

Georgios Vizyenos, *My Mother's Sin and Other Stories*, Translated by William F. Wyatt, Jr. Hanover and London: Published for Brown University Press by University Press of New England, 1988, p. xvii+229.

George Vizyenos (1849-1896) is the earliest of the prose writers who at the end of the 19th century represent the flowering of modern Greek fiction. Although he first drew critical attention in Athens by his poetry, his reputation today rests on the short stories that comprise the present volume.

Vizyenos was born of humble parents in the town of Vizye (hence his surname) in Ottoman Thrace. Supported for many years by wealthy Greek patrons, he studied theology and philosophy in Constantinople, Cyprus, and Athens, but most of his university training he received in Germany, where he earned a doctorate in psychology at the University of Leipzig. After a prolonged residence abroad he returned to Athens in 1885 and there held a succession of teaching positions at the University and in secondary schools. The last four years of his relatively short life were blighted by severe mental illness: he died a paralytic in an insane asylum. Vizyenos' stories, all narrated in the first person, contain many details from the author's own experiences and situation. Although the narrator plays an important role in most of the stories, we cannot consider them (as some critics do) as merely straightforward autobiographical accounts, at least not until we have more evidence. Taken all together, these stories construct an uncertain world that is full of shifting appearances and emotional turmoil.

"My Mother's Sin", "The Only Journey of his Life", and "Who Was My Brother's Killer?" deal with painful incidents in the narrator's family life: In the first, the mother's obsessive love for her daughters is revealed to be the result of an overwhelming sense of guilt; in the second, the narrator's boyhood dreams of success, fed by the fairy tales his grandfather tells him, are shattered by the harsh realities of both their lives; and in the last, the killer turns out to be a kindly man, the least suspect of all the characters. Another story, "Moskov-Selim", is unusual in Greek literature for its penetrating psychology of an upright Turk, victimized by his family and his society. These four stories are often praised for their lively re-creation of Greco-Turkish society in 19th-century Thrace and Constantinople. Especially noteworthy are the subtle portrayal of the relationship between a Greek and a Turkish family in "My Brother's Killer" and the Greek folklore preserved in "The Only Journey". "Between Peiraeus and Naples" and "The Consequences of the Old Story"—this latter set in Germany—depict young men in the thrall of romantic love.

In this fine translation William Wyatt has rendered the narrative passages in *katharevousa* (an archaizing form of Greek that was then the official language) into smooth and lucid English prose. Here and there, however, too literal a translation of colloquialisms in the Greek dialogue results in awkward phrasing. For instance, the mother's words in "My Brother's Killer": "Today at last I can eat a little bread and it will go to my heart!" (p. 56) and "From the direction I feared, I suffered nothing; from the direction I felt secure, trouble came" (p. 57). A measure of the accuracy of the translation is that this reviewer spotted only three or four mistranslations of Greek idiom. For instance, "May it turn out true" (p. 58) should be "May you grow up big and strong [*tranepsis*]". The "dancers of the subterranean Typho" (p. 42) are singers, not dancers, and the Typhons are many, not one. More accurately, this would be "choirs of subterranean Typhons". There is also an error in the description of Kyamil's costume (p. 55). But such details hardly detract from the merit of this translation.

The translator's brief introductions to each story provide useful information, particularly about Greek and Turkish lexicon and pronunciation. It would also have been helpful if he had given explanations of such puzzling historical and cultural references as "Kleantheian toils" (p. 114) and students "bawling about Phalanx" (p. 116), where even the educated reader would not know that this last refers to the student militia. Readers will appreciate Roderick Beaton's preface, which discusses the author in the context of the Greek short story.

Vizyenos has been well served by this first English edition of his works.

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Stratis Myrivilis, *Life in the Tomb*, translated from Modern Greek original by Peter Bien—with a new Introduction by Peter Levi. Published for Dartmouth College by University Press of New England, Hanover and London, 1987, pp. 325+3pl.

Stratis Myrivilis (1892-1969) came from Mytilena, an island in the Aegean sea belonging since the ancient period to Greek Asia Minor; so he too has been considered one of the Asia Minor writers of the generation of the '30s. He entered Greek Literature with *Life in the Tomb*, regarded as the most important work of this generation. The historians of Neohellenic Literature believe that Myrivilis' work referred to above is neither a novel nor a collection of stories. The title *Life in the Tomb* derives from the Lamentations sung in Greek Orthodox Church on Good Friday.

Ἡ ζωὴ ἐν τάφῳ κατετέθης
Χριστέ, καὶ ἀγγέλων στρατιαί,
ἐξεπλήττοντο, συγκατάβασιν
δοξάζουσιν τὴν σὴν.

[Thou o Christ, the Life, in tomb was laid/and arms of angels were amazed, and they/glorified thy humiliation]

Life in the Tomb is a war novel written as a journal by a young intellectual Greek sergeant, Antonis Kostoulas, soldier at the Macedonian frontier during the First World War (1917). Kostoulas related his experiences of this terrible war in the trenches in a series of 57 units. On the one hand the narrator describes the horror of the war and on the other he remembers his past happiness in Lesbos, before the war; both constitute a Kind of diary, where Kostoulas, an educated and sensitive man, gives his impressions of the appalling slaughter and who, surrounded by barbed wire, minefields and sandbags, is rooted in a trench fighting an invisible enemy.

In *Life in the Tomb* each story can be read independently of the others. Kostoulas' letters are written to be read later, after the war, when the soldier, if indeed he survives, would return to his island. Myrivilis wrote the first sketches in trenches in Monastir, on the Macedonian frontier in 1917, and one chapter of his work was published in the newspaper *Néa Ἑλλάδα* (Thessakoniki) in the same year. After his return from the campaign in Asia Minor, that was so tragic for Hellenism, he published the novel in sequences in the newspaper