

perous city of Smyrna, and the death or wretchedness of hundreds of thousands of refugees.

Of the latter, the Armenians stand out. Perhaps one may have some reservations as to the author's claim that the Turks were particularly selective in their choice of victims, that they persecuted the Armenians more than the Greeks. But I do not wholly agree with such a contention. The lower administrative and military echelons of the Turkish government whose centuries-old hatred was further inflamed by the recent Greek victories would certainly not distinguish Greek from Armenian. I do not doubt for a moment that the persecution of the Armenians was for the most part completely unjustified, although the undying, righteous and legitimate ambition of the Armenians to establish an independent state of their own goaded and incited the Kemalists into perpetrating their heinous deeds. The distinguishing of the victims whether Greek, Armenian, or Nestorian, on the part of the Turks in those tragic-laden moments would not have been a feasible or an easy thing.

The author understandably deals mostly with the fate of the Armenians and touches upon the lot of the Greeks in Smyrna in a few pages. This is, after all, the purpose of the book, and the author succeeds most admirably from the point of view both of historical accuracy, and the reconstruction of the events in bringing the tragic story to life, yet the title of the book (in the Greek translation) would suggest a broader treatment of the subject, for when we say that Smyrna was consumed by fire, we do not mean only the Armenian quarter or the Armenian refugees. Perhaps a sub-title in both the Greek and the American editions would have indicated more precisely the theme of the book and would dispel any misunderstanding or expectation on the part of the reader.

All told, the study by Marjorie Housepian¹ is a welcome addition to the Greek bibliography of the Anatolian disaster (see K. N. Triantaphyllou, «Bibliography of the Asia Minor Campaign (1919-1922)», in *Mnemosyne*, 4 (1972-1973), pp. 86-116). The bonds of compassion and friendship will always exist between these two peoples, for when Greece was crushed in 1922 and economically impoverished, she without discrimination and with open arms welcomed the uprooted and destitute fellow-victims of Turkish nationalism.

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Peter Bien, *Kazantzakis and the Linguistic Revolution in Greek Literature*, Princeton, N. J., Princeton University Press, 1972, pp. 292.

I have often wondered about the extent to which a foreigner, reading Kazantzakis in translation, would become aware of matters that made this author so highly controversial in his own country. Even in translation, some of the reasons for the controversy should be apparent; at least in the differences between his poetry and prose, in terms of manner, style, tone of voice, choice of theme, ideology, and overall objectives. Exactly what Kazantzakis did with the Greek language, however, no translation could give the feeling of, yet

1. Cfr. the observations of Kostas P. Kyrris in *Kypriakos Logos*, v. 7, n. 37 (January-February 1975), pp. 3-9.

that language was the central and permanent concern in his creativity, to the extent that it proved to be the touchstone of his accomplishment. Throughout a long and abundantly creative life, he stood the militant, passionate, obsessed lover and propagator, collector and shaper of the demotic tongue, the language of the people. He was one of the most fervent fighters for its cause in a war waged from Hellenistic times to the present against the *katharevousa*, the artificial, pseudo-atticizing language formed and obstinately upheld by the purist, the conservative intelligentsia, and most of the university professors, and imposed upon the nation and its education by every autocratic Greek government.

To the short accounts already given in English of that age-old linguistic war, with its often intricate involvements as well as sociological and political associations, Professor Bien has bravely decided to add a full survey of its history, its developments, movements, versions, divisions and subdivisions as well as the principal fighters and texts involved. He has drawn his information and illustrations from the best sources available and his own personal experience as a distinguished Greek scholar and translator. Taking up the first half of his book, this compilation-survey should make not only the increasing numbers of newcomers to the Greek language and its literature, but also those well familiar with them, grateful to him.

After thus surveying the background, precedents and circumstance, the book, in its second half, focuses on Kazantzakis himself, giving a critical account of his doings with the demotic as reflected in the gradual stages of his life and work and in the resulting failures and successes. Rather than an enthusiastic appreciation, this account is a post-enthusiastic and reserved critique, considering all the hard facts involved in an attempt to give the author his deserved due. Years ago, in a dithyrambic presentation of the poet of *The Odyssey: A Sequel*, Kimon Friar, the brilliant translator of that work, had much identified himself with its creator on the ground of intellectual, ideological and artistic affinities. The strongly appealing image he gave us was under the immediate impact of the old master's personality and charm. In contrast, Bien's account has the objectivity of a scholarly distance, his views, however, seem to coincide with those of the majority of Kazantzakis's Greek readers and, in some respects, with those of Pandelis Prevelakis, the author's most intimate, fellow-Cretan, younger friend, his confidant and biographer. In *Nikos Kazantzakis and His Odyssey*, Prevelakis, starting from his own deep attachment to the Greek (particularly the Cretan) folk culture, character, and tradition, regretted his older friend's betraying that tradition and culture in the spirit and the orientation of his epic. Bien will express the same regret as he approached the epic from the point of view of its language. Much like the other two critics, Bien appreciatively recognizes Kazantzakis's genuine, sincere, and unabating love for the demotic, his superb mastery of it, and his struggle for it, but, as he remarks, language, in literature, cannot be discussed and evaluated in a vacuum and «apart from subject matter». What matters, he adds, «is not the type of words and grammar used, but how these elements relate to the content», how the two fuse together as to achieve a «congruence of expression and content».

It is this congruence that, in his view, fails to be achieved in *Odyssey: A Sequel*, a work containing the full richness of the demotic, a language colorful, evocative and pictorial, «deeply rooted in the sensual experience of everyday life in Greece», but proved inappropriate and inadequate when forced to treat the author's obsessive metaphysical intellectualism, his Bergsonianism and Nietzschean nihilism at the time of that epic's composition. Drawn from the lips of the Greek people, that language was employed in a poem that «has nothing essentially to do with Greece and the Greek people, but is indeed contrary to the spirit»

of that country, a point at which Bien and Prevelakis agree, but Friar probably doesn't. A literary work is bound to reflect the personality and state of mind of its creator at the time of its composition, and *The Odyssey*, written at a time of great frustration and bitterness in the life of Kazantzakis, when he had, justifiably perhaps, little sympathy and understanding for Greece and its people, turned into a «textbook of demotic, a thesaurus, a dictionary . . . a compendium of his previous frustration, personal in motivation rather than artistic, and therefore all too often mechanical rather than aesthetic in its application».

A great change, as Bien further remarks, was brought upon Kazantzakis's work from 1940 on, when the war and his country's Nazi occupation deeply challenged his national consciousness and led him into «reimmersing himself [as well as other Greek authors] lovingly in the hellenic and neohellenic world». The product of the change was his «second, neohellenic 'epic' attempted in prose», i.e., his novels, starting with *Zorba* in 1941, and his translation of Homer's *Iliad*. There his linguistic and educational zeal could finally be «ruled, not compromised, by aesthetic considerations», and the congruence, sadly absent in his epic work, is successfully present thanks to his «specificity and earthiness». Kazantzakis himself, like Greek writers in general, may have persisted in considering verse the highest form of expression, and in deeming his prose works «ephemeral» and his poetry «basic», but the fact is that in the narrative of his novels he could better accommodate his natural inclination to be «expansive, comprehensive, accretive», — qualities that poetry, by nature, does not favor. When writing verse, he was generally inclined towards expressing a «stiff and rather self-conscious sublimity out of keeping with the demotic language he was using». His novels, in their natural flow and in their «successful marriage of language to content», might be said to contain his best poetry, in the wider sense of the term.

Unquestionably, some of Bien's views and arguments might easily give rise to counter-views and counter-arguments by the lovers of Kazantzakis's verse. These latter would, however, probably agree that Kazantzakis was a poet in the wider rather than the narrower sense. He was the highly active and creative mind, whom poetry served as a torrential outlet of his anxious and searching thought. In his poetry, poetic art was, in a sense, rather secondary to the ideological, philosophic, intellectual message, although there are in him moments of surpassing poetic beauty. His poetry may easily be dated in terms of other-than-poetic concerns of his own and his time, in Greece and elsewhere, but it stays, artistically, rather neutral and undated, with no innovation and no modernity, unaffected as it stands by modern poetic movements. Most valuable, nonetheless, strictly speaking and apart from subject matter and artistry, is the wealth it contains of the demotic tongue in its dialectal variety. At a time when the language of Greek poetry generally becomes much impoverished in its current and growing urban dissociation from the riches of its age-old traditional resources, i.e. the language of the open air people, the workers of the land and the sea, Kazantzakis's poetry, especially in his *Odyssey*, should be for the lover of the Greek language a treasure box of miracles for him to open and from which to regain the language of poetry that is in danger of being lost.

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