλια», "voputuous spasms," "I've been bord," "killed by . . . soul" instead of "killed my . . . soul," "astralobe," and more. Fortunately, the Greek poems are reproduced photographically from the original editions and are letter-perfect.

These defects are tiny compared to the luxury of a bilingual edition, the excellence of the translations, which won the Columbia University Translation Center's prize in 1984, and, most of all, the chance for anglophone readers to make the full acquaintance of yet one more major poet produced by Greece during its astonishing literary renaissance.

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Elisavet Moutzan-Martinengou, *My Story.* Translated by Helen Dendrinou Kolias. Athens, Georgia & London: The University of Georgia Press. 1989. Pp. xxxiv + 125. $22.50.

My Story is the journal of Elisavet Moutzan-Martinengou, a woman and a writer who lived her short life on the island of Zakynthos at the beginning of the 19th century (1801–1832). Although the greater part of her work has been lost, the present volume, which previously was edited by her son and published in Greek, remains. It tells the story of Moutzan-Martinengou's imprisonment within the family estate, her pursuit of learning and her search for teachers, her desire to enter a convent and her family's refusal, and, above all, her attempt to come to terms with a life she found unbearable. Unfortunately, only 64 of the 150 pages of this volume are "her story." Whereas

Moutzan-Martinengou was once cloistered within the walls of a house she hated, she is now enclosed within a preface, introduction, afterword, and footnotes that, much like those other walls, have domesticated her, prescribed her identity, and usurped her voice.

While giving us an occasional revelatory glimpse into the life of a 19th-century housebound woman, *My Story* is above all a *Künstlerroman* and a lamentation—two genres which may indeed be inseparable for a 19th-century woman. Moutzan-Martinengou's story, then, is not one of a consummated artistic career; instead, it is an apology for the desire to write and a mourning for lost possibilities. Although she argues that she writes to benefit others, to bring recognition to herself, and to show what nature is capable of doing without the help of art, Moutzan-Martinengou also quite patently writes *to change her life,* as evidenced, for example, in the letter that she writes to her father and uncle—complete with subtle syllogistic reasoning, cogent examples, and analyses of counter-arguments—begging permission to join a convent. Ironically, it is by way of lamenting her inability to change her life that she *does,* in fact, change her life—by transforming it into "her story." Hence, she repeatedly scripts her life in familiar literary forms—dialogues, fables, tragedies, and letters that she copies into her journal—and frequently addresses a "reader" who ostensibly functions both as a hypothetical community which commiserates and as a legitimating medium by which her suffering, and her writing, are rendered meaningful.

However, while it is gratifying to function as that reader that Moutzan-Martinengou so desired, Helen Dendrinou Kolias, the translator of this edition, has unfortunately encumbered her subject's work with preface, translator's note, introduction, copious notes, and afterword, all of which are characterized by a degree of detail that is not only of dubious relevance to Moutzan-Martinengou's story but indeed detracts from it. For example, Kolias's penchant for comparing Moutzan-Martinengou's work to that of more established male writers (such as Dionýsios Solomós and Aléxandros Papadiamándis) has the effect of usurping both the specificity and authority of her voice, as well as implying that what establishes Moutzan-Martinengou's work as significant is that something similar has been said by a *man.* Similarly, while Kolias asserts in her extensive historical introduction that an "understanding of Venetian society is a prerequisite to an understanding of [Moutzan-Martinengou's] life" (xxi), she does not sufficiently demonstrate the relevance of this historical background to the text she is introducing. Further, I find it problematic, particularly in a work that advertizes itself as "primarily and unabashedly a feminist text" (x), that this "legitimized" version of history is given priority over what a woman desired to say about herself. Indeed, to assert that exigencies of which Moutzan-Martinengou was herself unaware are the "prerequisite" for understanding her life severely undermines the significance and authority of her voice.

However, the most disturbing of Kolias's textual appendages is certainly the afterword, in which she summarizes two previous critics of Moutzan-Martinengou's text, as well as Sidonie Smith's work on women's biography, and in which her approach to critical analysis is something akin to Ronald

Reagan's "we're-all-in-the-know-here" wink—an approach, that is to say, that relies on vague generalization and conjecture while conveniently side-stepping consistent argument, explanation, and support. For example, she suggests that "for many of us nowadays the 'Writer' and the 'Reader' are always 'in process,'" but neither examines what that term means nor how it is significant to Moutzan-Martinengou's text. In similarly flippant fashion, she asserts that if one thinks of the text as "simply a construct or a rhetorical situation . . . previous notions of text and writer become questionable" (77), but does not examine what those "previous notions" are, nor how they are called into question.

Hence, while there is much of interest in Moutzan-Martinengou's story, it is regrettable that her work has not been made available in a more sensitively edited volume.

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Peter Bien, *Kazantzakis: Politics of the Spirit.* Princeton: Princeton University Press. 1989. Pp. xxiv + 318. $29.95.

Perhaps no major writer of our time has been treated by critical opinion with so much misunderstanding and distortion as has Nikos Kazantzakis. From the beginning of his career down to the present, inaccurate or intentionally distorted information, coupled with a limited basis for understanding the writer and his work, has often resulted in hostile, erroneous, and frequently self-contradictory conclusions. This has been especially true in Greece, where partisan passions and personal biases often dominate "critical" evaluation. A contributing factor in Kazantzakis's case has been the nature of his work—its vastness and its protean, exceptionally demanding nature. As a result, most critics of Kazantzakis have been unable to approach the subject in the complete, in-depth manner that the Kazantzakian personality and creation require. To compound the problem, many of the existing works of criticism, together with the widespread oral lore about Kazantzakis, have either misinformed or misdirected the readers of his work. On the other hand, most positive views of Kazantzakis, often in the tone of paeans, have been lacking in method and substance. Critical studies that correct this situation have been sorely needed.

Happily, Peter Bien's *Kazantzakis: Politics of the Spirit* is a significant contribution toward fulfilling this need. Based on painstaking research, this is a major study that provides an admirably woven "life" of Kazantzakis and his evolution as thinker and artist. A central perspective in presenting the writer's life in this volume is the "political" nature of Kazantzakis and the impact of his "politics" on his life and work. The distinction between Kazantzakis's temporal/societal and his eternal/eschatological politics (his "politics