The books reviewed in this issue show the variety of books available to us that can edify and delight us about our Hellenic heritage. Several of the books explore being caught between two worlds: Greek and American. Immigrant Tryton Tolides in his book of poetry, “An Almost Pure Empty Walking,” which is reviewed by Artemis Leontis, draws a soulful picture of a child immigrant’s difficult entry into an alien American world and his periodical return to the cherished but vanishing Greek village of his youth. Adrienne Kalfopoulou, author of “Broken Greek: A Language to Belong,” describes her life as a binational (Greek and American) living in Greece. As reviewer Anastasia Stefanidou describes it: “It is Kalfopoulou’s challenge to penetrate the seemingly unfathomable depths of Greekness without compromising her American identity. She takes us along as she searches for a space and place to call home.”

“American Aphrodite: Becoming Female in Greek America” by Constance Callinicos, which was released 16 years ago, continues to be relevant today. She interviewed 111 women prior to writing the book. Reviewer Yiorgos Anagnostou says, “It tells the stories of those who have felt the iron grip of male domination and its power to put down women; to mute, insult and render them inferior and unworthy.”

We feature two giants of Greek Americana, Harry Mark Petrakis and Theodore Saloutos, in this issue. “Legends of Glory and Other Stories” by Petrakis couples eight short stories with a novella. Says reviewer Dan Georgakas, “The beautifully crafted stories featuring Chicago Greeks are vintage Petrakis that reaffirm his mastery of this genre … In the novella, ‘Legends of Glory,’ Petrakis explores an entirely different social environment. The principals are mainstream Americans living in a small Midwestern town. The fiction of Petrakis always has had a social subtext, but this new work shows heightened attention to some of the social ills afflicting the specific Greek American community and the United States in general.”

We await the re-release of the book by the late Theodore Saloutos about the history of the Greeks in the United States. In anticipation we offer an article by another renowned historian of the Greek American experience, Charles Moskos, who writes about his personal recollections of Saloutos. He says, “My own writings on Greek Americans have obviously been strongly influenced by my personal interactions with Saloutos as well as by his scholarship. We both had immigrant parents, we both made our primary academic reputations in fields outside of Greek America … and turned to Greek American studies later in our professional careers. We both were also committed to finding practical ways to maintain contact between the old country and the American-born generations.”

Historical books include “Claiming Macedonia” by George C. Papavizas and “Agamemnon in Performance: 458 BC to AD 2000,” edited by Fiona Macintosh, Pantelis Michelakis, Edith Hall and Oliver Taplin. “Claiming Macedonia,” reviewed by Mark Lardas, outlines in detail the history and heritage of Macedonia from ancient times to the present. “Agamemnon in Performance,” reviewed by Evaggelos Vallianatos, gives us a perceptive look into the history of the ancient Greek drama of Aischylos’ play “Agamemnon” and the way it has been interpreted (or misinterpreted) and performed in Europe and America in the past two and one-half centuries.

History also plays a role in the novel, “The Island,” by English writer, Victoria Hislop. After a visit to a now-defunct leper colony off the northern coast of Crete, the “strange, haunting aspects of it” captured her imagination. As reported by reviewer Aprophidite Matsakis, she found the atmosphere on Spinalonga so “electrifying,” she knew she had to write a story about it. This led to historical research and her romantic story about the love and courage of a Greek family, as first one, then another, family member develops the dreaded illness. Hislop says, “Here was somewhere that had effectively been a prison, a place for a life sentence, but where the ‘prisoners’ were innocent of any crime and indeed might be living close enough to their beloved ones to be able to see them just across the water. It was profoundly terrible and yet there was evidence from the infrastructure (a communal laundry, two churches, pretty homes, shops) that these people had not lived entirely miserable lives. They had dignity, and they had enjoyed a certain quality of life.”

Dan Georgakas piques our interest in the Greek language through his review of “A Modern Greek-English Dictionary, Volume 1,” which was compiled and edited by his cousin, Demetrios J. Georgacas. The dictionary seeks to define in English virtually every word used in modern Greek. Georgacas amassed more than 2.5 million citation slips in the process of seeking to define in English virtually every word used in modern Greek. Institutions in both Greece and the United States supported the research. Georgacas says, “The relationship between Greece and the United States, even between Greeks and Greek-Americans, is not always harmonious or productive. The creation of this extraordinary dictionary demonstrates the marvelous work that can be done when two powerful cultures collaborate.”

Steve Frangos, in his article, “Reading As a Greek American,” prods us to read books about Greece and the Greek American experience. He says, “No one will be Greek for you. But then the discovery of that fact and even reading about it are their own reward.”

Wishing you enlightening and inspiring reading.

Elaine Thomopoulos
Managing Editor-Books
Thomop@msn.com

The Hellenic Museum and Cultural Center in Chicago is proud to announce the creation of a Hellenic Writers Guild which will showcase authors and their works from all over the nation. Under the umbrella of the museum, the guild will allow for: promotion of authors and their works, archiving of their books and books in our library, opportunity to sell volumes in HMCC gift shop, allow works to be entered into competitions, offer space for book signings at the HMCC and many other things.

To this end, the Hellenic Museum and Cultural Center asks that all Greek American authors submit their names, address, e-mail address, phone number and bibliography list of their works to the attention of Nick Vern, Hellenic Writers Guild Chairman, 801 W. Adams (4th Floor), Chicago, Illinois 60657.

Authors may also submit this information via email at HellenicWritersGuild@hellenicmuseum.org.
Prologue by Mr. Evripides Stylianides
Minister of National Education & Religious Affairs
For The National Herald's special "Books" insert

From the sage scholars that fled to Europe in the 15th century, communicating ancient Greek knowledge to the West and contributing significantly to the formation of the European cultural identity, to the contemporary authors of “diaspora”, the role of the intellectuals, who live outside Greece has diachronically remained the same: they are the “ambassadors” of Greek language and civilization around the world, vividly demonstrating the inherent extroversion of the Greek ecumenical spirit.

In an era of globalization, in which national languages strive to safeguard their international presence against the monopoly of prevalent cultures, Greek-American authors - members of a thriving community, with a multi-fold contribution to the financial, scientific and political life of America - are the heirs to a long-standing tradition of keeping the Greek-American experience alive. Through Greek language as a vehicle of diachronic values, which have inspired savants worldwide, they transmit the “voice” of Greece in the U.S.A., stimulating the intellectual life of the community and strengthening its linguistic and cultural bonds with the “metropolis”.

As a Minister of National Education and Religious Affairs of Greece, I would like to congratulate all authors, whose work is included in the Special Issue of the National Herald, entitled “Books”, on their tenacious adherence to enforcing the vitality of the Greek-American community and to promoting education in its pure essence. I profoundly believe that through this Special Issue your work will capture the attention of a yet wider audience, furthering the on-going universal dialogue about the importance of a humanistic perspective in a largely technological civilization.
Broken Greek: A Language to Belong
By Adriane Kalfopoulou
Plain View Press, 208 pages, $18.95, paperback

By Anastasia Stefanidou
Special to The National Herald

A
driane Kalfopoulou’s non-fiction book “Broken-Greek: A Language to Belong” is an exciting, touching and provocative collection of autobiographical narratives based on the author’s encounters with Greek reality. Her account is enriched by her knowledge of Greek history, politics, literature and myths. Kalfopoulou is a poet with a first collection “Wild Greens” (Red Hen Press, 2002) and a scholar “A Discussion of the Ideology of the American Dream in the Culture’s Female Discourses: The ‘Untidy House’” (Mellenn Press, 2000). What is unique about “Broken Greek” is that Kalfopoulou does not write from the point of view of a visitor or even an ethnic tourist who simply records familiar patterns of life or criticizes cultural and other differences.

Instead, Kalfopoulou writes as a “binational Greek” in Greece. Dan Georgakas has coined this term best fitting those Greek Americans who try to maintain some kind of Greek identity in America or in Greece, this sense of identity facilitated by globalization. Binational Greeks do not choose between two cultures but are emotionally and psychologically comfortable in and with both. Having been raised in a Greek American family, educated in an American context but now having lived and worked for more than two decades in Athens, Kalfopoulou carries a genuine cultural binationalism. “Broken Greek” represents her effort to secure her own standing within this Greek American current.

As indicated by the title of the book, Kalfopoulou is especially concerned with the Greek language. For her this also means the Greek culture as marked by its complicated and sometimes dark past, as well as its tumultuous course into the 21st century as a European member country. Additionally, Kalfopoulou intends to make the reader aware that longing is fragile and uncertain even for those who have a stronger claim on a culture, such as the native nationals themselves. As she explains in her preface: “The more I understood of Greek, the more feeble English seemed in its ability to reflect the layered depths of a world that had no analogous word for privacy but four to describe variations of love.”

So the country “became the landscape of absolute feeling where language would ‘hold up to,’ or break under, what, conventionally, it was not meant to do.” It is Kalfopoulou’s challenge to penetrate the seemingly unfathomable depths of Greekness without compromising her American identity. She takes us along as she searches for a space and place to call home.

“Broken Greek” begins in 1981 when Kalfopoulou comes to Greece in her early twenties and visits her grandparents’ house on Syngrou Avenue, Athens. In a realistic and lyrically nostalgic voice, the author invites us into the protected environment of abounding love and care which her elderly relatives offer her. Here Kalfopoulou finds comfort and inspiration from the daily routines and the lifelong habits of her grandparents. They pass on to her their family history and tradition, as well as valuable knowledge about the city’s and the country’s past. This beginning fugue acknowledges the tremendous effect that the passing of time leaves on people and things as Kalfopoulou lives through her grandparents’ last days and eventual death. At the same time, she admires their patience, perseverance and devotion to a country where “everything is too immediate,” too extreme” and where people put up everyday struggles to accomplish even the minimum of tasks, such as having to wait for years before their telephone line is connected.

The chapter “Traffic Politics” is especially indicative of this kind of struggle. In living the madness of today’s Athenian roads everyone “needs to make the lights as if that green light represents some concept everyone else is too slow to take advantage of; we drive like we are possessed, as if the chokes and errands and destinations we are out to complete must occur within the next few seconds if there is going to be any tomorrow.” The tone often gets bleak and ironic as Kalfopoulou explains the Greek term “koroидo” (“sucker”) and gives examples of people refusing to budge on a crowded road or absurdly blocking the traffic in order to avoid being called a “sucker.”

What is more, traffic politics and its bendable morals becomes a microcosm of Greek society, where people try to impose their own rules. Kalfopoulou vividly relates the gruesome details of court trials she endures after an accident with a taxi driver. Nevertheless, she remains impressed by these individualist initiatives, of how, for instance, her lawyer suggests he represent her case for no payment, or how a store employee holds up a line of impatient clients to help an elderly woman who is not even sure what she is asking for. Kalfopoulou believes that these kinds of individualist solutions to problems originate in the Greeks’ historical distrust of authority, and especially foreign governments, which goes as far back as the Ottomans. That is why, Kalfopoulou suggests, people make up “unofficial solutions for what was officially unacceptable.”

Kalfopoulou discovers too that she can be victimized by the absurdity and inconsistency of rules. When she is given a ticket for not wearing a seat belt despite her earliest explanation to the traffic policeman that she had been in a hurry to get to her daughter, Kalfopoulou feels confused and “trapped in the tangled structures others manage to dodge.”

A woman who has parked illegally in front of the narrator’s car in order to do her shopping is not penalized because she happens to have a baby with her.

In innovative ways, Kalfopoulou presents herself as an Arachne who spins “a tangled yarn, exchanged, sold, and bartered” when she confronts the bureaucratic labyrinth of Greek civil services in the intriguing chapter “Academic Phallacism.” The witty title reflects the mysterious entanglements of Greek national universities where nepotism and lack of meritocracy reign supreme. This is amusing, very few, if not the only, pieces of writing that I know of which so vehemently and frankly exposes what has long been the thorn in the hiring procedures for prestigious positions in the Greek public sector. It has become common knowledge in Greece that only those who belong to the “dyki toux” (“one of theirs”) circle of people in authority have their candidacy for important positions seriously considered.

Assigning mythological names to the professors involved in her efforts to get a lecturer’s position at the University of Athens, Kalfopoulou also takes the risk of coming across as offensive towards those who might recognize their mythological personas as fallen gods and goddesses. After all, the gods and goddesses of the ancient world were better known for their passions, jealousies and other flaws rather than for acting out of any objective sense of right or wrong. Still, Kalfopoulou demonstrates that myths are not the opposite of reality. Rather, myths may originate in reality and could even give meaning to a world where “legal formalities [are] divorced of substance.”

In the sections “The (Post) Colonial Eye” and “Tsiflik” the author further explores her belief that the fundamental question in Greece is, “Who looks after whom,” who being to and therefore receives protection from a “tsiflik,” the Turkish word “used idiomatically in modern Greece to suggest a domain under the authority of one person, or clique.” The acts of favoritism by those in authority in the public sector have contributed to the Greeks’ distrust of the State in its role of safeguarding people’s rights. Quoting from The Economist article “A Country on the Edge” by Brian Beedham, Kalfopoulou points out that there has always been a strong connection between history and people’s character. She mentions the example of Kapodistria, the first governor of the newly-liberated Greece in 1827, who was assassinated because the local leaders of the War of Independence regarded him as an outsider and as such particularly suspect. Kapodistria had made the fatal mistake of listening to the advice of a foreign minister instead of the locals and putting one of the local “anzaires” leaders in jail.

Being regularly reminded that “without protection one never gets very far,” Kalfopoulou recounts more stories she has heard or experienced herself in order to prove the close connection between the personal and the political, the private and the public, when it comes to corruption and people’s suspicions of one another and the State. For her, it is no wonder “why almost every Greek wore some ver-
sion of the evil eye, and never ceased to cross themselves when things took a turn for the good."

Having lost the lecturer's position at the University of Athens to someone who does not seem to have the required qualifications, Kalfopoulou appeals to the Supreme Court only to hear the now trite remark, “Greece eats her children.” The bitter sarcasm with which the chapter ends not only emphasizes the feeble foundation of the Greek state which, according to Kalfopoulou, has not yet fully developed its cultural or national identity, but also implies people's powerlessness and resignation to the ruling chaos around them. Those who dare to uncover the dark holes of the system or who try to do things differently stay suspect and are penalized by remaining outsiders.

While in Athens, Kalfopoulou’s American self grows into an obstacle in her dealings with public-sector services and people, and she is often encouraged to go back to America. But in the fourth chapter “The Story of the Wall” Kalfopoulou reaches the conclusion that her Greek family name and heritage are in fact responsible for her newly discovered sense of belonging. On the island of Patmos, where she buys a house, Kalfopoulou learns “to speak a language of vulnerability” and “share common ground, to become ‘dyki tous.’” She notes “I was given secrets, the secrets of how people lived and thought and built edifices of meaning as literal as the tools and materials with which they built them.” The lucid description of the houses she visits, the insights into the locals’ characters and habits as well as the colorful dialogues give this chapter an air of ethnographic quality which may text: nostalgia for what is lost or simply forgotten can be recovered into seas. The sounds are hard to part from, and keep us awake.” Like many native Greeks, Kalfopoulou has adopted a state of constant alertness, as if she too now realizes she must fend for herself against what cannot be controlled or changed. Supplemented with a glossary of Greek names, which, as the author tells us, give identity and destiny, the book provides us with more historical and anecdotal background to the narrative. With committed sincerity and critical attention, Kalfopoulou draws her own map of cultural survival, ethnic awareness and spiritual growth. In “Broken Greek: A Language to Belong” Kalfopoulou has created a new kind of Greek American text: nostalgia for what is lost is not a burden. Instead, what is lost or simply forgotten can be revived and protected through innovative and passionate personal interventions and reinventions.

“Broken Greek: A Language to Belong” can be ordered from www.amazon.com or directly from Plain View Press www.plainviewpress.net. For information about Adrianna Kalfopoulou, visit www.adriannekalfopoulou.com.

Anastasia Stefanidou, Ph.D., has taught American literature and ethnic poetry at the Department of American Literature and Culture, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece. Her scholarly work on Greek American literature has appeared in the Journal of the Hellenic Diaspora, The Charioteer, the Journal of Modern Hellenism, and “The Greenwood Encyclopedia of Multiethnic American Literature.”

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The Great Betrayal
A Survey of the Near East Problem
by Edward Hale Bierstadt

Edward Hale Bierstadt was Executive Secretary of the Emergency Committee for Near East Refugees in 1923, one of the main groups that assisted the survivor-refugees of the massacres and expulsions. In this book (a reprint of the original 1924 edition), he chronicles aspects of the destruction and extermination of the Christian populations of Asia Minor, the Greeks, the Armenians and the Assyrians, first by the Union and Progress cabal under the Ottomans, and then by the forces of Kemel Ataturk.

The International Association of Genocide Scholars (IAGS) recently voted overwhelmingly that “the Ottoman campaign against Christian minorities of the Empire between 1914 and 1923 constituted a genocide against Armenians, Assyrians, and Pontian and Anatolian Greeks.” This work initiates a series of studies our house will be publishing to amplify aspects of this genocide, which even now political forces not only in Turkey but also in the US and Europe seek to deny. Subsequent publications will be guided by Bierstadt’s approach, who writes in his Introduction, “I have taken my direct evidence from sources that can not readily be accused of bias, chiefly American. Where I have adopted conclusions . . . that are in line with Greek or Armenian points of view I have done so entirely on my own judgments and in accordance with the facts, not because I desired to show the slightest partiality either to Greece or Armenia.”

Constantine XI Dragas Palaeologus
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A Modern Greek–English Dictionary
Volume A (Alpha)

Edited by Demetrios J. Georgacopoulou

According to American Library Association’s Choice, this title is “a landmark publication in Greek–English lexicography... representing the results of nearly fifty years of ambitious scholarship.” The only dictionary of Modern Greek based on the actual recorded usages or words spanning 250 years, of which Professor Georgacopoulou painstakingly collected 2.5 million. Six volumes are projected in total. xxxv+811 pages, hardbound. ISBN: 978-0-89241-600-9 Price: $140.00

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NEW FROM ARISTIDE D. CARATZAS

FEBRUARY 23, 2008

THE NATIONAL HERALD
The Macedonian Question Answered
G. Papavizas addresses an issue that has consumed Europe since the 1870s

Claiming Macedonia: The Struggle for the Heritage, Territory and Name of the Historic Hellenic Land, 1862-2004
By George C. Papavizas
McPharland and Company, 292 pages, $35

By Mark N. Lardas
Special to The National Herald

Macedonia is where Greece ends and the rest of the world begins. The issue is where?

For Greeks, that border is defined by the northern periphery of the province of Macedonia. Neighbors to the north disagreed. First Bulgaria, then Yugoslavia has claimed Macedonia. They asserted that Greece ended at Macedonia’s southern boundary.

Today, Greece faces a new challenge to claiming Macedonia. A former republic of Yugoslavia, cynically carved from southern Serbia, containing a mixture of ethnic Slavs, Bulgarians and Albanians, calls itself Macedonia. It now claims the province’s ancient heritage.

This is the “Macedonian Question,” a political issue that consumed the Balkans – and Europe – from the 1870s until the Greek Civil War ended in 1949. The issue re-opened in 1990 after a 50-year dormancy by the creation of a state that calls itself “The Republic of Macedonia.”

“Claiming Macedonia” by George C. Papavizas examines the Macedonian question. The book – unapologetically written from a Greek perspective – is both fascinating and informative. The author’s intended goals are to demonstrate the inappropriateness of the new Serbian nation calling itself Macedonia and to convince an American audience to stop supporting that claim.

If facts were the only consideration in naming the Republic of Macedonia, the author would succeed.

Papavizas follows attempts by Bulgaria to create a Balkan empire amid the decay of the Ottomans as the 20th century started, and then Tito’s attempts to expand Yugoslavia following World War II. The prize was the Thessaloniki – the finest harbor on the northern coast of the Aegean Sea. Except for unattainable Constantinople, Thessaloniki was the biggest industrial center and mercantile port in reach of these nations.

The Bulgarians (and later the Yugoslavs) attempted to cloak their territorial ambitions with as irre- dentity – redeeming lost homelands. The claim was nonsense, providing cover for imperialism.

Papavizas shows that the ethnic makeup of Macedonia was overwhelmingly Greek. The Slavophone minority also looked south to Greece, not north to Bulgaria. They preferred identifying with Greece’s ancient heritage, to becoming Bulgarians.

The Turks preferred turning the region over to the Bulgarians, their favored Christian minority, rather than to Slavs and Greeks. The Bulgarians were also more talented in enlisting the sympathies of Europe’s Great Powers than the Greeks.

The Bulgarian attempt to grab Thessaloniki and an Aegean coastline caused a bloody struggle for the soul of Macedonia in the last decade of the 19th century and the first two decades of the 20th century. The Bulgarians had the outgoing overlords on their side. The Greeks had just the stubborn support of the native population.

The conflict between the Greeks and the Bulgarians led to two regional conflicts in the second decade of the 20th century: the Second Balkan War and World War I. Greece, with the assistance of Serbia won the Second Balkan War and claimed Macedonia. After World War I Greece recovered Thrace, as well.

Yet Greece’s tenure did not remain unchallenged. Bulgaria allied with Germany and Italy in World War II, receiving control of Macedonia during the Axis occupation. Once that was done, Greece was pitched into a civil war, in which the Communist insurgents barred away Macedonia in exchange for support from now-Communist Yugoslavia.

Ultimately the uprising was crushed, but Yugoslavia never abandoned hope of obtaining Macedonia and an Aegean port. Imitating his Soviet overlords, Tito partitioned Serbia, creating the Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia from its Slavic, southern reaches.

Tito pretended it was part of a greater territory of ancient Macedonia, to establish a claim on northern Greece. Tito created a bogus heritage and created a synthetic “Macedonian” language by combining the Bulgarian dialect spoken there with a new alphabet.

It did Tito little good. Protected by NATO, Greece was too strong for Tito to attack directly, and Macedonia was too wedded to Greece for Tito to separate Macedonia from Greece politically. Macedonia was Greece, and Greece was Macedonia.

With the disintegration of Yugoslavia in the 1990s, the former Yugoslav state gained its independence and called itself Macedonia. While it did not quite openly claim northern Greece, it was willing to hint that that part of Greece – Macedonia – really ought to belong to a country named Macedonia. The Macedonian question, dormant for decades, again awoke.

“Claiming Macedonia” is strongest where reciting this chronology. Papavizas meticulously recounts the events that bound Macedonia to Greece and the attempts of others – both outside and within Greece – to sever those bonds. He writes with the precision of the research scientist that he was. Prior to his retirement he was a microbiologist with over 200 technical papers and two books to his credit.

You cannot come away from reading these sections of “Claiming Macedonia” without understanding how much blood and treasure Greece and the inhabitants of Macedonia, both Greek-speakers and Slavophones, sacrificed to become part of Greece and to remain part of Greece.

For Papavizas, who grew up in Macedonia, the story is personal. He served as an officer in the Greek Army during the Greek Civil War, losing a foot to a mine. Two generations earlier his grandfather fought the Bulgarians.

After reading “Claiming Macedonia” you understand the sensitivity of Greeks, especially those from Macedonia – the real Macedonia – to the use of the name by a neighbor to the north. What Americans see as verging on paranoia, seems to these people as a new chapter in a very old book – yet another attempt to alienate Macedonia from Greece.

A recitation of facts – however passionately or accurately presented – will not resolve the issue. The new problems created by a republic calling itself Macedonia are much different than those earlier posed by Bulgaria and Yugoslavia.

Papavizas feels that because this “nationality” was created artificial- ly, it lacks legitimacy. He writes as if he believes you cannot create nationalities. Yet history shows it is possible to artificially create a people.

Sixty years ago there were no Palestinians, only Arabs living in Palestine. If they picked up and moved elsewhere, they were Arabs living somewhere else. Today few would argue that Palestinians are not now a separate culture.

Can Slavs similarly transform themselves into a new people called Macedonians? Demographers will likely settle that issue. Non-Albanian populations in Serbia, Bulgaria, and the nation that calls itself Macedonia are imploding. The ethnic Albanian population – in and out of Albania and – is skyrocketing. Unchanged, these trends will soon settle the Macedonian question. In two generations Slavs that call themselves Macedonian will have been displaced by Albanians.

Under the normal scheme of

This is the “Macedonian Question.”

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things, the former Yugoslav republic would allow itself to be absorbed into one of its neighbors. To the west and northwest are Albania and Kosovo, threatening the new state an Albanian tide. To the north and to the east are Serbia and Bulgaria, impoverished due to a half-century of Communist rule.

Greece, to the south, is healthy. It alone of the new republic’s neighbors (as Papavizas makes clear) has forsworn territorial interest in the region. This leaves the republic with choice between absorption by undesirable neighbors or continued independence. Independence cannot be justified on economic or geographic grounds, so it clings to its ethnicity – even if it is a bogus ethnicity – to maintain its independence.

Greece’s new neighbor realizes that in the court of public opinion, the United States, not Greece, is the main venue. They play to that venue. The new republic wants strident Greek reactions to their use of the name Macedonia, since that elicits American sympathy for them, not Greece. Tally the towns named Athens, Corinth, Sparta and Ithaca in the United States. Americans have no problem with borrowing place names. They are baf-
stled as to why Greece’s northern neighbor expropriation of the name Macedonia differs from American practices.

Papavizas’ passionate objection to the name Macedonia is the re-
sponse that the Republic of Macedo-

nia desires from Greeks. This book could have been more effective if Papavizas had shown more understanding of the predicament of those in this new Republic. He offers no solutions other than use a name other than Macedonia.

This is like telling a drowning man not to cling to you because you will both drown. If he hangs on, you might both live. If he lets go he will certainly drown. While you see his action as folly that puts you at risk, he sees it as his only chance to survive. Until given a real-

istic way to survive without the name “Macedonia,” Greece’s new neighbor to the north will cling to its Macedonian name and invent heritage with the same persistence. Papavizas accurately depicts the role that Macedonia played in the creation of the Greek state. Before Philip’s conquest of Attica and the Peloponnisos there were Greeks and Greek cities, but no Greek na-
tion or Greek homeland.

Greeks thought of themselves as citizens of their “polis,” their city. A Greek that lived in the next city was as much a foreigner as a bar-

barian on the plains of Scythia. Traces of that attitude still survive today.

Philip – and his son, Alexander the Great – changed that. Philip hammered the individual cities in-
to a solid mass. Alexander annealed that mass into a nation called Greece. The resulting alloy contained Macedonia. Greece without Macedonia is like steel without carbon.

But Papavizas spends time ex-

amining whether Macedonians were Greek before the conquest. This misses the larger fact: that issue is trivial. He shows that Mac-
edonians created the Greece nation. Macedonian culture and heritage is as essential to the existence of the Greek nation as the contributions of the city-states. Similarly, to sepa-

rate Macedonian heritage from the rest of Greece is to diminish Mace-
donia, to rip a vital and important heart out of that heritage.

Despite these criticisms, “Claim-
ing Macedonia” is well worth read-
ing. It is a very good book. It has one of the clearest explanations of the origins of the Macedonian question and it intricacies since it first arose in the 19th century.

The National Herald inter-

viewed George Papavizas for this book review.

TNH: Why did you write this book?

GCP: My grandfather fought the Bulgarians (to keep Macedonia). I felt close to my grandfather. When the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia separated, I felt that their use of the name was not right. My own grandson was asking, “Why is this happening? I expected a historian to writing a book about it. No one did, so I felt I had to. I had earlier written a book about my experiences in the Greek Civil War called “Blood and Tears.”

TNH: Can you tell us of some of your experiences in that war?

GCP: I served three years in the Greek Army. During the war I was a lieutenant. I led a platoon fighting the communists in northwest Greece. I lost a leg below the knee in a minefield on Mount Vitsi shortly before the war ended.

TNH: Was the Greek Civil War a real civil war or was it an invasion by Yugoslavia?

GCP: All of the people I fought spoke Greek. It was 30,000 Greek Communists against the 100,000-

man Greek army. Tito was supply-
ing them. They signed agreements giving him Macedonia for that help. But the Americans were sup-

plying us to balance that out.

TNH: Both the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia created “au-
nomous” states within their na-
tions as tools to aid expansion. Both disintegrated as a result. Do you see an irony in that?

GCP: It was counterproductive, but no one expected either to collapse. If Tito had realized his tac-
tics might lead to Yugoslavia’s dis-

integration and acted to prevent that, things might have been bet-
ter.

TNH: Could the Macedonian Republic be more successful than Bulgaria and Yugoslavia in alienat-
ing the real Macedonia from Greece?

GCP: Only if they convince peo-
ple they are real Macedonians. They certainly can cause trouble. They are dependent upon Greece in many ways. Greece is helping to train their border guards. It de-

pends on the Greek government.

Mark Lardas, a Texan of Greek descent, was born and grew up in Ann Arbor, Michigan. An engi-

neer who works at a major aerospace company, he is also a free-

lance writer, amateur historian and model-maker.
Tryfon Tolides' Joyous Book of Sadness
A stunning debut collection on the poet's trans-Atlantic between-ness

“An Almost Pure Empty Walking”
By Tryfon Tolides
Penguin National Poetry Series, 66 pages, $16, paperback

Poetry runs deep in the Greek world, so deep that Greek experiences of the human condition seem intertwined with language and poetry. Who does not feel the resonance of words like “anthropos,” “philos,” “phos,” “logos,” “nous,” “psyche,” “ousia,” “hesychia” — words shaped and reshaped in the mouths of so many Fingers of the Greek poet, Tolides. From Homer to Sappho, Sophocles, Euripides to the writers of the New Testament, to Yiannis Ritos and Eleni Vakalo? Who does not appreciate the succinct vision Greek poets give to the perplexity of human-ness, or its ability to express “joyous sadness,” a paradox captured by the Greek word “harmolypi?"

Good poetry thrives not just in Greece today but also among Greeks writing in English. Word-smiths of Greek descent who have won national awards in the U.S. include Olga Broumas, born in Syros, the first non-native English speaker selected for the Yale Younger Poets Series for her electrifying volume, “Beginning with O” in 1977; Nicholas Samaras, raised on Patmos, whose “Hands of the Saddle-maker” also won the Yale Younger Poets Series in 1992; and Eleni Sikelianos, California-raised great-granddaughter of the revered Greek poet Angelos Sikelianos, who was the 2002 National Poetry Series Selection for her “The Monster Lives of Boys and Girls.”

With his award-winning book, “An Almost Pure Empty Walking,” Tryfon Tolides joins this eminent list. His collection of poems earned almost instant accolades when it appeared in 2006. Mary Karr, a best-selling poet and essayist on the New York Times list, called it a “stunning debut” and spoke of Tolides’ “illuminated grandeur. Tolides is the shaman of epiphany.” Paul Mariani, poet, biographer and literary scholar, praised his powers of observation: “In the things of this world, which we so often fail to notice, Tolides finds worlds within words, pulling them out of his gypsy bag and holding them up to the light like the tiny diamonds they are, one after the other: the doors, the dogs, the barbed wire fence, the dying mother, the holy air.”

Two story lines run through “An Almost Pure Empty Walking.” One is a story of immigrant arrival, immigrant work, immigrant eyes and the back and forth movement of immigrants between two homelands. This set of themes, announced clearly by “Immigrant,” the title of the first poem, is a piece of Tolides’ life. In 1972, when he was six years old, he and his mother and brother left the small village of Korifi Voiou in western Macedonia to join his father in Connecticut. Tolides’ poems take us through the many wrinkles in the lives of immigrants, who encounter the new world through the old and live both here and there. Working long hours in restaurants, a package store and pizza delivery, the immigrant son encounters worlds of hard loneliness: a woman for whom smoking is “the only thing left she likes” (15), in one case, and exceeding friendliness with strangers “with hunger for the idea of sex, or some contact” (13) in another. Harder still are images of raw power that cut through his conscience but make no sense to him: the unexplained surveillance in a shoe store; supermarket aisles of excess; media stories that grilly toss around words like democracy...or human rights, or words that seem opposite: genocide, weapons of mass destruction, terrorism (37).

In a set of powerful poems where conscience burns, beginning with “The Mouse and the Human” (a much-discussed poem which won the Foley Prize), he questions the human drive to destroy unwanted guests. Tolides follows a charge and a duty prescribed by poet Odysseus Elytis when he called poetry a source of innocence, full of revolutionary forces. Still there are moments of quiet revelation. The poet is in a park near the ocean: “I sit alone, / barren, peaceful, safe with no one, / as on a sunny windless day in an empty parking lot” (16). From odd angles he discovers beauty in the unobserved details or simple acts, as in driving on an American highway “in August with the windows rolled down / on a muggy night passing green signs with white / letters, taking in the soft rubbery scent of air, / perhaps thinking about what cannot be unraveled” (29). There are quiet moments of joyous fulfillment that the poet will not leave unattended.

America also gives the poet his appreciation for the village, the setting of a more intimate home. Greece is powerfully present in this collection. It appears right away in “Almond Tree,” which names with audible precision sights, smells and crackling sounds remembered from a mountain village. It appears too in “Circus.” “The First Thing: Ousia,” “Etymological” and “All Summer,” poems pressing hard against the longing of Immigrant, the first in the collection. It appears also in “From Mount Athos” and “I have Two Stones” and other poems too numerous to list, ending with the last poem, “I Will Sweep,” which leaves us with “the ancient scent of the house, joyous and crying” (66). Regular summer visits keep the place, the people, the trees, soil, air, houses, sparrows, swallows, plants, smoke a continuous memory and presence. The village becomes a jewel that lights up whenever the immigrant son is far away. Everything feels grounded. Things all seem to rest in their proper place.

In comments he sent to me last fall, Tolides wrote about his experience of the village: “I love the village; it is home for me, grounding in body and spirit, even without the people. It is a meditation, a simplicity and rejuvenation for my soul.... A beautiful magical grounding home, haunting, spirit-filled windfilled mountainfilled ‘monopatifilled’ (path taken), spirit-filled windfilled mountainfilled ‘monopatifilled’ (path taken), stonefilled ‘korombilafilled’ (plumfilled) ... place. A village like many, which is dying out. Now, in the wintertime, there are perhaps 30-40 people that live there. In the summer the population spikes, but not like it used to. The youngest of the people that live there year round are in their mid-70s. Before I and my mother and brother left in 1972 to join my father in Connecticut, cut... there were 3 little stores, one ‘peripinto’ (kiosk), the elementary school was still open, two ‘kafenia’ (cafés) and the population of the village, though it had been dwindling for some time, was at least three hundred people. Two ‘tsangaridhes’ (shoemakers). Our village priest was still alive (now there is one that comes from Tsiorti, one Sunday to our village and the next Sunday to the next village of Chraisvagi). The place was full of spirit and ‘tsakna’ (dried twigs) and ‘manitaria’ (mushrooms) and ‘foties’ (fires) and ‘provata’ (sheep) and ‘tsoknides’ (nettles) and ‘kalives’ (huts) and ‘mouries’ (mulberries) and ‘tiria’ (cheese) and psychically rich people and the cemetery was alive at night, the presence of the living people always had the effect of making the dead more living, too, they were always in the air and in the houses with us and the animals. Two churches and five ‘eklisakia’ (chapels) and a bunch of iconostasia. 980 meters up with a spectacular view of many mountains around us there, including Smolikas and Vasilitsa and A’lias and Grammos. A bus twice a week for trips to the local market town of Tsiorti” (http://www.lsa.umich.edu/modgreek/detail/0,2250,6740%255Farticle%255F51497,00.html).

“An Almost Pure Empty Walking” captures the transatlantic between-ness of the poet’s life: between America and Greece, city and village, complexity and simplicity. Added to this is his close-ness to “people nearing the gates of death” (57) while he tries hard to hold onto things which persist in life (61).

This between-ness gives the book its second narrative line: the son’s reckoning with his mother’s illness and death. In the background are more disease and death: the father, already dead 15 years and appearing to him only once in a dream (27). Uncle Apostolos, sick with cancer in a clinic in Thessaloniki (6); a dead aunt in the village (58).

Terminal illness follows the mother’s years of living ungrounded, suitescases here and there (62). Seen from the mother’s eyes, America is an impossible adjustment. “What is America? A hole in the water. What have we gained but poison and illness?” (1), she complains in “Immigrant.” From the first hard note she utters, we feel her deep pain coupled with the immigrant son’s helplessness. “Her whole message, a cry, though still she asked / what I would eat for lunch. Back in bed, / I listened awhile to the furnace. Then, dressed, / passed the same books and papers spread on the floor, /
and out, to the snow, the crows in the park” (1).

Again and again we follow the son through intersections of pain and longing to the precipice of incomprehension. Rather than hurl himself over the edge, he tries to hold onto the life he has, gently, not by crushing but by observing and listening deeply. And here we see his “shamanesque” power: his ability to find healing in the smallest things: in two white stones picked up “by the shore of a monastery in Greece,” or “a green shirt that runs when I wash it,” or “a raw throb around one tooth” (18); or in walking “Walking is like the air and the sky and the stars whenever I need them. / Or like the sun on your back, or on your face, or through a window on a bed in a / room where you’ve gone to read the letter in the quiet house, or like the smell of / the sun on your arm, or like touching your nose on the hair on your arm to smell, / even on a cold day” (18).

For brief moments at least, he reaches points where “knowledge and the intellect are submerged in wonder, in ecstasy, where knowledge is made perfect through faith,” as Tolides has described it in an interview he gave me through correspondence. He elaborates on the process in religious terms and shows that his poems really seek to enter an interior place:

“Isaac the Syrian speaks of ‘in- bration’ with the love of God, a point at which knowledge and the intellect are submerged in wonder, in ecstasy, where knowledge is made perfect through faith,” as Tolides has described it in an interview he gave me through correspondence. He elaborates on the process in religious terms and shows that his poems really seek to enter an interior place:

“Isaac the Syrian speaks of ‘in- bration’ with the love of God, a point at which knowledge and the intellect are submerged in wonder, in ecstasy, where knowledge is made perfect through faith,” as Tolides has described it in an interview he gave me through correspondence. He elaborates on the process in religious terms and shows that his poems really seek to enter an interior place:

The soul, because of her trust in God, becomes as one drunken, in the awestruck wonder of her continual solicitude for God; and by simple, uncompounded vision and by unseeing intuition concerning the Divine Nature, the intellect becomes accustomed to attending to rumination upon that nature’s hidden-ness.” One way to this life is through awe at what God has created, all around us. And there is a state, not a method, which makes a way toward this life. That is stillness, according to Isaac. I think I am someone who needs more solitude than the average person. ‘Hesychia,’ stillness, allows for, is the climate in which, something of seeing, of communion with being and with the divine might take place. Something in me wants this sweetness. And recognizes its value to my sanity and spiritual progress or health. I don’t know. I think it may have to do with temperament. I don’t know if one can aspire toward ‘hesychia’ if something in his soul isn’t aimed

of poems. Tolides earned a B.F.A. in Creative Writing from the University of Maine at Farmington and an M.F.A. in Creative Writing from Syracuse University. He also completed a two-year diploma program at the Hartford Conservatory in Jazz Composition, and the fact because I believe you can hear in his poetry his feeling for texture and phrasing, for the pauses, breaths and silences in music from guitar to ‘klarina,’ from Pat Metheny to Petros Lukas Chalkias to the gypsy musicians “o Angelos,” “to Tsimoul,” “o Minas” who’d come to his village for weddings and walk through his “horio” with the “ghambro.” You can also hear in his poetry the “horiatika” (village) Greek, as he calls it, of his mother tongue, a language not restricted to speech but full of inflection and gesture, smells and forces, and thick with the inflections he remembers in voices no longer living.

Readers will find in “An Almost Pure Empty Walking” the insight of an old sage, the energy and curiosity of a young boy, the pacing, the pausing, the inflections and the potent feeling of “harmolypi” we find in the best of Greek poetry.

Artemis Leontis is associate professor of Modern Greek at the University of Michigan. She has published essays on Greek literature in Greek and English. Her books are “Topographies of Helenism: Mapping the Homeland;” “Greece, A Travelers’ Literary Companion,” an edited volume of short stories by Greek authors; and “What These Ithakas Mean … Readings in Cavafy,” coedited with Lauren E. Talalay and Keith Taylor.

Tryfon Tolides earned a B.F.A. in creative writing from the University of Maine at Farmington and a M.F.A. in creative writing from Syracuse University. In 1972, when Tolides was six years old, he and his mother and brother left the small village of Korifi Voion in western Macedonia to join his father in Connecticut. Tolides in his book of poetry, “An Almost Pure Empty Walking,” draws a soulful picture of a child immigrant’s difficult entry into an alien American world and his periodical return to the cherished but vanished Greek village.

A few details about the author’s education add to the appreciation of this marvelously accessible book

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THE NATIONAL HERALD FEBRUARY 23, 2008
Empowering Greek American Women
A feminist critiques Greek patriarchy and advocates cultural change

American Aphrodite: Becoming Female in Greek America
By Constance Callinicos
Pella Publishing Company, 298 pages, $14 paperback

By Yiorgos Anagnostou
Special To the National Herald

Dedicated to the memory of Eleni Anagnostou.

"A
merican Aphrodite: Becoming Female in Greek America" turns private dramas into public documents. It reports the experiences of those Greek American women who were oppressed by ethnic patriarchy. It tells the stories of those who have felt the iron grip of male domination and its power to put down women; to mute, insult and render them inferior and unworthy. Its author records the far-reaching consequences of psychological and physical abuses against women. Viscerally felt, patriarchy shattered dreams, crushed desires, crumbled lives; dwarfed ambitions, stripped away self-confidence, fermented rebellion; it traumatized and oppressed. Family relations were injured, and immigrant culture was spited. Patriarchy exiled women doubly, both from family and ethnicity.

The book builds on an oral history project, which consists of the author's interviews with a total of 111 women spanning three generations. It gives voice to the "picture bride" generation of the 1920s and 1930s and to the daughters and granddaughters of that cohort. The sample does not include post-World-War-II immigrant women, as the author makes clear. For her research, Callinicos scoured the country between 1978 and 1992, looking to interview women who grew up in various places in the United States but who shared the social background of early 20th century rural Greece. Separated by geography but connected through an "almost identical upbringing," these three generations of women were acculturated, Callinicos distressingly points out, "as Greek peasant girls, first, last and always." It was the transplanted Greek village in America, the "horro," which overwhelmingly defined their existence.

There is a personal component in the book as well, with the author disclosing parts of her own story as well as her family's history. Briefly yet poignantly, she draws the portrait of her immigrant grandmother. Familiar only with bits and pieces of the family's distant past, Callinicos puts together the fragments to reconstruct her grandmother's world, a peasant way of life wholly transplanted in 1920s America. Readers are told a story of uninterrupted continuity, where the ways of the Greek village survived intact to entirely define the life of an immigrant woman in America. "In fact," the author writes, "my grandmother did live out her life in the village, even though her body was here in America."

Callinicos, a professed feminist, also undertakes a dejected appraisal of her mother's life. American-born, vibrant, and "gifted with a talent for music and a beautiful voice," Mary Zervas Triantafilou aspired to "become a musician and teacher," an ambition that was thwarted by traditionalist parents. Despite her struggle to escape from parental control, Mary ultimately succumbed to an arranged marriage, ending up as an unpaid waitress and cashier in her husband's restaurant, and a dutiful "Good Greek Mother and Homemaker."

This is a book driven by deeply felt emotions. Anger layers it. Passionate resolve motivates its writing. Frustration textures it. Tears stain its pages. And the conviction that it matters, at all cost, to tell its story animates its purpose. The author's decision to include lengthy interview material affords a direct glimpse into this nexus of these feelings. Intimately confessional, the numerous testimonies converge on a single point: they sorrowfully document and bitterly indict Greek patriarchy for limiting the lives of women. A chorus of women's voices expresses an avalanche of grievances. Women were denied opportunities for education; shamed for their non-conformity; silenced as inferior; humiliated, again and again, because they happened to be women, an identity which patriarchy devalues.

The author joins the chorus, recounting episodes of her own experience growing up in Greek America. She brings attention to ordinary sociability where the ideology of patriarchy infuses the worlds (and words) of men and is internalized by women. Toasting newlyweds for a son (not a daughter); rehearsing proverbs about women as sexually vulnerable and dangerous; treating sons preferentially. It is in this kind of everyday incidents that patriarchy works most effectively to dominate women. It makes it appear natural that women represent a burden. It is as if it goes without saying that women are lesser than men. In the context of the honorable shame culture, where non-conformity to traditional ideals brings shame to the entire family and compromises its honor, patriarchy requires that women must be supervised and controlled.

The accretion of ordinary insults against women ultimately weaves a suffocating social reality. The author informs readers that women's asphyxiation constituted a grim reality even in the late 1980s and 1990s. Ominously, she reports: "The Greek world in America remains largely androcentric. Many (women) feel it is a world they are not inclined to continue to inhabit or perpetuate. Simply put, they leave."

Callinicos offers acute insights on how patriarchy is transmitted. She understands that this ideology can be found where least suspected, in the plausible experience of folk dancing for instance. Consider the reasons why she recalls an early dance lesson from her immigrant grandmother. Her purpose is to show that this instruction is more than learning how to dance;
It is from this feminist angle that Callinicos advocates resistance to patriarchy. Significantly, while the author indicts immigrant culture, she is not willing to altogether abandon it. "Ethnic food and dancing still function as sources of pleasure, meaningful sociability, and cherished intergenerational remembering. At the same time, it is not possible for women to authentically connect with ethnicity. Callinicos suggests, unless they form their own exclusive, all-female circles, away from the authoritative male gaze. Here, the author borrows a page from a specific brand of feminism, influential in the 1970s and the 1980s. It was common for women to establish their own separate places to socialize, create, and work, shutting off the males whose demands, controlling attitudes, censoring comments, and sexism were seen as inhibiting women’s liberation.

It is from this feminist angle that Callinicos advocates resistance to patriarchy. Adopting the perspective of an activist, she urges women to battle those ideas and behaviors that subjugate them. As a template for future action, she offers a personal story, which unfolds in the exclusive company of women who gathered to celebrate the birthday of her sister. This festive occasion is turned into an act of rebellion when women violate the patriarchal restrictions imposed upon them through folk dancing. The narration of this event overflows with the cathartic exuberance one experiences in the act of subverting structures of domination. With the hypnotic melodies of the clarinet and the incessant beating of the drum (288) as the sensory background, the leader of the folk circle dance appropriates male behavior and creates an emerging imagery that changes a tradition that has restrained women. The woman dancer leaping with "her billowing skirts swirling at her ankles" (288), kicking up her legs, and shouting, redefines tradition in women's terms.

Documenting and critiquing patriarchy exemplifies a particular feminist strategy, namely consciousness-raising. Revealing the workings of patriarchy explains the real causes of women's domination. In this manner, women who were taught to blame themselves as intrinsically unworthy are now in a position to understand what brought about their condition (and conditioning). Exposing the causes of their domination empowers women. It provides a language through which they can speak back and resist patriarchy in all its guises.

A subversive component in “American Aphrodite” is bound to generate controversy, as it bulldozes away a cultural taboo in Greek America, the absolute prohibition against airing one’s dirty linens. Violating this code of silence assaults the principles of the honor-shame culture: Transgressions from cultural ideals must be kept hidden, away from the prying public. Predictably, interviewees made a point of keeping their anonymity, to avoid exposing their family. It is the making of the author’s story public that defies the principles of honor. It is also the decision to publish narratives about duplicity in Greek America that risks ethnic stigmatization. Ethnic groups are conscious of their historical vulnerability, exercising caution to keep “dark secrets” away from public view. The airing of such secrets raises a politically and ethically sensitive issue, namely how an author introduces and discusses ethno-centric discourse.

Throughout the book’s narratives of victimization powerfully cascade, leaving no doubt about the reality of patriarchy in Greek America, past and present. Yet the persuasive case laced by the testimonies should not distract the readers’ attention from a serious fault of the book. Callinicos suggests that the sample of interviewed women represents the whole. It is precisely this erroneous assumption that enables her to portray Greek American families of early 20th century rural origins as a homogenous entity across time and space. Incredibly, Greek Americans are depicted as frozen in time, wrapped up in their past, mechanically reproducing peasant patriarchy. At least some immigrant families displayed remarkable cultural versatility and openness to new ideas where caring, non-patriarchal males encouraged their daughters’ creative proclivities. In the piece “The Twined Muses: Ethel and Jenne Magafan,” for example, Steve Frangos takes note of an immigrant father from a small village near Mesinia who “recognized and warmly supported” his daughters’ “artistic gifts.” This portrait alerts us about the existence of a male Greek America far more diverse than the one reconstructed in the book. As it is evident in my discussion, “American Aphrodite” greatly contributes to the struggle of women’s liberation. But in neglecting to take into account the heterogeneity of peasant families the book commits a disservice to Greek America and to the wider reading public, which it explicitly identifies with the “Americans who want to know her (the Greek American woman).”

In this regard, reading “American Aphrodite” presents a twofold challenge. On the one hand, it calls upon the reader to enter a world that destabilized women, and to reflect on how to actively battle patriarchy. On the other hand, a critical reading should resist accepting that world as the only ethnic reality.

“American Aphrodite” can be ordered by sending a check in the amount of $18.00 ($14.00 for the book and $4.00 for postage) to Pel-la Publishing Company, 337 West 36th Street, New York, NY 10018.

 Yiorgos Anagnostou is an associate professor in the Modern Greek Program at The Ohio State University. His book “Contours of ‘White Ethnicity’: Popular Ethnography and the Making of Usable Past in Greek America” is forthcoming from Ohio University Press.

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**Underwater Dreams**

**A Modern Greek Tragedy**

By Dr. James Rouman

See the animated book trailer at NEW website! http://www.jamesrouman.com

**Reviews of Underwater Dreams**

*Odyssey Magazine*, in their international January/February 2007 issue says: “What sets Rouman’s novel apart is his insight into immigrant life in small town America.... A laudable effort, Underwater Dreams is an interesting addition to the literature of the Greek-American immigrant experience....

*Connecticut Medicine* highlights the medical angle. “This is not a tale that requires familiarity with the writer to grip the reader in its spell. For any physician who has heard a colleague say at retirement, ‘I think I have at least one book in me and now I’m going to write it,’ this is one that really got written and deserves a read.”

*Historywire.com*, January 27, 2007, in Book Alert: “The new novel by retired anesthesiologist James Rouman is a welcome gift... Rouman is at his best in the difficult task of capturing urban black dialect in dialogue between characters Martha and Daisy, as their friendship deepens.”

*Kirkus notes*: "The most intimate -and interesting- sections of the novel are the descriptions of anesthesiology: “We have a connection to our patients no other doctors have... when they’re asleep there’s a constant dialogue going on between us... only the linguistics are different... It’s almost a spiritual thing that’s hard to explain.”

*Midwest Book Review* calls it “A dramatic and bittersweet tale, which paints thoroughly believable characters to the very end.”

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Peter E. Randall Publisher
Harry Mark Petrakis: Master Storyteller
Writes with enormous compassion for his characters

Legends of Glory and Other Stories
By Harry Mark Petrakis
Southern Illinois University Press, 174 pages, $25

T he new collection of writing by Harry Mark Petrakis, “Legends of Glory and Other Stories,” couples eight short stories with a novella. The beautifully crafted stories featuring Chicago Greeks are vintage Petrakis that reaffirm his mastery of this genre. In the novella, “Legends of Glory,” Petrakis explores an entirely different social environment. The principals are mainstream Americans living in a small Midwestern town. The fiction of Petrakis always has had a social subtext, but this new work shows heightened attention to some of the social ills afflicting the specific Greek American community and the United States in general.

Harry Mark Petrakis has authored 20 books, including novels, memoirs and collections of short stories and essays. He first burst into American consciousness in the 1956 when his story “Pericles on 31st Street” was published in the prestigious Atlantic Monthly and then adapted for use in one of the dramatic television shows of that era. With the publication of “A Dream of Kings” 10 years later, Petrakis became a best-selling novelist. That work was the basis of a motion picture of the same name released in 1969 with Anthony Quinn and Irene Papas in the starring roles.

Petrakis likes to speak of himself as a storyteller even though he knows that is not a fashionable designation these days. He likes to write about recognizable people in recognizable settings experiencing recognizable emotions. Some of his characters are able to change as circumstances change, but he frequently deals with the tragedy of those unable or unwilling to change. He is a firm advocate of the idea that authors should work hard to make the reading of their work as accessible as possible. When one is successful in that endeavor, as Petrakis so often is, there is a danger of the stories being read too quickly. Ernest Hemingway, another advocate of simplicity of style, complained that readers often mistake dense prose for density of thought while assuming that something that is easily read lacks depth. Some critics have made that error regarding Petrakis, categorizing him as an artist whose appeal is largely limited to ethnic or regional audiences. Fellow writers have not been so foolish. His work has been praised by John Cheever, Kurt Vonnegut, Isaac Bashevis Singer, Mark Van Doren and Elie Wiesel, among others. He has twice been nominated for the National Book Award in Fiction.

THE GREEK AMERICAN STORIES

Petrakis prefaces each story in “Legends of Glory and Other Stories” with a few paragraphs that discuss the real-life circumstances that inspired the writing. This anecdotal material enhances the stories by making a vital connection between the real life of Greek America as lived by Petrakis and the Greek America of his fiction. Wisdom does not necessarily accrue with age, but the octogenarian Petrakis writes with enormous compassion for his characters, a sense of the travails of everyday life that has grown keener with his advancing years.

These are traditional stories with a beginning, middle and an end. We want to know what is going to happen. But much of the richness of the writing comes in the sly commentary by Petrakis about our life in America and the vagaries of human mortality. The characters often carry classic names that suggest historical and mythological parallels. But the disciplined Petrakis does not let those echoes disrupt his narrative. They simply offer additional coloring to the events at hand.

Some aspect of sexuality is the theme in many of the tales. The events of “Beauty’s Daughter” are told by a daughter whose mother bore the name Aphrodite and was the wife of a baker. Her marriage was not happy, leading to a brief affair with grocer. The story, grounded in the nature and need for physical love, ultimately is about the empowerment of a mother and daughter through the most unlikely of circumstances.

Romance is the main concern of “A Tale of Color” as well. The lovers in this instance are Denzel, an African American from Chicago, and Sofia, a village girl Denzel meets while serving in Greece as a soldier in the 1950s. They marry and relocate to Chicago. Denzel’s parents reject the couple outright and the Greeks are distant. Petrakis shrewdly avoids the use of horrible Ku Klux Klan types. The problem is not this or that unsavory individual, but a society whose social structure was not prepared to accommodate such a couple.

“The Birthday” deals with the trauma of reaching age 75 while “Christina’s Summer” deals with a sexual moment of truth for a 13-year-old boy. What is striking about these tales in which age plays a prominent factor is the rich nuance and context of the telling. Using a straightforward narrative for “The Birthday” and a retrospective voice for “Christina’s Summer,” Petrakis adroitly captures the impact of the various ages at play.

“Rites of Passage” take places in a Halstead street restaurant. Sofoula, the owner’s daughter, and Panos, a waiter, become attracted to one another. At one point, after some naive talk about sexuality, Sofoula impulsively exposes her breasts to Panos, an action she immediately regrets. Panos, too, is embarrassed by her behavior. How that incident reveals the loneliness and frustration on which their mutual attraction is based is the central focus of the story. Further enriching the tale, however, is the candor Petrakis brings to his discussion of relationships in a Greek restaurant. When Panos decides to change his life entirely, Petrakis informs us:

“He felt confident that he’d make his way and find another position where he wouldn’t be at the beck and call of anyone with a few dollars for a plate of gyros and a Greek salad. He would never again have to flame the platers of saganaki and cry the foolish “Oppaaa!” again.”

“A Dishwasher’s Tale” is told by a dishwasher whose best friend sells hot dogs from a pushcart. The dishwasher is a cynic of sorts, but the hot dog seller feels the events of ancient history as if they were current news. As he explains to the dishwasher, “You are an earthbound creature! You don’t allow yourself to take wing and dream!” The relationship of the hot dog seller with his son is wretched and his life seems barren, yet when he dies and the dishwash-
er goes to his gravesite, there is a magical moment in which the world of myth asserts itself.

Older men who consider marrying younger women are the subject of “The Wisdom of Solon” and “The Rousing of Mathon Sarlas.” In “The Wisdom of Solon” such a marriage takes place with many unforeseen consequences. In the other story, Mathon, aged 55 and a widower for 10 years, wants to marry a younger woman but fears she may come to resent him due to the gap in their ages. He is concerned that such a resentment could become a hatred, causing him a hurt that would be far worse than the loneliness he now feels.

THE LEGENDS OF GLORY
“Legends of Glory” breaks new ground in the work of Harry Mark Petrakis. It is the longest work he has ever done involving non-Greek characters. More significantly, it is a novella dealing with the most important political issues of our time. “Legends of Glory” is further distinguished by being one of the first novels by an American about contemporary debates regarding American political morality in the wake of 9-11.

Dan and Molly Scott, moderately liberal Democrats, live in Plainfield, Indiana, a moderately conservative Republican town. Dan is a high school teacher who frequently uses Greek classics as texts. Noah, their only child, is a typical American teenager. He starred in high school football and worked at Kentucky Fried Chicken to make pocket money. Thomas Joshua Scott, Dan’s father, a veteran of World War II, won a Medal of Honor for bravery on Omaha Beach on D-Day.

The Scott family has a proud military tradition. A glass case in the Scott household is filled with medals and ribbons won by generations of Scott warriors who have fought in every American conflict since the civil war of 1861-1865. The only reason Dan never served in the military was that he came of military age during the peaceful decades between the two world wars.

Thomas Joshua lived with Dan and Molly for many years, but due to medical problems moved to a veteran’s home while in his 80s. During the years when the family lived under one roof, Noah, like many boys, felt closer to his grandfather than to his father. Noah was particularly enchanted by the war stories Thomas Joshua told with considerable flourish. Molly was never pleased with that circumstance. After Thomas told a tale about what napalm does to the human body, Molly commented that his stories were “sickly and unnatural.” Dan responded that his father was just a good storyteller.

The narrative of “Legends of Glory” is further distinguished by the depth of their support. Molly circulates petitions against the war in Iraq, seeks to comfort Molly, the letters Noah writes home regularly. Obviously unknowing, a second group of letters is sent only to his grandfather. These are much more stark and grim. One ends, “There is something wrong here, but I’m not smart enough to figure out what that is.”

Noah has entered his freshman year of college, but he feels the only honorable option for a true-blue Scott at a time of war is to join the military. His grades go from straight A to an occasional B and even a C. Abruptly, he leaves college and, to his mother’s horror, enlists in the Marines. The town is thrilled to have one of their own take such a heroic and patriotic step. Dan is surprised by the depth of their support. Molly thinks this reaction is stupid and intensifies her anti-war activities. Thomas Joshua informs Dan he had counseled Noah not to enlist at this time, but he doubts Molly will believe him.

When Noah is shipped to Iraq, he writes home regularly. Obviously seeking to comfort Molly, the letters are innocuous, and speak of eating well, contain snapshots of fellow soldiers, and refer to cooperative Iraqi civilians. Unknown to Molly, a second group of letters is sent only to Noah. These are much more stark and grim. One ends, “Things are more stark and grim. One ends, “The war is a remarkable collection from a remarkable author, an example of a writer demonstrating he can still produce the kind of stories for which he is famed, while having the courage to risk taking on new literary challenges. Petrakis is not an author to be read too quickly.

Dan Georgakas is a Fellow at the Center for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies at Queens College-City University of New York. His most recent book is “My Detroit: Growing Up Greek and American in Motor City.”
Agamemnon in Performance: 458 BC to AD 2004
By Fiona Macintosh, Pantelis Michelakis, Edith Hall and Oliver Taplin (editors)
Oxford University Press, 484 pages, $125

By E.G. Vallianatos
Special to The National Herald

On June 16, 2004, I was in Carnegie Hall in New York. I came at the invitation of Peter Tiboris, conductor of Manhattan Philharmonic, to attend the opera “Agamemnon.” I had not seen Peter since student days at the University of Wisconsin in the early 1970s. Now he was a famous conductor, directing the American premiere of Sergey Taneiev’s opera, “Agamemnon.”

Despite the fact this was “Agamemnon” out of 19th century Russia’s “Oresteia,” it was a Greek “Agamemnon” that came through the Russian opera, with Russian singing by the Russian Chamber Chorus of New York and the reading in English of the speeches of the protagonists. Olympia Dukakis, the Greek American actress and opera singer, sang the words of Klytaimnestra, the explosive force in the “Agamemnon” play. Both Sergey Taneiev, 1856-1915, and Peter Tiboris made slight changes to the original text, but they left the integrity of the play intact.

Unfortunately, this had often not been the case with past performances of “Agamemnon,” as is shown in the scholarly book, “Agamemnon in Performance: 458 BC to AD 2004.”

Agamemnon is one of the three plays of “Oresteia,” the crowning achievement of Aischylos, who lived from 525 to 456 B.C. He was the proud and noble Athenian son of Eleusis, the sacred polis near Athens. The Persian invasion of Greece shaped his work and life. He fought against the Persians at the battle of Marathon in 490 B.C., and again in 480 B.C. at the battle of Salamis. His epitaph said the longhaired Persians would remember him but made no mention of his plays. Aischylos almost single-handedly created the tragic theater of Athens. He wrote more than 90 plays, but only seven survived to our times.

Aischylos staged his “Oresteia” in 458 B.C. during the festival of Dionysos, the patron god of the theater, freedom, wine and rural life in Greece. Theater in Athens was a political school where citizens went to see and hear, out in the open, in the sunlight of the day, the reenactment of stories about the origins of Greek culture. Aischylos’ “Agamemnon” was Homeros’ Agamemnon, king of the rich-in-gold Mycenae and leading general in the Greeks’ war against Troy. Homeros’ “Iliad,” the world’s greatest epic poem, is about the Trojan War.

The “Iliad” was the model for Aischylos’ “Agamemnon,” which is why its message was dear to the Greeks who loved their country and knew their early history. Aischylos appealed to Greek patriotism. Aischylos urged the Greeks to fight for freedom and never to submit to slavery, believing it was better to die on your feet than live on your knees.

Agamemnon led the Greek armies to Troy to avenge the abduction of Helen by Paris, prince of Ilion or Troy. Helen was the daughter of Zeus and wife of the king of Sparte, Menelao.

Agamemnon and Menelao were children of Atreus, king of Argos. Atreus offended the gods by feasting his brother, Thyestes, with the flesh of his own children. Only Agisthos, son of Thyestes, survived the massacre of his brothers by Atreus.

Agamemnon and Menelao came out of a murderous family, a legacy that followed Agamemnon to the end. When he returned home after the end of the Trojan War, the citizens of Argos greeted him as a hero. However his wife Klytaimnestra and her lover Agisthos murdered him to avenge Agamemnon’s sacrifice of her daughter Iphigenia. Agamemnon sacrificed his daughter to appease goddess Artemis so she would allow the blowing of the winds that enabled the Greek fleet to travel to Troy.

The Trojan princess Kassandra, whom Agamemnon brought to Ar- gos, saw through Klytaimnestra’s revenge. As a priestess of Apollon, she warned the elders the fate of “Agamemnon” and, therefore, the reception of Greek culture in the West, is documented in the illustrated and scholarly book, “Agamemnon in Performance: 458 BC to AD 2004.” The 39 images of this book relate to the historical performances of “Agamemnon.” They range from ancient art depicting Agamemnon, Klytaimnestra and Kassandra to posters and pictures from the performance of the play since the Renaissance.

Two-thirds of the 19 scholars who wrote this book are classicists. The rest have positions in departments of English, comparative literature and theater studies. They include the editors: Pandelis Michelakis, who teaches classics at the University of Bristol; Edith Hall, professor of Greek cultural history at the University of Durham; Fiona Macintosh, senior research fellow at the Archive of Performances of Greek and Roman Drama and a faculty of St Cross College, Oxford; and Oliver Taplin, tutorial fellow at Magdalen College, Oxford. Twelve of the contributors of articles are British. The others are French, Italian, Swiss, Russian, Australian and American.

Of the 19 chapters, one is a general overview of the performance of “Agamemnon,” four examine the early history of the transmission of this play in the West; four chapters look at the play in Germany and England, with the Australian scholar writing the German chapter; four examine the problem of translating Aischylos; and six investigate the international fate of the play, especially in France, United States, Russia and Switzerland.

Because it is a product of a scholarly conference, the book is technical and somewhat difficult to read. The diversity of the contributors makes for fascinating reading, however.

At the end of the book there’s an extremely useful chronology of the “Agamemnon” / “Oresteia,” referencing more than 750 works inspired largely by Aischylos. The data from this chronology indicates the reception of Aischylos in different countries. Unfortunately, the author of this chronology, Amanda Wrigley, describes Greek Anatolia in 100-50 B.C. as Turkey, a country that did not exist even as the Ottoman Empire for more than a millennium after that date.

From the chronology at the end of the book, I noted that “Agamemnon” returned to Greece after some 2,300 years of absence. Its first performance took place in Athens in November 1903. In the next 100 years the Greeks staged “Agamemnon” / the “Oresteia” another 42 times. Americans saw the play for the first time in 1895. From 1895 to 2004 “Agamemnon” or the “Oresteia” played in American theaters 217 times.

The chronology and the book are very useful in that they summarize when and how the West treated a masterpiece of Greek literature, a play that has been central in the intellectual life of the West, including its theatrical canon, for at least the last two centuries.

Pandelis Michelakis cites the account of exiled Emperor Napoleon reading “Agamemnon” to his faithful colleagues at St. Helena, in the South Atlantic in November 1816. Here was one of Europe’s greatest leaders going to Aischylos for consolation, perhaps reflecting upon his own fall from power and seeking inspiration from the tragic fate of the Greek king Agamemnon.

“Agamemnon in Performance 458 BC to AD 2004” gives dozens of examples of the journey of “Agamemnon” in the West. The book shows the fleeting, often careless, handling of Aischylos’ “Agamemnon,” a seminal work presented and studied in the theaters, opera, and classrooms of the West since the text of Aischylos’ play appeared in print in the first half of the 16th century. In fact, from the 16th to the 18th, the “Agamemnon” the Europeans misused -- calling the play “cold and atrocious,” “primitive,” “obscure,” “unbalanced” and “unnatural” -- was Seneca’s “Agamemnon,” not Aischylos’ (chapters 3-4, 6). Seneca was influenced by Aischylos, but lived 600 years after Ais-
During the last two centuries Westerners adapted Aischylos' "Oresteia" to reflect their own unique concerns. They searched for their origins, erroneously thinking they were related to the Greeks (Chapters 6-16). The British, particularly in the 19th century, were obsessed with "origins and the evolutionary process." And because the "Oresteia" evolved from bad to good, it received a favorable reception in Victorian England (Chapter 8).

American producers also tried to "explore" their neuroses of gender, gender conflict and identity through "Agamemnon." They often did radical surgery to the Greek text in order to highlight gender conflict or to make Clytaimnestra even more prominent than she is in the original play or to stress her "complexity or androgyny." The adaptations during the Vietnam War highlighted the violence of war. And the coming of the millennium, with all the anxieties of turning to a new century, sparked performances of "Agamemnon" that addressed hidden fears, including the dangers of advanced technology. "Oresteia" became the play of choice after the Moslem attack against the United States on September 11, 2001. Justice and revenge became the theme of the 2002 performance of "Oresteia" at Baylor University (Chapter 17).

According to Pandelis Michelakis, Clytaimnestra's killing of Agamemnon "has haunted the Western imagination's pursuit of its past and identity." But, in my opinion, behind these blurred visions of Greekness, Westerners are telling themselves they are superior to the Greeks, mocking them for not being "modern" enough (Chapter 6). With some exceptions, they exploited "Agamemnon" to test, attack or support their own political or philosophical problems, rarely to learn from the Greek tradition.

Michelakis summarized the love and hate relationship between the people of the West and the Greeks, nay, the schizophrenic attitude of Westerners towards the Greeks. "Agamemnon," he says, "has been seen variously as a paradigm of pre-modern Western culture, a mirror of modernity, and a vision of postmodernity. It has served as a reflection on the appeal, but also on the disintegration and reconstitution, of some of the most central tenets of modernity such as the ideals of progress, reason and rationality."

Chapters 1 and 12 describe the outstanding performance of "Agamemnon" in the Greek Theater of Syracuse in 1914. With that rare exception in the appreciation of the Greek vision and patriotism of Aischylos, the performance of "Agamemnon" has largely become another piece for technical virtuosity or entertainment in the West.

Lorna Hardwick, a British expert on the reception of classical texts, describes this decline in cultural standards as the "performative slide," where the translation effort has little to do with respecting the meaning of the original. Rather, the strategy of the producer of "Agamemnon" is governed by "performability" and "speakability." That is, the translation becomes "adaptation" or "version" of the original. For example, the British producer David Stuttard made an effort to Christianize Aischylos in his production of Agamemnon (Chapter 11).

There's little doubt, therefore, the way the difficult Greek text has been translated is one of the greatest reasons why Westerners are still confused with the Greeks in general and Aischylos in particular (Chapter 11). According to Chapters 1 and 10, the first English and French translations of "Agamemnon" took place in the 1770s. Those and subsequent translations of "Agamemnon" tried to "update and modernize" Aischylos' text and, by that hubris, they create a translation sometimes alien to the meaning and power of the original.

To conclude, I believe that European and American producers have been manipulating "Agamemnon" at will, now supporting this or that academic fad, or making a statement against violence or war. For example, according to the book's chronology, there was a rush to "Agamemnon" in the United States after the Islamic attack on September 11, 2001, "Agamemnon" / the "Oresteia" being staged 33 times between September 2001 and September 2004.

Nevertheless, "Agamemnon" remains popular in the West. The play reflects the pale image of the illusions we have about our importance. Aischylos said that the fragility of culture is what breaks the heart. And, at a time of wars between civilizations, his message ought to be heeded.

I believe that reading "Agamemnon in Performance" is indispensable. It is a technically accurate and somber assessment of the efforts of the West, not always successful or artful, to understand the Greeks.

"Agamemnon in Performance" is a controversial, scholarly, difficult, but useful book.

E.G. Vallianatos is the author of "The Passion of the Greeks: Christianity and the Rape of the Hellenes" (Clock and Rose Press, 2006).
A Story of Courage, Betrayal and Hope
Love and life on a leper's colony off the Cretan coast

The Island
By Victoria Hislop
Harper Collins Publishers, 474 pages, $14.95, paperback

By Aphrodite Matsakis
Special to The National Herald

eprosy. The very word conjures up images of hideous creatures whose open wounds and disfigured bodies are so repellant all we want to do is flee. Yet “The Island,” Victoria Hislop’s powerful yet inspiring look at leprosy’s effects on a Cretan family, has made the best seller lists in the United Kingdom, Greece, Israel and Portugal. The book is currently being translated into 22 other languages.

Spinalonga, the island of the book, is located off the northern coast of Crete. A former fortress and smuggler’s retreat, the tiny island was the main leper colony in Greece from 1903 to 1957, when a cure for leprosy was found, and the lepers no longer needed to be segregated from others.

“The Island” is a multi-generational story about the love and courage of the Petrakis family as first one, then another, family member develops the dreaded illness. It is also a story about romance, infidelity, jealousy and war, infused with the passionate temperament of the people of Crete. Although the book’s English-born author has no Greek roots, she writes as if as if her “yiayia” and “papou” were Cretan villagers themselves.

The books begins with 25-year-old Alexis Fielding, who in her struggle to make a decision about marriage, realizes she needs to find out more about her roots. Alexis is familiar about the history of her English-born father, but her mother, Sofia, never speaks of her Cretan past. A Cretan family friend explains to Alexis: “Your mother’s story is your grandmother’s story, and it is also your great grandmother’s story. ... Their lives were intertwined, and that’s what we really mean when we talk about fate in Greece. Our so-called fate is largely ordained by our ancestors, not by the stars. ... Of course events seem to take place out of the blue that change the course of our lives, but what really determines what happens to us are the actions of those around us now and those who came before us.” (43)

Alexis’ mother Sofia holds tight to her family’s secrets, lest she shatter. One secret involves a deadly love triangle, another that her grandmother, Eleoni Petrakis, was a leper. The disclosure of these intertwining secrets is the basis for a plot, which is highly believable, yet full of unexpected twists and turns.

The story of the Petrakis family begins in Plaka, a small coastal village in Crete that faces Spinalonga. Eleoni Petrakis, Sofia’s grandmother, is a pure hearted vibrant Cretan woman, beloved to her husband, Giorgis, and her two daughters, Anna and Maria. She is also Plaka’s favorite teacher. “Eleoni had a magnetism that attracted children and adults alike to her and was admired and respected by all.” (52)

When Eleoni develops leprosy and must depart to Spinalonga, her family is devastated. But the author neither over simplifies nor over dramatizes their grief. Instead she artfully draws us into the souls of each family member as they struggle with loss, anger and fear.

Contrary to popular misconceptions, symptoms of leprosy often develop quite slowly and the grotesque images we have of lepers belong to the last stages of the illness. Also, there are two types of leprosy, one type being far less lethal and disfiguring than the other. Eleoni suffers from the more serious type, yet she lives for several years, during which time she writes to her daughters regularly and is visited weekly by her husband, who is careful not to come too close. Hence Eleoni’s family suffers the torture known to anyone who has or has had a family member suffering from a long-term fatal illness. Death is inevitable, but not mercifully so. Instead the beloved lingers and hopes for a cure rise and fall alongside fears and uncertainties about how much and how long the beloved will suffer. As long as Eleoni lives, Giorgis cannot bury her and hope to find any closure. Instead, he must watch his wife deteriorate and lose her, a little at a time, which causes him immense suffering.

“Giorgis was not even forty when Eleoni left, but he was already stooped with anxiety, and over the next few months he was to age beyond recognition. His hair turned from olive black to the silvery grey of the eucalyptus, and people seemed always to refer to him as ‘Poor Giorgis.’ It became his name.” (92)

Although both of Eleoni’s daughters are shattered by the departure and ultimate death of their mother, their reactions couldn’t be more different. Anna becomes explosive and even more determined to escape the mundane household chores and the many family and social duties associated with being a traditional Cretan woman. Anna wants riches, romance and excitement instead. Like Scarlett O’Hara in “Gone with the Wind.” Anna is self-centered, impulsive and often utterly insensitive to the feelings and needs of others. In contrast, Anna’s sister Maria is more like the saint-like Melanie in “Gone with the Wind.” Maria, as pure-hearted as her mother, finds fulfillment in the traditional female role and when Eleoni departs for Spinalonga, silently commits herself to taking care of her father. In contrast Anna thinks only of her own pain and gain and after marrying a wealthy man, rarely bothers to visit, much less help, her bereft father.

To reveal more story would be a disservice to those who will read this unforgettable book. Suffice it to say that the disclosure of the family secrets transforms Sofia (Anna’s daughter) and Alexis. Both mother and daughter become more emotionally honest and expressive and form a more meaningful connection, not only with their Greek roots, but with one another.

One of the most fascinating aspects of this book, as well as the source of several intriguing subplots, is life on Spinalonga where most of the inhabitants look and function like ordinary people. Instead of moaning on dirt floors in dark hovels or trying to escape their plight with ouzo or unrestrained sex, these social outcasts valiantly try to recreate their former village life. Alongside the hospital and special quarters for those in the last stages of the disease, the residents have a church, town hall, kafenio, various shops and, like most Greek villages, gossip and political and personal rivalries.

While some inhabitants cannot overcome their justifiable despair and the longing to go on to their separation from their families, others marry and have children. Many decorate their homes or apartments, make friends and find a new sense of purpose in helping one another. For example, Eleoni, bereft of her own children, showers her maternal affections on a frightened young leper boy bereft of his parents. She also resumes her role as schoolteacher, infusing Spinalonga’s students with a love of learning and hope for the future.

The author first visited Spinalonga in 2001, even though she had made annual visits to Crete since 1991. At the time, she had no personal connection with or interest in leprosy and no thoughts whatsoever about writing a novel. She simply wanted a break from the beach-lunch-beach routine. “Going to Spinalonga was a fluke,” the author states.

At first glance Hislop thought that Spinalonga was like “any rural Greek village, with a church, stray cats and urchins filled with basil and geraniums.” Yet there were “nuisance, hauntings and a ‘wraith’” that captured her imagination. “Here was somewhere that had effectively been a prison, a place for a life sentence, but where the ‘prisoners’ were innocent of any crime and indeed might be living close enough to their loved ones to be able to see them just across the water. It was profoundly terrible and yet there was evidence from the infrastructure (a communal laundry, two churches, pretty homes, shops) that these people had not lived entirely miserable lives. They had dignity, and they had enjoyed a certain quality of life.”

She found the atmosphere on Spinalonga so “electrifying,” she knew she had to write a story about it. “The inspiration to write this
novel came completely out of the blue. As a travel journalist, my very first thought was to write a feature about it, but I realized immediately that ... there was much more of a story to be told – one that couldn’t be contained in so few words and one that had to be inspired by my emotional reaction to it, rather than pure fact," she states.

The main narrative is set in the era of World War II because Hislop wanted “to maintain the true life chronology of when the cure was first used and when the patients actually left Spinalonga.” Working backwards, she found herself in the 1930s. “It actually suited the plot and the themes of the book well to have this period of the war … a terrible time for the people of Crete, and to show that at times the patients on the island were in some strange way better off than those on the mainland.”

With its authentic, historically accurate and vivid portrayal of village life and wartime Greece, “The Island” has been well received in Greece, It has been in Ta Nea’s top ten for 16 weeks. This has made Hislop “incredibly happy.” She says, “I wouldn’t have dreamt in a million years that it would ever be translated into Greek .... “So for the Greek press not to say, ‘Who does this woman think she is, writing about us; what does she know?’ has been immensely gratifying.”

Both critics and readers alike describe “The Island” as “a real page turner” and so it is. The book has suspense. Who will develop the disease and will they live or die? What will be the outcome of the various romances?

More importantly, the book has heart. Despite the enormity of their pain, a group of broken-hearted lepers and their families had the courage to find love and purpose in their lives, while at the same time contending with the heartbreaking of the outside world. Even today, few are aware that leprosy is not only less contagious, but more curable than the common cold.

Victoria Hislop, an Oxford-educated journalist, lives in Kent, England with her husband, journalist and TV personality Ian Hislop, and their two daughters. She writes travel features for The Sunday Telegraph and The Mail on Sunday, as well as celebrity profiles for Woman and the Home. “The Island” is her first novel. Her second novel, scheduled for completion by the end of the year, is set in Spain, some of it during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939). She hopes to write another novel set in Greece.

Hislop describes her first visit to Greece during her teens as “agape’ at first sight.” She was particular drawn to Crete and spent many hours sitting quietly in kafenions in tiny villages there. “I would watch the way people in Crete interact with one another – with passion and involvement – rather than the slightly cool indifference which we English are so practiced at. It’s amazing to watch their friendships, the rapport between them.” “Since writing ‘The Island,’” Hislop says, “I have met many many wonderful people in Athens and in Crete. I have been so warmly embraced by the local community that I feel I have discovered the true and overwhelming nature of ‘filoxenia.’ It’s something very special.”

When asked how this book changed her life, the author noted her involvement in LEPRA, the U.K.’s lead leprosy charity. She helps raise funds for LEPRA by speaking about leprosy. Last year she traveled to India to see LEPRA’s efforts in rural communities and plans to return next year. She also values having met and become a close friend of a former leper, Manoli Foundoulakis, 84, who lives in Elouda, the village next to Plaka.

“He is now cured,” states Hislop, “but not before the disease had done considerable damage to him. How do I explain why Manoli is so important to me? In some rather hard to define way, he is the reason I wrote ‘The Island.’” Even though I didn't know of his existence while I was writing the book, Manoli is very close the nature of people I imaged there (dignified, clever, funny, warm and loving). He tells me that the book has helped to remove the stigma of the disease, and if I have done that purely for him, that matters more than anything else.”

For additional information about leprosy, which is now called Hansen’s disease, after the 19th century Norwegian physician who discovered that leprosy was caused by bacteria, visit www.leprosy.org; about “The Island,” visit www.victoriahislop.com


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By Charles Moskos
Special to The National Herald

In September 1958, I was a newly arrived graduate student in sociology at the University of California at Los Angeles. Upon entering Haines Hall for the first time, I noticed a faculty directory in the entryway. In addition to containing the department of sociology, Haines Hall was also the location of the history department. One of the names on the history faculty list was Theodore Saloutos, the only Greek name on the directory.

Several days later, I went to Saloutos’ office and introduced myself. He greeted me cordially as a fellow second-generation Greek. After exchanging pleasantries about our background, Saloutos informed me that he was starting a book-length study of Greek Americans. This was to be the volume, “The Greeks in the United States,” published by Harvard University Press in 1964. The subtitle on the book’s jacket read: “Why They Came, What They Found, and What They Accomplished — The Vivid Story from The First Immigration to the Present.” It was an honor when Saloutos later asked for my input for his forthcoming book. In fact, it was my interaction with him that engendered my own research and writings on Greek Americans. But nothing could ever surpass “The Greeks in the United States.” This was the first definitive treatment of Greek Americans and remains the foundation of Greek American studies to this day. It is with our community’s deep gratification that greekwork.com will soon be reissuing this monumental work.

Ted’s father, Panagiotis, was born in the village of Aspia Spitia, six miles from Olympia, in the province of Telefs in the Peloponnesse. In what was probably an arranged marriage, she later joined Panagiotis in Milwaukee. Ted’s first language growing up in Milwaukee was Greek. He really started to speak English only after entering public school. Ted had five sisters, one born in Greece, the others in Milwaukee. As a teenager, he worked at the Coney Island restaurant for a brother-in-law, Tom Kemos. After graduating from high school, he attended Milwaukee State Teacher’s College (today, the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee). It was there that he met his future wife, Florence Schwefel. Florence was born in Milwaukee in 1912 and was of German ancestry, no rare thing in the Milwaukee of that era. Even today, Milwaukee is said to have the highest percentage of citizens of German origin of any major American city. Unlike Ted’s working-class background, Florence’s father was a lawyer.

After receiving his bachelor’s degree, Ted went to the University of Wisconsin at Madison, which awarded him a doctorate in 1940. He first taught at the University of Wisconsin and Oberlin College, but in 1947 moved to UCLA, where he remained until his retirement. It is noteworthy that Saloutos first achieved national prominence as a scholar in a field having nothing to do with Greek Americans, becoming a leading figure in American agricultural history. He was author of “Agricultural Discontent in the Middle West” (1951), “Farmer Movements in the South” (1960) and “The American Farmer and the New Deal” (1982), all this in addition to numerous articles published in academic journals. Saloutos also served as president of the Agricultural History Society, which created the Theodore Saloutos Book Award in 1982.

Even while starting a career leading to his premier role in American agricultural history, however, Saloutos also displayed a strong interest in topics Hellenic. As a young scholar, he received a Fulbright research award and went to Greece for the academic year 1952-1953. This led to the publication of “They Remember America” (1956), subtitled, “The Story of the Repatriated Greek-Americans: A Timely Study of How Our Ways Can Influence a Foreign Culture, and an Understanding Account of the Impact of Cultural Differences on Individuals.” “They Remember America” was as much sociology as history. Saloutos started his interviews of Greek immigrants departing for the old country from the port of New York on the Greek ship, Nea Hellas. In Greece itself, he interviewed hundreds of returnees, almost all of whom were eager to talk to the young scholar. Saloutos comments in the book that whether in a big city or in a village, once he found a repatriated immigrant, it “led almost instantly to the ‘rounding up’ of the rest.” There was plenty of variation among the returned Greeks, some with delighted to be back in the old country, some missing America and most with mixed feelings.

I received my doctorate in 1963, and Saloutos served on my dissertation committee, although my dissertation had nothing to do with either Greek America or agricultural history. The thesis dealt with the independence movements in the British West Indies, where I had spent a year doing field research. I never met a Greek the entire year I was in the Caribbean (although Arab Orthodox Christians did host me for free meals). Still, Saloutos willingly agreed to be on my committee, because as he put it: “It’s a Greek thing to help a fellow Greek.”

After Saloutos completed a nearly final draft of “The Greeks in the United States,” he asked me to read it, which I did, with great attention. Growing up in Chicago (through age ten) and Albuquerque (through high school), my stereotype of the Greek immigrant was that of the small businessman. My father had a shoe-repair store and my maternal grandfather operated a confectionery (where he made delicious chocolates). In Albuquerque, the prevailing occupation of Greek immigrants was, of course, that of restaurant-owner, although there were many bar and liquor-store owners as well. It was reading Saloutos’ manuscript that I learned for the first time of the large number of Greek immigrants who were from the working class. That is, Greeks who had labored in the fur industry in New York, textile factories in New England, railroads in the Middle West, mines in the Rocky Mountain states, among other jobs and locales. It was only upon reading Saloutos’ book that I learned as well that many Greeks were also active in labor unions. Dan Georgakas, Steve Prangos and Helen Papaniokas, among others, have added to our knowledge in this area. When the book came out in 1964, a year after I had left UCLA, I was honored to be acknowledged in it, but Ted’s personal inscription was especially moving: “For my good friend and colleague, Charlie, who is as much a part of this story as I am.”

My first academic position was at the University of Michigan — a great university, but located in Ann Arbor, which had no Greek restaurants. When offered a position at Northwestern University in the Chicago area, therefore, I accepted immediately. Northwestern was a great university, too, but Chicago was also a world-class city and, most important, there were plenty of restaurants to go to in Greektown on Halsted Street. But moving to the Chicago area had another advantage that I had not anticipated. Ted Saloutos was not keen on flying. Thus, whenever he came from California to the East Coast to lecture or to see his sisters in Milwaukee, he would come through Chica
go — the railroad center of America. I would meet him at the train station, and then drive to nearby Greektown, where we would have a leisurely meal together. After a most insightful discussion on matters Greek American, I would take him back to the station. This happened several times a year and was always an event we both looked forward to.

One aspect of Saloutos’ perception of Hellenism must be mentioned. The conventional treatment of Hellenism is to stress the classical era with its emphasis on great philosophers, theater, sculpture, and the like. Saloutos certainly was appreciative of classical Greece’s shaping role in the foundation of Western civilization. But he also believed such emphasis could be overdone to the detriment of contemporary Greece and the Greek immigrants abroad. Indeed, for Saloutos, the unsung story was that of the Greeks who had come to this country with little formal education and
no funds, and had, through hard work, established a viable Greek American community that has persisted through the generations. An overemphasis on classical Greece, Saloutos believed, was an indirect way of demeaning contemporary Greeks in Greece and abroad. This is a view with which I concur.

Prior to his passing, Saloutos had arranged to donate his extensive files and personal library on Greek Americans to the Immigration History Research Center at the University of Minnesota. His collection occupied a two-car garage as well as his home office. It consisted of books, newspapers, magazines, personal letters, and unpublished autobiographies, among numerous other items. It was surely the most extensive archive anywhere on Greek American history.

There was one problem, however. The University of Minnesota required $100,000 to transport, organize and catalogue the Saloutos archives. I was asked by the family to undertake raising the necessary funds, a not inconsiderable sum in 1981. I mainly approached well-to-do Greek Americans in the Chicago area. After explaining the significance of preserving the archive, my line was: “I am a professor and donating $1,000,” the unstated premise being, “You are much richer and can give more.” To my pleasant surprise, raising the funds was surprisingly easy. It was very important, however, that the businessman and philanthropist Michael Jaharis told me to raise what I could and he would make up the difference. In about a month, I raised something like $75,000, and Michael Jaharis came up with the rest. Even today, I still run across Greek Americans who thank me for asking them to donate to the Saloutos fund some quarter-century ago.

Regarding the fundraising for the Saloutos archives, there is an interesting anecdote that Ted would have appreciated. In addition to personally approaching various Greek Americans, I also sent out letters to others whom I did not know personally. The letter described how the Saloutos archive would ensure that the history of our immigrant pioneers would not be forgotten. Among those to whom such letters were sent were two of America’s most prominent film directors, John Cassavetes and Elia Kazan. Cassavetes sent a $1,000 check and a one-sentence note: “Your letter touched me.” Elia Kazan, meanwhile, sent a $25 check! My wife said that I should return it. I did not, but wonder what Saloutos would have done.

My own writings on Greek Americans have obviously been strongly influenced by my personal interactions with Saloutos as well as by his scholarship. We both had immigrant parents, we both made our primary academic reputations in fields outside of Greek America (Saloutos in agricultural history, mine in military sociology) and turned to Greek American studies later in our professional careers. We both were also committed to finding practical ways to maintain contact between the old country and the American-born generations. (Somewhat coincidentally, we both married women of German ancestry — although it should be noted that my wife, Ilia, speaks better Greek than her husband and rolls her own fyllo when making spanakopita.) In addition, neither Saloutos nor I were comfortable with the theoretical jargon and overly arcane explanations of the immigrant experience that became fashionable in the academic world.

As evident in “The Greeks in the United States,” Saloutos was very concerned with the continuation of a Greek identity in the United States. Obviously, much has changed since the book’s initial publication. But it is amazing how prescient Saloutos was over three decades ago. He notes the declining level of immigration, the rise in interfaith marriages, and the assimilation of the second and later generations of Greek Americans. Of course, we do not know how Saloutos would have reacted to “My Big Fat Greek Wedding,” but my guess is that he would have loved it. My own current thinking, and I wish I could discuss this with Saloutos, is that if Hellenism is to have a future in America, we must proceed along two avenues: the religious and the ethnic. Each is different, yet complementary to the other. The more the Greek Orthodox Church reaches out and accepts non-Greeks — without compromising on its doctrinal tenets — the more it ensures its own flowering. By opening up to the spiritually hungry, the Church will bring more Americans into contact with Greek ethnicity.

At the same time, we must also foster a Greek secular identity in America by increasing Greek American connections to the old country. Today’s youth—and here I include those of Greek stock, mixed parentage, and even non-Greek philhellenes — will be the repository of Hellenism’s future in America. This future could be greatly enhanced among college students by sending them on a junior year abroad. What better country for Greek American and philhellenic students to spend a year in than Greece? By becoming more Greek in a secular sense, more people may find their way to Greek Orthodoxy in a spiritual manner. In brief, as Saloutos would have phrased it, we can have the best of both worlds: Greek and American.

Charles Moskos, professor emeritus at Northwestern University, is the author of “Greek Americans: Struggle and Success.” He and his younger son, Peter, assistant professor at the City University of New York, are completing the third edition of the book.
A Bilingual Treasure Chest
Seeks to define in English virtually every word used in modern Greek

A Modern Greek-English Dictionary, Volume 1
Compiled and edited by Demetrius J. Georgacas
Melissa International Ltd., 811 pages, $120

By Dan Georgakas
Special to The National Herald

Most scholarly dictionaries take decades to create. This is the case with “A Modern Greek-English Dictionary” compiled by Demetrius J. Georgacas. In the early 1960s when I visited Georgacas (a first cousin), he was already at work on the dictionary, financed by what would become the United States Department of Education. He would continue with this historic project until his death in 1990 at age 82. In that time period, he left a legacy of dedication and expertise that has inspired the posthumous publication of what became his lifework.

The “MGED” is like no other Greek dictionary in existence. It seeks to define in English virtually every word used in modern Greek. This extends to dialect words from every region. All meanings of every word are given, and for the first time, the use of every word is documented by phrases or passages from Greek texts. The cited sources sometimes go back to the Byzantine period but more often are from contemporary sources. In short, the examples are not invented by the maker of the dictionary, but offer us what publication director John N. Kazazis terms a “Common Cultivated Modern Greek and Literary Demotic.”

Georgacas was a student of Georgios Hatzidakis, the father of Greek linguistics. In addition to study in Athens, he studied with the leading authorities on language in Berlin and later at the University of Chicago. For 12 years he was an editor at the Center of the Historical Lexicon at the Academy of Athens, and in the United States he founded the Modern Greek-English Dictionary Center at the University of North Dakota, where he held a professorship. Throughout his life, Georgacas wrote extensively for specialized journals and became well known for the quality of his etymologies. Correctly understanding early in his career that demotic Greek would prevail over katharevousa, he gave considerable attention to the sources of the demotic and expressed surprise at the “astonishing wealth of cultural (or learned) demotic.” In addition to his scholarly writing, he served on the United Nations committee which names newly discovered heavenly bodies. His work on the ongoing “MGED” was funded repeatedly by the National Endowment for the Arts and various foundations in the United States and Greece. Numerous American and Greek graduate students and young philologists working on the emerging dictionary but his closest associate was his wife Barbara, a philologist, who had earned her graduate degree at the University of Chicago.

When Georgacas retired from teaching in 1989, his archive and its accompanying library were placed in storage at the basement of Montgomery Hall at the University of North Dakota. After his death, Barbara Georgacas was anxious to get the material to a scholarly institution in Greece. She decided the most suitable site was the new Cultural Activities Center established in Kalamaria, a suburb of Thessaloniki. With assistance from the Kalamaria City Council, the Georgacas Archive and Library were relocated in November of 1996. Three months later, floods ravaged North Dakota and the storage areas in the basement of Montgomery Hall were devastated. Had the priceless materials not been transported when they were to Thessaloniki, they would have been lost.

The present volume nominally only contains words beginning with alpha, but due to the peculiarities of the Greek language and lexicographic methodology in contains one-sixth of all Greek words. John Kazazis explains that this is due to the fact that “many words (compounds containing the ‘alpha (a/aν)’ -- privative or copulative, or the prefixes ‘ana’ or ‘apo’), whose first letter would otherwise place them elsewhere, are included in this first volume.” Aristide Caratzas has indicated plans to publish the entire dictionary, a pledge repeated in the preface by Dimitris Fatouros, president of the board of directors of the Centre for the Greek language.

Binational funding for publication of the dictionary came from the Hellenic Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs and the National Endowment for the Humanities. In addition to these funders and others already noted, assistance for the project also came from the Ouranis Foundation and the Foundation for Greek Culture. Further enhancing this project is that the Centre for the Greek Language has made a database web-accessible to all interested persons (www.komvos.edu.gr). The “MGED,” to be sure, is not the kind of volume that is going to be part of the average person’s library, but it is an invaluable treasure for scholars in any field of Modern Greek Studies. It is a must for any research library and ought to be in every Department of Modern Greek Studies.

The relationship between Greece and the United States, even between Greeks and Greek-Americans, is not always harmonious or productive. The creation of this extraordinary dictionary demonstrates the marvelous work that can be done when two powerful cultures collaborate.

Dan Georgakas is a Fellow at the Center for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies at Queens College-City University of New York. His most recent book is “My Detroit: Growing Up Greek and American in Motor City.”
We would like to Congratulate

All the Greek American Writers

Who are Making

Literary Contributions to Society
Reading As a Greek American

The rewards of learning about your heritage

By Steve Frangos
Special to The National Herald

Let us assume that growing up within a Greek American cultural environment makes one something other than a White Anglo-Saxon Protestant who happens to eat goat cheese. If that is true then our experiences of the surrounding world as Greeks living in North America must have its own unique perspective and expressive nuances. This Hellenic Eye or Greek American Sensibility would allow for seeing, experiencing and communicating in ways outside or simply different from our WASP brethren. Taking this all to be true, by experience as well as basic logic, the question then becomes, “What exactly is this Hellenic-American Sensibility?”

One would think we should automatically turn to our artists and intellectuals for insights into this realm of habitual Greek American perceptions. But we have been abandoned by academics in North America so no one has asked these very fundamental questions. Consequently, you and I have to go directly to the artists. Not unexpectedly when the individual accounts written by Greek Americans are read and considered collectively, our shared common heritage organically emerges.

Implicit in all the biographies, collective histories and community accounts that I have read to date is the core consideration, “What does it mean to be Greek?” Now, a number of these books definitely act as if they already know the answer (which is always family or, at most, one’s “dikos”) and so proceeds from that point of view. In Greek, “dikos,” loosely translated means an individual’s personal and so unique circle of very close friends. But whether this question is consciously raised or not it is unquestionably the recurring theme being voiced, again and again, across any number of books.

Greeks take everything personally. So there is little organizational unity beyond family and one’s personal circle of intimates within an extremely defined community. You can also see this in the fiction they write, but that is another tale.

But why take my word for it? Go and read any of the over 100 volumes published biographical accounts since 1980. That this should be the next logical step for anyone trying to understand a Greek American point of view is really not that logical at all. On all fronts Greek American writers, publishers and what remains of our intellectual class agree that there is virtually no unified support or interest from our community in reading Greek American writers. Or Greek authors, history or cultural studies for that matter.

At this point we hit an especially difficult area to understand. As far as the United States government can survey the issue, Greeks in the United States are nothing if not dedicated readers. Since the 1970, United States Bureau of the Census has (allegedly) reported that Greeks in America are, when counted among their own number, near the top in the nation in education it seems that this statistical feat could only have been accomplished through dedicated reading habits. How else could a large percentage of Greek-Americans have advanced educational degrees?

Or so one would think. My personal experience with Greeks in America is that individually considered they have each mastered their job or profession. But that does not mean they are reading Proust by flashlight under their blankets at night. It does translate into their reading related to work. My personal theory, then, is that Greeks are pragmatic problem-oriented readers. Whatever affects their work or daily lives will peak their interest and so they will “read up” on the manner at hand. But that is very much a supposition.

I say all this because I have not witnessed Greeks, as a group, as avid readers. Curious readers, yes, so much so that when their personal interests are awakened they become surprisingly astute researchers, but still not lost-in-the-story kind of readers.

Or perhaps they are so private in this I simply have not seen it.

But let us presume, for the sake of argument, that Greek Americans are regular readers. How does that tendency relate to the wider society in which we live?

Statistics on this issue seem more anecdotal than academic but what is available is provocative in the extreme. In “The Twilight of American Culture” by Morris Berman (New York: WW Norton, 2000) we learn: “(O) f the 158 countries in the United Nations, the United States ranks forty-ninth in literacy. Roughly 60 percent of the adult population has never read a book of any kind, and only 6 percent reads as much as one book a year, where book is defined to include Harlequin romances and self-help manuals. Something like 120 million adults are illiterate or read at no better than a fifth-grade level. Among readers age 21 to 35, 67 percent regularly read a daily newspaper in 1965, as compared with 31 percent in 1998.” (36).

Saul Bellow’s essay, “Hidden Within Technology’s Empire, a Re-creation of Letters” compounds Berman’s report on reading by noting: “(A)ccording to one recent study 55 percent of American spend less than 30 minutes reading anything at all.”

And just to throw one last figure into the puzzle according to one report in 2004 alone, 194,000 books were published. The highest number ever published up to that time (www.alternet.org/story/22176). So, if Americans are not a nation of readers who is buying (and presumably reading) all those books?

Now just to restate the obvious we have no statistical evidence whatsoever that Greeks in America read any more than any other in the country. So, what do Greek Americans read (and if they do) remains an open unanswered question.

Again since we are speaking of Greeks let us clarify the definition of ‘reading’ one culturally-specific step further. I have witnessed Greeks reading newspapers my entire life. Obviously that is exactly what you are doing right now. As a child I was often a courier taking an article, a single newspaper or even an entire stack of newspapers from one Greek to another. To this day, I regularly receive and send news clippings and entire newspapers to relatives and friends. But I think this has much to do with Greek notions and interest in “ta neu” rather than reading explicitly as pleasure, reading as a matter of intellectual pursuit and all the rest.

Another point of cultural clarification is that Greek Americans also respond quite strongly to celebrity culture. By this I mean once a Greek American writer becomes widely acclaimed by Americans, we find that Greeks will line up to hear them lecture or buy their books. This works to our collective detriment. In responding to this celebrity frenzy Greek-Americans will support writers of Greek descent who have no knowledge, or often regard, for their Greek heritage such as the snide and almost always condescending David Sedaris.

It may be that Eugenides won the Pulitzer Prize for “Middlesex” but this book even allowing for
‘artistic license’ is simply perverse. True Greek American artists, and by that phrase I mean those who reflect and comment upon their heritage through their art, such as Lucas Samaras, Diamando Galas and/or Theodora Skipitaris employ extra-ordinary forms of art. These artistic expressions (which are also often performance art) many within our community at large would label ob-scene or perverse. Yet these three individuals employ art not simply to express themselves (or redeem themselves and others) but as the forum to unabashedly identify and rage against injustice, domination and hate.

That this type of Greek art has not been as actively embraced as say the film “My Big Fat Greek Wedding” speaks more to our collective desire to look good to non-Greeks that it does to our individual recog-nition of own true selves as we en-gage or ignore what our artists are testing or revealing via their art.

But even the celebrity label has limited credence among us. Theo Halo’s “Not Even My Name” became famous outside the community, and while she has received honors from various Greek organiza-tions her book still remains, by all accounts, a bestseller largely out-side our ranks.

We also begrudge our artists a basic living. I have seen this over and over. One particular example can stand for many others. I was in the office of a major Greek American cultural institution when they reported to me that they were happy that Nicholas Gage came to speak, but that they had to turn Theo Halo down. I asked why and was told Halo had asked for plane fare, housing, food and an honorarium. The staff person telling me this story laughed because, as she said, “How ridiculous was that.”

The gossiper thought that since Gage had donated his time to help the institution, that is what Halo should have done.

But where is the respect for Theo Halo’s work (let alone her person) in those remarks? “Why is the laborer not worth their wages?” as our WASP brethren say? This is truly a universal attitude among Greeks in North America. Every Greek thinks they have worked ex tremely hard and sacrifice greatly for their life, money, social standing and so on. And they bemoan “those cheap Greeks” who never pay their share of our collective community’s ultimate real world expenses. As my yia-yia used to say, “Hunchback look at your own hump!”

Ultimately the fundamental question here is when did you last read a book about or by a Greek or Greek-American? Can you even name a Greek or Greek American author? I’m deadly serious. When I was visiting Pueblo, Colorado and suggested that as one of their Cent-tennial speakers they have Harry Mark Petrakis only a few people knew who I was speaking about.

There is no rhyme or reason for this ongoing and open distain of our own writers. As a case in point, Thomas Doulis, one of our most ac-claimed writers, has had to see his first explicitly Greek American novel, “The Open Hearth” die at the press, from lack of support. Why?

Do you have to hear from others who to read or do you suggest Greek American authors to others? I remain deeply impressed by the extremely high quality of writing seen in the Mondo Greco volume “The Greek American Experience.” Yet even with this landmark volume the publisher has disappeared or gone into seclusion. I am not even sure you can still buy that specific issue. What if he had our collective support?

We have to begin consciously reading as Greek Americans. It won’t work any other way. Certain-ly we can look around us for models on how best to go about this process. In the 1930 classic, “How to Read A Book,” by Mortimer J. Adler and Charles Van Doren we learn various systematic tech-niques for recognizing the internal structure of different kinds of books and how to go about reading for specific kinds of information.

The only aspect of reading I think Adler and Van Doren fail to consider in this classic volume is the subject of periodic re-reading. As we age and read more our no-tions of the world and ourselves automatically changes. So too when we re-read any given book or field of study we reassess with a new/renewed perspective vol-umes, authors and subjects we nor-mally believe we have already mas-tered.

Clearly where Modern Greek Studies has most severely failed the collective Hellenic diaspora is in never compiling, to my knowl-edge, a lifetime reading plan. Many books exist in English with this long-term view of reading and learning in mind. What are the classic works of the diaspora? What are the essential volumes not simply of the Classic Greek Era or Byzantine period but Hellenistic and the Turkokratia? With more scholars than at any previous time in history holding university posi-tions all across the planet why is such a reading list or miscellaneo-sy or art catalog not in print?

More to our collective purpose here in Ameriki we need a book such as Dorothy L. Ferbee’s, “How to Create Your Own African Ameri-can Library” (New York: Ballantine Books, 2003). The subtitle of this book is “A Selection of Books That Belong in Every Home from Classic Novels to Children’s Stories to His-tory and Biography.” This volume is organized into 10 separate sec-tions with necessary subsections. Essentially each section is a listing of books with the full title and a paragraph describing each volume.

Ferbee also includes a section on where to purchase the suggested books.

Ferbee's volume can definitely serve as a model for any American ethnic group or subculture. Unfortunately, since no such volume exists for Greek Americans you are going to have to create such a li-brary for yourself. You will have to seek out Greek American nonficion, fiction, culture and anthro-pology, history, music, art, chil-dren's literature and all the rest.

Yes, on occasion you will buy books you absolutely hate and regret buying. When that happens just go to your bookshelf and see all the exceptional books you have already discovered and read. Then remember that there are so many more wonderful Greek American books you have not as yet read. Self-awareness through shared his-torical experience isn’t something they teach in Greek school but it’s true nevertheless.

No one will be Greek for you. But then the discovery of that fact and even reading about it are their own reward.

Steve Frangos is a regular contributor to The National Herald. Readers can reach him at Greek write@yahoo.com.
A n American-born boy who moved to Crete when he was two years old, Helias Doundoulakis experienced a life-changing moment at eighteen, when Adolf Hitler’s elite paratroopers seized control of his land. Still in high school, he joined a resistance organization during the German occupation.

Avoiding capture by the Gestapo, he was evacuated to Cairo, Egypt, where he was recruited by the OSS (Office of Strategic Services) and received six months of spy training. Transformed into an adept and skillful spy, he was sent on a dangerous mission back to Greece, and his reports on German troop movements to OSS Headquarters in Cairo inflicted great losses to the enemy — and silently turned the tide of World War II.

Today, Doundoulakis stands as one of the world’s leading scientists and inventors; one among the few whose signatures are found on two plaques that have been left on the moon by Apollo 11 and Apollo 12.

In I Was Trained To Be A Spy, Doundoulakis boldly revisits the past century as he shares his cinematic life story, in a memoir that features the momentum, tension, and action of a fictional spy thriller. In this sterling volume, the author masterfully narrates his powerful tale of life against imposing odds, and the grim realities of war. It is also a story of transformation, a startling portrait of an ordinary man’s evolution — through the cultivation of inborn strengths and intense training — into a spy of world-class caliber.