

Introduction

HIS IMPORTANCE

TWO REMARKABLE LITERARY renaissances occurred roughly in the first half of the twentieth century at the two edges of Europe: Ireland and Greece. Ireland, with a population then of fewer than four million, produced Yeats, Joyce, Beckett, Wilde, and Shaw; Greece, with a population then of fewer than eleven million (compare Ohio, with just over eleven million), produced Cavafy, Palamas, Seferis, Elytis, Kazantzakis, and Ritsos, plus a dozen other remarkable writers of both poetry and prose. Our focus in this volume is on Kazantzakis; yet it is important to remember that he was part of a generalized literary revival and also of a culture in which just about everybody, it seems, writes a slender book of poetry that is privately published and distributed to friends. Kazantzakis's one indisputable uniqueness is his success in becoming known outside of Greece via translation, not to mention having three interesting movies (*Celui qui doit mourir*, *Zorba the Greek*, and *The Last Temptation of Christ*) made from his work. Of course, Cavafy is widely appreciated and perhaps a dozen others have been translated, but no other Greek author has attained Kazantzakis's worldwide range. In addition, Kazantzakis was more peripatetic than the others, who stayed mostly in Greece (or in Alexandria in Cavafy's case), whereas Kazantzakis lived in France during his final decade, attempted previously to establish a career in the Soviet Union, Germany, and Spain, traveled repeatedly to Asia and the Near East, resided for extended periods in Czechoslovakia and Italy, vacationed in Switzerland, and corresponded not only in Greek but also in French, Spanish, German, Italian, and even a little in English.

Also quite remarkable was the range of his political experiences and involvements. As a child he was exposed to a Cretan insurrection against the Ottoman Empire; during the Balkan Wars he was briefly in uniform in Macedonia; he was in charge of repatriating Greeks from the Caucasus when they were being persecuted by the Russians; he lived in Vienna and then Berlin during periods of extraordinary inflation and unrest following the First World War; he was the only Greek invited to Moscow for the tenth anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution; he served as foreign correspondent in Spain during the Spanish Civil War; he resided in Greece during the Axis occupation in the Second World War, then in Athens while the Greek Civil War was being fought there. All this, and more, is recorded in more detail in the chronology below.

What, then, is his importance? I do not believe that it is as a supreme artist. As a poet, he is surely not a Goethe or a Milton; as a novelist, he is not a Dostoevsky; as a dramatist, he is far from an Ibsen or Strindberg. I believe that his importance lies in fortitude. His life was extremely discouraging—a very bad first marriage (all too evident in the letters below); estrangement from his father; inability to make a living during most of his career; early death of his best friend, Stavridakis; prolonged estrangement from his other friend, Sikelianos; being persecuted for his communistic enthusiasms long after he had abandoned them; his epic *Odyssey* ridiculed; his *Askitiki* misunderstood; being able to publish in Europe but not in Greece; a publishing house reneging after he had completed half of a French-Greek dictionary; single copies of manuscripts lost in the mail; and so on and so forth. But throughout all of this he successfully fought depression, never stopped working, and never lost his belief in eventual “salvation” for himself, his nation, his broader civilization. This fortitude—and resilience—is well worth our admiring notice.

A MANIACAL EPISTOLOGRAPHER

There are many collections of extraordinary letters. My favorites are those of James Joyce, D. H. Lawrence, and Virginia Woolf. In each case these letters are not only essential resources for scholars but also useful for anyone interested in human behavior because they enable us to know what an exceptional individual was thinking, doing, hoping, fearing, even eating almost every day of his or her adult life. The same is true for the extraordinary letters of Nikos Kazantzakis. We know quite a lot about Kazantzakis's life but nothing compared to what is revealed in these “selected letters,” even though they are only about one-tenth of the total. I chose them because of their intrinsic interest but also because I wanted to include every person to whom he wrote. Above all, the letters show his genius. Look for example at those written in the very first years of his student days at Athens University, when he was nineteen and twenty years old. His powers of expression are remarkable, as are his rich vocabulary, his tireless urge to observe everything and everyone around him, his erudition even then (when he had just finished high school). All these virtues continue for the next fifty-plus years. What we also see is his intense *need* to write letters and to receive them. He did not use a telephone for decades, although he occasionally sent or received telegrams; he certainly never owned a computer; nor did he type (his wife Eleni did that). His connection with others was through the written word inscribed via pen and ink at lightning speed. Did he write with the expectation that his letters would be retained by their recipients and be published? Perhaps, but no evidence for this exists. I think he wrote owing to fear that, without letters, his connection with humanity would be severed. He kept pleading with recipients to answer him quickly, extensively, and complained bitterly if they did not. When his wife Galatea did answer, he protested: “I always write you immense missives. You, two words.

Beyond that, you use such big letters! Three of your pages fit into one of mine.” Yes, he sometimes seemed in his letters to be trying out passages that would eventually be included in a published work; yet I believe that his primary purpose for writing was to connect with someone who would be interested and would respond with comments. I call him a maniacal epistolographer because letter writing for him was truly a mania: a zealous necessity.

COMPLETENESS

My aim has been to print complete letters only. For published letters available in incomplete form, fortunately in many cases I have found corresponding manuscripts enabling me to translate these texts in their complete form. On the other hand, many manuscripts are missing, especially those of letters to Eleni Kazantzaki. To be consistent with my general aim to print complete letters only, I omit incomplete letters to her and others unless they are extraordinarily interesting. Happily, the incomplete letters to Eleni Kazantzaki that I would have liked to include here are readily available in printed form not only in Greek but also in English and French translation.

ANNOTATIONS

Anyone reading these letters will soon become aware of Kazantzakis’s far-reaching involvement with people, places, and ideas that are likely to be unfamiliar especially to non-Greeks and even in many cases to Greeks of the twenty-first century as opposed to those of the first half of the twentieth century, his own time. Thus, I have tried to annotate just about everything, perhaps excessively. Because I do not employ footnote numbers, readers may easily ignore the annotations; conversely, because I place the annotations directly beneath each epistle rather than at the end of the volume, interested readers may access them easily. Many are borrowed from other writers, especially Pandelis Prevelakis; many are gleaned from the Internet, Greek encyclopedias, dialect dictionaries, Who’s Whos, and the like; many have been supplied by Peter Mackridge and a bevy of other friends and colleagues, all of whom are listed with thanks in my acknowledgments, below.

TRANSLITERATION

Transliteration is a pain; no matter what ones does, somebody will object. I expect that objections will greet the transliterations in this volume, perhaps because the system I employ is not consistent. Mostly I try to approximate modern Greek pronunciation; this, I am happy to say, seems to be the favored mode employed now in Greece itself, especially on street signs. Thus Kazantzakis’s ancestral village Βαρβάροι is transliterated as Varvari, not Varvaroi and certainly not Barbaroi. Similarly, the proper name Ψυχάρης appears as

Psiharis, not Psychares. The same for Χάρης, transliterated here as Haris, more or less the way it is pronounced, not as Chares (horrible!), Charis, or Kharis. On the other hand, familiar words are done more conservatively. Thus for Kazantzakis's Οδυσσεύς (with one sigma!) I write Odysseas, not Odiseas, Odiseas, Odhiseas, or indeed Odysseus. Like everyone else, I tend to “correct” Kazantzakis's spelling and accentuation, except occasionally when I indicate that these features have been retained in my text. His program of spelling reform was resisted by everyone, even his friend Prevelakis. He eliminated all double consonants that do not affect pronunciation, as well as all accents on a word's final syllable. Even Ellada became Elada for him, but not for anyone else, which explains (I trust) my own conservatism in this area. Regarding stress, I have chosen not to include accent marks at all, which perhaps is a mistake, but does make life easier. Of course, the best solution is to utilize the Greek alphabet, avoiding transliteration altogether. This I do many times, a practice that should please readers of Greek and make no difference to those who do not read Greek, who will be just as perplexed by the transliteration in such cases. Finally, it is worth noting that I use the Greek form of female names—thus “Helen Kazantzakis” for a work published in English but “Eleni Kazantzaki” for works published in Greek.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Scholarship, like many other activities, is most often communal, even though the result is often credited to only a single author or editor. Because I could never have produced this book by myself, I wish now to name all those who have helped, hoping that I have not overlooked anyone.

First of all must come the late Eleni Kazantzaki. She originally asked me to translate the *Four Hundred Letters of Kazantzakis to Prevelakis*. I suggested to her that a volume of *Selected Letters* drawn from many recipients (and, of course, including the best of those to Prevelakis) would be more useful. She agreed, indeed with enthusiasm. Although I possessed a fairly good knowledge of obvious recipients, my scope was greatly enlarged by Mrs. Kazantzakis, who provided me with names, addresses, and a letter of introduction to numerous people. A Fulbright Research Fellowship to Greece in the spring of 1987 enabled me, greatly aided by my wife, Chrysanthi Yiannakou-Bien, to contact scores of recipients, to visit them, and to photocopy 221 holograph manuscripts of unpublished letters, all carefully saved in various homes, plus 140 holograph manuscripts of published letters, and 74 printed items new to me, a total of 435 items. Together with these, of course, were letters published often in periodicals and books, some of which were readily obtainable but others obtainable only by various instances of good luck or miracle. I must add that all the recipients (with one exception, whom I shall not name) were delighted, even ecstatic, to learn that some of their treasures would be published. I should naturally note as well that people who received letters from

Kazantzakis tended to keep them. There were several exceptions: one recipient (Lefteris Alexiou) tore them up in anger, and several feared that they might be politically compromised if such letters were discovered in their possession. Later journeys outside of Greece produced additional unpublished letters—for example, those to Max Schuster housed now in the Columbia University library in New York.

Eleni Kazantzaki initiated the project, but Chrysanthi Bien, already mentioned, nurtured it for twenty years. How many times did she glare with a magnifying glass at an almost illegible word in Kazantzakis's frantic scrawl and manage most often to decipher it! How many times did she enlighten me regarding a term in no dictionary by saying something like "I used to play that same game in Thessaloniki as a child" or "We, too, ate that same mush for breakfast during the war."

Next I must mention Dr. Patroclus Stavrou and Professor Peter Mackridge. Dr. Stavrou, who cared for Eleni Kazantzaki in her senescence, now manages Kazantzakis Publications and controls the copyright to the letters. He approved the project from the beginning, always encouraged me, and has cooperated at every step. Professor Mackridge, recently retired from Oxford, went carefully through the entire translation in relation to the original Greek, identified errors and solecisms, and offered very fine suggestions for improvement of both text and annotations. He has saved me from numerous (sometimes embarrassing) faults. In addition, he provided extensive information for my annotations of the Anghelakis letters, discovered letters to Kay Cicellis, and also located John Mavrogordato's diary entries as a source for my annotation about Ambassador Waterlow—overdoing collegiate camaraderie!

Then there are the three great archival centers. Because this project began with the idea of translating only the letters to Prevelakis, I mention first the Prevelakis archive at the University of Crete in Rethymno. Professor Alexis Politis and Professor Emeritus Stamatis Philippides of that institution helped to facilitate my ten-week stay in Rethymno in 2007 and a month's stay in Iraklio in 2009. Regarding the actual letters to Prevelakis, the stalwart is the curator of special collections, Eleni Kovaïou, who enabled me to view original manuscripts, who searched for the meaning of words in Cretan dialect, and who answered promptly and fully all my queries. What happened in the Rethymno archive was especially important because Prevelakis censored all of Kazantzakis's curses directed at then-living individuals. Prevelakis's brother Eleftherios, whom I visited in Athens in 1987, enabled me to restore some of these nasty comments if they occurred in manuscripts he chanced to possess in his apartment. But most of the restorations occurred thanks to Eleni Kovaïou, who oversees the complete archive of correspondence to Prevelakis. And what fun it was relishing Kazantzakis's censored maledictions, all of which are now restored in this edition of the *Selected Letters*.

The other two archival centers are the Kazantzakis Museum in the ancestral village, Varvari (renamed Myrtia), and the Historical Museum of Crete in

Iraklio. The former maintains many archives of letters to various recipients plus a complete collection of printed materials that are relevant. Its director, Varvara Tsaka, is another stalwart, driving me each day to and from the village, attending to my repeated needs at a time when the museum was undergoing restoration and everything was topsy-turvy, researching my queries via her extensive data bases, and continuing to respond to emailed requests regarding illegible words, dialectical terms, dates of birth and death, and other puzzles I detected after my departure. The museum's associate curator, Andonis Leventis, installed me in his office during my time there while he busied himself with hammer and vacuum cleaner owing to the restorations. He, too, has been a source of vital information of all kinds. The latter center, in Iraklio, contains all of the manuscript letters to Galatea Kazantzaki, plus letters to various other recipients. The museum's director, Dr. Alexis Kalokairinos, has supported the project from the start and has been most welcoming. The museum's curator of libraries and archives, Georgia Katsalaki, helped me on a daily basis during my time in Iraklio, providing access to manuscripts, deciphering nearly illegible words, worrying about Cretan dialect, and asking various people for information on my behalf.

Before proceeding with all the others, whom I am going to list alphabetically, I wish to record here the use I have made of the annotations done by Prevelakis for the *Four Hundred Letters*, those included in Martha Aposkitou-Alexiou's collection of letters, and those done by Eleni Kazantzaki for the letters she published in Greek, English, and French. (See the References Cited for a full list of materials utilized.)

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how to survive the ordeal of such a project; Professor Emeritus Norman A. Doenges of Dartmouth for help with ancient Greek; Professor Bruce Duncan of Dartmouth for help regarding German pronunciation and for finding the authors of some German poems; ELIA (The Greek Literary and Historical Archive) in Athens for material from the Paxinou-Minotis archive; Dimitri Gondicas, director of Hellenic Studies at Princeton, for opening up for my use the very great resources of Firestone Library; Professor Emeritus Yannis Hasiotis of the University of Thessaloniki for information regarding the letters to Stavridakis; Yiolanda Hatzi, niece of Elli Lambridi, for letters to Lambridi; Evanthis Hatzivassiliou for information regarding Greek leftists; Professor Robert Hollander of Princeton for help with Dante; Professor John Iatrides for information about Greek Civil War figures; Dr. Aglaïa Kasdagli of the University of Crete for information about her father; Professor K. G. Kassinis for help with Palamas's manuscripts; Muriel King, born of French parents in Saigon, for aid with Kazantzakis's sometimes idiosyncratic French; Lia Lazou and Don Nielsen for help locating people in Athens; Maria Margarita Malagón-Kurka, an Adirondack neighbor, native of Colombia, for translating the letters to Jiménez; Amy Mims for annotations and also for snippets of translation when a bit of a letter excluded from Eleni Kazantzaki's Greek edition (1977) is included in Mims's prior translation of these same letters into English (Helen Kazantzakis 1968); Devin E. Naar of Stanford University for identifying the editor of the newspaper *Le Progrès* and supplying additional information; Francis X. Oscadel, reference librarian at Dartmouth, for general assistance; Gareth Owens, his wife, Kallia Nikolidaki, and her father in Vori for introduction to Yorgos Stefanidis and help with Cretan dialect; Lewis Owens for assistance obtaining the letters to Martinu; Ben Petre for translating part of the letter, dated 5 February 1944, to Nikos Hatzikyriakos-Gkikas; Anastasios Pourgouras of the American Farm School outside of Thessaloniki for translating a tenth-century liturgical text; Professor Ulrike Rainer of Dartmouth for translating and correcting German; Professor John Rassias of Dartmouth for help with French; Professor Kevin Reinhart of Dartmouth for help with Turkish; Professor Panayotis Roilos for guidance regarding Harvard's resources on modern Greek; David Roth, student assistant; Professor Barry Scherr of Dartmouth for prompt and expert help with Russian, even while he was preoccupied as Dartmouth's provost; Professor Emeritus William C. Scott of Dartmouth for help finding quotations in ancient Greek; Don Skemer for willingness to supply photocopies of manuscripts in the Princeton library's special collections; Niki Stavrou, Patroclus Stavrou's daughter, now working at Kazantzakis Publications, for valuable help with my annotations; Yorgos Stefanidis for information on Harilaos Stefanidis; S. E. Stephanou for the gift of photocopies of letters to his father, the Reverend Emmanuel Pappastefanou; Pitsa Tsakona, librarian at the Benaki Museum, for use of the library's collections; Angelos Tsakopoulos and his daughter Eleni for supplying the photograph of a manuscript; Miguel A. Valladares, one of Dartmouth's

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Peter Bien