COMING OF AGE IN THE MODERN GREEK PROSE OF LILIKA NAKOS

By Deborah Tannen

Lilika Nakos, born in Athens and raised in Geneva, Switzerland, is one of the foremost prosewriters in modern Greek fiction. Now an old woman nearing eighty, Nakos began writing short stories in French in the 1920's but returned to Greece to live in 1930 and turned to writing stories and then novels in her native Greek. Not only was she one of the first women to write prose in Greek; she was one of the most important of a group of writers called "The Generation of the Thirties"[1] who shaped a modern novel in Greek. Nakos' work was particularly influential in two major ways. First, she wrote in a startlingly simple demotic Greek, that is, the language spoken by the people, rather than the puristic of "learned" language, called *katharevousa*, which had been the vehicle for Greek prose up until the beginning of the twentieth century. Secondly, she wrote with frankness which shocked and simplicity which charmed her Greek readers, about the most intimate experiences and emotions of women. The Greek critic Pericles Rodakis asserts that every woman writing in Greece today is influenced by Nakos' style.[2] It is probably more correct to say that every writer in Greece today has been influenced by Nakos, as the demotic language has been accepted as the literary language, and explicit treatment of personal experience has become commonplace in Greek as in other European literature.

Nearly all of Nakos' fiction is concerned with the development of women characters in male-oriented Greek and European society. Nakos is particularly skillful at recreating the world from the point of view of very young girls who come of age in a lonely, cold environment, cut off from their parents by a gulf of indifference. As they grow older, the women's alienation from society becomes a reflection of the unjust social system which the novels and stories portray. A study of Nakos' work as a whole reveals a development in the view of women's experiences with sex and with men which becomes increasingly optimistic as the author ages. The early stories and novels, written in the 1920's and 1930's, describe girls who are repelled by sex, and portray a world in which love is a "scourge" which leads women to destruction at the hands of men. The novel written during the German Occupation of Greece in World War II is slightly ambivalent but still mostly negative about sex and men. A sequel to this novel, written shortly after the war, witnesses the first sexual relationship and the first happy marriage (although the latter is not the heroine's) in Nakos fiction. Nakos' last novel, her only one written from a man's point of view, is romantic about the happy-ever-after marriage of its hero, and furthermore features the only fully sexual union in Nakos' work.

The discussion that follows will trace the theme of women's attitudes toward sex through the works mentioned. Particularly, it will focus on the ways in which girls are introduced to an awareness of sexuality and thereby come of age.

One of Nakos' first stories, written in French and published in Paris under the title "Photini," was translated into Greek by Galeteia Kazantzakis and published in a Greek newspaper in 1928.[3] In the story, a little girl, Photini, wakes up in a hospital, believing she has attacked her mother with

a knife (The reader does not know whether she has indeed done this, or whether the child is in a mental hospital and is deluded by her own fantasy). Photini recalls the suffocating atmosphere of her home in Athens where she felt utterly alienated from the upper-class parents: "The child folds into herself because she suffers from feeling so different from them."

Photini's only happy moments are when her parents go out late at night, leaving her alone. For "one of the most intolerable torments for Photini is to sleep in the same room as her mother... She can't even dream in peace in her little bed." One night, while Photini is enjoying the Athens night by herself at her open window, she rushes back to her bed and pretends to be asleep when she hears her parents returning. She hears them enter her room: her mother laughs; her father takes off his shoes. The mother assures her husband:

> She's sleeping. And again her little laugh, false and sharp. Then the child heard them lie down beside her in her mother's bed... and her father's voice saying, I'm glad you like it... and the bed made rhythmic movements! The child understood right away and thought she would suffocate from disgust. She covered herself with the pillows so as not to hear, but her mother's sighs of pleasure still reacher her... The child was suffocating and swimming in sweat, her guts moved with disgust and shame, but she didn't dare cry out and betray herself. She held herself motionless under the sheets, her head buried under the pillows thinking this would never end... And the next day her repugnance was such that she couldn't lift her eyes to look her mother in the face.

The child stands and screams in her hospital bed and no one can calm her. She is seeing the vision of her mother drenched in blood and herself wielding the knife.

The shocking frankness of this story outraged Nakos' father no less than Greek society at large. He rushed to Paris, where his daughter was living, and forbade her to write any more. He repaid to the Rieder Press the advance they had given her toward her second collection of stories (as a result, these stories have never appeared in print and are lost) and cut off all further funds to Lilika, who found work as a waitress in a Greek restaurant to support herself.[4] Upset though she was at her father's reaction, Nakos did not heed his threats and continued to write.

Another story written about the same time, also in French, shows not so much a little girl's personal revulsion against sex but rather her victimization by society's perverted values. Photini killed her mother in her mind; the mother in "...And the Child Lied..." kills her daughter, not literally, but by sending her to a monastery because she believes a lie fabricated by her son.

The little sister showed her brother a doll which the hotel cook had given to her.

> And at that moment Andreas made up the story. He thought with what pleasure he would tell it to his mother. He wanted to show her that he wasn't a little boy any more...

> "Mama, I have something to tell you..." he said, and he pretended to hesitate. "I have something to tell you and I don't know how to start," the boy said again. His heart was beating fast. Mother was looking at him. This gave him courage. Then he quickly started to talk. "I was there near the sea, I was looking for limpets... Suddenly I heard laughing and voices next to me in a cabin... I ran to see because I thought I heard Marika's voice... I looked through the cracks... And then... then..." Here Andreas made believe he was ashamed to say what he saw. "I saw the hotel cook, you know that short one with the red hair, holding Marika naked on his lap... He was caressing her all over... And she was laughing and kissing him on the mouth... I ran away blushing from shame."

The mother beats her daughter and packs her off to a monastery. The little girl never appears in the story, contributing to the impression that she doesn't count. A little boy's accusation of sexual misconduct is enough to condemn the girl for life. Marika is marched away between two nuns; it is the nuns who are described, not the child lost between them. Only the maid cries at Marika's departure. The mother seems as satisfied as her son at being left alone with him, as she embraces him and says, " 'Now it's just the two of us'."

Marika, in this story, never understands the nature of her crime. As she is led away, the maid later reports, she seemed "dazed." Another story from this early period concerns a slightly older girl and is Nakos' first treatment of an adolescent girl's introduction by sex. Marina, in "The Nameless One," like Photini, is repelled by sex. Her revulsion takes the form of an intense antipathy for her mother's lover: "This man disgusted me when I saw him. Even physically, he was repulsive to me." At thirteen, Marina is too young to be moved by the man's charm, yet too old to ignore it.

"The Nameless One" is about Marina's confrontation with sex in the form of a double trauma. The first occurs when her mother's lover comes up behind her when she is leaning out her window, calling vainly for a young friend.

> He came up to me and said something. With one of his hands he fondled my thighs, as if absentmindedly. Then I turn and look him in the eyes. He had that so-sweet bitter smile that all the women loved.
>
> "Listen, Marina, why not be nice?..."
>
> I didn't answer him. I just turned my back before he even finished his sentence. I went on calling Vangelis and bending out the window. He then began slowly caressing my legs higher. At first I wanted to give him a kick. But then I felt faint... I let his hand go on... Suddenly I felt his hot breath near my neck. I turn and, trembling with disgust, I spit in his face.[5]

This confrontation is interrupted by the maid shouting for the lover to come to the bedside of Marina's mother, and the girl soon hears her mother's shriek of pain as she experiences a spontaneous abortion. The girl soon suffers a second trauma as the maid calls her to witness a strange burial in the backyard.

> I bent over the then I saw, in a glass jar, a tiny human shape. It was like a wax doll with eyes like little white beads. One of its little arms was broken. I jumped up, full of horror and disgust.

Marina feels the same disgust for the aborted fruit of the sexual union between her mother and the lover as she does for the lover himself. The two dovetail in her mind and keep her awake that night:

> I felt the hot breath of my mother's lover here on my neck and I was trembling all over. I went and knelt before the icons. I started praying and crossing myself. My hands kept making the sign of the cross without being able to stop, as if the madness had possessed them too. Finally exhausted by morning, I feel asleep. But I had a terrible dream. I saw the icon of the Holy Virgin who, instead of holding the Holy Infant in her arms, held the corpse of the child with the white bead eyes.

The lover's sexuality was borne in upon Marina at the same moment that her mother suffered its consequences (perhaps fatally). Marina's reaction is unmitigated revulsion and rage. The next morning she hides by the road, and as the lover approaches the house, she uses all her strength to hurl a huge rock at his head. The story ends with the angry vision of blood oozing over the man's face. Marina's bloody violence is like Photini's image of knifing her mother. That is the spirit in which girls in these early Nakos stories refuse to accept sexuality.

"And the Child Lied" and "The Nameless One" were published in Greece in 1932 along with a novella which Nakos had written in French under the title My Peter's Book (LeLivre de Mon Pierrot) and which had won first prize in a contest sponsored by the newspaper Le Petit Parisien. Nakos rewrote the novella in Greek, but it was her publisher who slapped on the sensational title *He Xepartheni* "The Deflowered One." (Nakos commented to me that she didn't even know the word in Greek.) The title exploited the sensational nature of the novella's subject: a young woman who has an illegitimate son whom she raises in secret.

Although Katina has a son by her former French lover, her passion for the lover is depicted as selfless and sexless; moreover, their relationship has ended. The lover does not appear in the book. Katina devotes herself entirely to the martyrlike care of her baby. My Peter's Book creates a world of fairytale good and evil, personified in two-dimensional characters. At the end of the story, Katina's adored son Peter is murdered, at her father's behest, by a villainous man named Spanides who loitered in dark alleys throughout the novella. In keeping with an interpretation argued elsewhere[6] that the action of this work is a fantasized drama enacted by characters from Katina's past, the villain Spanides is the same man who molested Katina when she was six or seven years old.

Katina recalls this scene in the present tense, to heighten its immediacy and effectiveness. The man called to her in the woods:

> "Come here, my little one," he goes, "and I'll give you candy." My first impulse is to leave. But then again, my mother always says I have to be polite to everyone...

> So I go up to him. I'm afraid, I want to leave. But he squeezes me so tight, I don't have the strength to move. I want to cry. But he keeps rubbing himself against me, panting... A great revulsion seizes me... I can't stand it -- I shout... Steps are heard in the row of trees. Then he lets me go and disappears among the trees. I return running to Mrs. Kontylo and tell her everything. She turns deep red with anger. She grabs an umbrella and runs to find him. But Alex has disappeared. Only on my little piquet skirt I see a liquid sticking to it like gum. (54)

Thus Alex Spanides, the man who sexually molested Katina as a child, becomes the archvillain of the novella. By murdering the baby Peter at the request of Katina's father, Alex further becomes allied with the part of her father that is hateful to Katina as well. Alex is a veritable devil, for he appears, in the end, under a fig tree, just as the devil is believed by Greek peasants to appear. Again, sex is presented with the most negative associations.

In 1935 Nakos' first full-length novel, and the first work she wrote directly in Greek, was published under the title *Hoi Parastratimenoi*, literally "Those who have strayed from the straight path," or, as has been translated by the critic Linos Politis, The Lost. Politis exclaims, "A great stir was caused by the publication" of this novel. The Lost is the Bildungsroman of Alexandra Kastri from her early childhood in Greece to her coming of age in Geneva (paralleling Nakos' own experience).

An arch-innocent of nearly mythic proportions, Alexandra moves through a corrupt world without being touched by its filth. She searches endlessly for love but never comes to terms with sex. As a schoolgirl in Athens, Alexandra first experiences love in the form of a crush on an older schoolgirl whom she adores from afar. One day her mother discovers a lock of Violetta's lovely blond hair, which Alexandra managed to buy from another student at great cost. Convinced that the relationship between the two girls is sexual, her mother beats Alexandra mercilessly:

> Her eyes became wild. Her face was distorted with anger. I'd never seen her like that... But what had I done wrong? Why was it bad to keep Violetta's curl?... My mother grew steadily more wild, until she finally took Uncle's leather belt and began to beat me hard on the legs. It was the first time anyone had beaten me in my life. She was frantic and didn't know what she was doing. The pupils of her eyes had gotten bigger. She pulled me by the hair, made me kneel before the icons and swear that I would never do it again. But do what again? That I shouldn't love Violetta? And why shouldn't I love her? (53)

Alexandra despises her mother. Like the little girl in "...And the Child Lied...", she is actually quite innocent of sex; it is her mother who is obsessed with it.

Alexandra is exposed to sex through her brother Nikos and Despoina, the maid. Nikos is crippled. He is the child of a powerful illicit passion between Alexandra's mother and her first cousin (marriage between first cousins

is forbidden by the Greek church and state). Nikos thus represents the dreadful result of physical passion. Moreover, he is the negative counterpart to Alexandra's purity. She shows only love for everyone; Nikos shows only anger. She is always perfect; he is incorrigible. Nikos reflects all the impulses Alexandra prefers to ignore, including sex.

When Alexandra begs to be left alone, saying she is "unwell," Nikos leers at her knowingly. Elsewhere Alexandra explains:

> My brother had a strange scorn for every woman. ... However, he liked to look at women... I had caught him many times with his eyes fixed on Despoina's fat legs and looking steadily at her breasts. His lips got dry then and he wet them with his tongue. Despoina also liked Nikos' desire for her. I often heard them bantering in the kitchen. It disgusted me. (101)

Alexandra's awareness of sex is thus stirred by Nikos and the maid, Despoina, but she is still not conscious of its full import. When she hears that Despoina is going out at night to "do a favor" for the milkman, Alexandra has no idea what the nature of that favor might be.

Alexandra's adolescence, her taking residence in a new, sexual self, is reflected metaphorically in her move, with her family, to a new house near Lycabettos Hill, far from the old district of Plaka. Spring has arrived. Alexandra is fifteen and restless. Her own sexuality is budding. It is borne in upon her, symbolically, one day during the dizzyingly hot noon hour when everyone is asleep: the hour when peasants believe that spirits roam. Feeling an unaccountable urge to weed the garden, Alexandra comes upon a reflection of her physical nature in the form of an ancient tomb which represents both her heritage as a woman and her heritage as a Greek. She stares at the tomb:

> I saw a beautiful woman's body, with her breasts high and perfectly round. Sitting on her lap was a large Satyr... From the middle down, however, things were strangly mixed up... The Satyr's thighs covered her legs... The Satyr had a human head with a little pointed beard. His eyes sparkled with mischief. What was that air with which he was looking at the woman? He was pressing his body against hers with such pleasure!... It made you tremble...
>
> Suddenly something like fatigue hit me. I lay down on the tomb. The marble was hot from the sun, as if it were alive... Something like fire passed through my blood!... A strange uneasiness came over me. I myself didn't know what I was longing for. My mouth became dry as if from fever, and I was burning all over. (103)

Stunned by this apocalypse, Alexandra makes her way into the house to get some water, only to come upon Nikos and Despoina enacting a similar scene:

> But as I passed through the second yard, in front of Despoina's room, I heard something like sighs, as if people were whispering... I stopped involuntarily,

> and turned to see what was happening. And through the half-open door, I saw the maid lying on her back, but she had her head turned toward the wall... From her open blouse, her whole chest was showing, big and white, with the nipples deep red. I remember... Nikos was sitting next to her with his back to me. He was asking for something in a choked, unrecognizable voice. He had one hand on her thigh, and he was slowly moving it up. Despoina stretched her body, struggled, as if she liked it but yet didn't want it... All of a sudden she yelled at Nikos in a stifled voice: "Not there! Higher, dummy!" And then she writhed and moved like a woman possessed.
>
> I couldn't stand any more. I ran away. I was overcome with revulsion and confusion... How I despised both of them! (104)

Like "Photini" and Marina in "The Nameless One," Alexandra's reaction to sex is overwhelming revulsion. Even when she grows older and moves to Geneva with her mother, she never comes to accept sex. Her first experience with a man occurs when she fights off a lascivious Pole in the pension where she and her mother live. The Pole has expressed interest in Alexandra's piano playing and has introduced her to a great piano teacher. However, he expects recompense for his kindness. As soon as he catches the young woman alone, he pounces on her:

> His heavy, panting breath stroked her face... He was all red and distorted... His mouth searched for mine... Oh, no! No! I didn't want it at all... I pulled away from him violently... I was so frightened, I just barely kept from screaming. I detested him. I had never been kissed!... And I kept pulling back and pushing him away.

The man begins to curse her for being ungrateful. Alexandra is confused by this attack, and he takes advantage of her confusion to persist:

> He stuck his mouth on mind... I could hardly breathe. I thought I would burst... The seconds he was near me seemed endless... And what repulsion!... I closed my eyes so as not to see him.
>
> "What a little hedonist you are..." The Pole said to me, when he pulled away from me. "Look, how pale you got, and how your hands froze. Ah! You little Eastern woman, what hot creatures you are!" (183)

Alexandra fights off a man's advances a second time, when she is returning home late at night from her work playing piano at a casino. The man overtakes her in a dark alley. Fortunately, she is saved by a motherly singer from the casino, a huge Spanish woman who chases the man and tells Alexandra, " 'Men!... They have nothing on their minds except their things...' "

Alexandra falls in love with a Greek man named Kostas. Although she spends all her free time with him, she never thinks of having sex with him until she learns that he is having an affair with a married woman. When she

confronts him, Kostas tells her that he needs a mistress because he cannot make love to Alexandra, since she is a virgin.

> "Just the word 'virginity' frightens me... It robs me of any desire... . . . Well, if you weren't 'a virgin,' the matter would have a different view. . . . A man wants a "lusty" woman, a woman who speaks to his lower instincts... Get it? You're something holy for me!... You represent my better self." (299)

Alexandra thus discovers that the pedestal on which Kostas hoists her is a lonely place. Her utter innocence allows her to expose the absurdity of Kostas' double standard. Kostas says that the idea of her virginity stops him cold. If she weren't a virgin, it would be different. Therefore Alexandra determines to correct her condition.

Alexandra goes to a doctor and disposes of her virginity "scientifically," then waits for the right moment to "surprise" Kostas. That moment comes when they are stranded overnight in an isolated country inn and rent a room for the night. The poor young woman is shocked to see that her lack of virginity doesn't please Kostas any more than her possession of it did. Quite the contrary, he bolts from the bed, cursing her: " 'How can I ever trust you again?' " he screams. " 'How do I know you didn't go down with all the men at the casino?' " (322). He quickly gets dressed and leaves the inn, as she weeps naked in the strange bed, alone. By taking Kostas' words literally and acting on them, Alexandra exposes the senselessness of the values behind them. The result is illuminating, even comical, for the reader, but devastating for her. Just as happened with the Pole, and with her mother when she was a girl platonically in love with Violetta, the angelically innocent Alexandra is accused of sexual excesses. In the world of The Lost, no explicit judgment is made on sexuality, because Alexandra, whose vision the book constitutes, remains steadfastly ignorant of sex. By implication, however, the associations with sexual activity are negative.

During the Second World War, when German-occupied Athens was racked with famine which nearly killed her as it did her mother, ex-husband and half-brother and -sister, Nakos, who was already one of Greece's most prominent writers, sold cigarettes in the street to earn a few cents and worked full-time as a volunteer nurse in a provisionary hospital for starving children. During this harrowing time, Nakos wrote her second long novel, Boetian Earth *(Gi Tis Voiotias)*, through which she recreated the fairytale world of the province of Leivadia, where a young heroine named Barbara spends her early childhood and comes of age.

When the novel opens, Barbara is a little girl who hangs around the kitchen listening to the maids, or hides out by herself in a deserted Turkish bath-house in the yard. Barbara's awareness of sex is triggered about halfway through the book by a scene which is a reworking of the aborted fetus episode which occurs in the early story "The Nameless One." In the short story, a sinister maid who resents the little rich girl subjects her to the sight of her mother's aborted fetus in a jar. The resulting trauma is associated, in the girl's mind and in the timing of their occurrence, with the sexual advances of the mother's lover. Both are repellent to the young heroine.

In Boetian Earth, Barbara too is traumatized by the sight of an aborted fetus. However, the associations with this event, which represents the girl's

initiation into adolescence, are both good and bad rather than merely bad. In keeping with an ambivalence toward sex which will be seen to characterize Barbara's attitudes, the fetus episode in Earth is played out by two sisters, one evil and one angelic.

Barbara's epiphany occurs, as does Alexandra's in The Lost, during the spookily quiet and oppressively hot noon hours. Alexandra came upon her sexuality in the form of a lusty satyr carved on an ancient tomb. Barbara can expect a similar awakening: "Porfyra and the gardener had told her that these are the hours when satyrs roam, half goats and half men, and kidnap little girls..." (156). At this hour, Barbara sneaks out of the house and climbs a tree overlooking the neighboring yard. Her head is burning from the heat. In this state, she witnesses two sisters, Argyro and Zoe, in the yard of their secluded house. Argyro is like an evil witch. It is she who has performed the abortion that resulted in the bloody fetus. Zoe, however, is a good soul (her name means "life") who has lost her mind over an abortion she had been forced to undergo when she was young. Mistaking the present fetus for her own unborn child, she croons to it and gives it a little funeral.

After this experience, Barbara falls ill and languishes between life and death for a long time. When she recovers, it is as though she has been resurrected. Barbara is no longer a little girl, but an adolescent:

> Frequently, lately, her head felt heavy. Her whole body burned as if she had fever, but her hands stayed ice cold... . . . She was impatient to live, but then she was afraid of life. Joy and sadness, dreams and melancholy, sweet like sweet wine, all these feelings together struggled with each other in her adolescent soul... Without any significant cause, tears came to her eyes, and then laughter, uncontrolled, almost hysteria.

In the middle of this crazy time, comes Barbara's period. She is sitting alone in her favorite hideaway, the half-ruined Turkish bath-house:

> Suddenly she felt between her legs something flowing hot and wet like blood...
>
> When she stood up, she saw big drops of blood on the down... On one leg in fact there was still a little red stream running... She was frightened! She was frightened, even though she realized right away what it was... She knew from the maids... She had often heard them talking... But nevertheless the blood, such a deep red, frightened her... . . .
>
> She said to herself: Well!... So that's the whole thing?... I've become a woman, I know!... But that's how it comes, like a sickness? (239)

Despite her mixed emotions, Barbara is not repulsed by the blood of her menstruation. Her introduction to womanhood is mostly positive, for it brings her closer to her friend, a village boy named Thanasis.

Thanasis comes upon Barbara soon after she discovers the blood on her skirt. Although he does not know what accounts for the change, he finds his

young friend bewitchingly attractive. Barbara bids him sit beside her and put his hand on her forehead.

> Never before had Thanasis come so close to Barbara... Not even in his most secret dream had he imagined this... And look now, that this unbelievable miracle had come to pass!... His hand touching Barbara!... A strange trembling seized him, and inside him it was as if his soul shivered from emotion. (240)

When she stands up to leave, Barbara remembers the blood on her skirt. Although she is embarrassed, she has no trouble confiding in Thanasis: "It seems I've become a real woman!..." Thanasis, too, is moved rather than repelled:

> This mystery captivated him, but at the same time it filled his soul with awe, as if he were seeing the hatching of a chrysalis which throws off its silk cocoon and, drunk from the light, begins to fly, to begin a new, different life. Yes, the boy felt as if he had witnessed one of the mysteries of nature. (241)

This shared experience becomes a bond between Barbara and Thanasis: "From that day the two children felt that they were more closely bound to each other." This is in stark contrast to the heightened alienation that Marina experiences in "The Nameless One" as a result of her shocking initiation into the facts of life. After the double trauma of being molested by her mother's lover and seeing her unborn brother in a jar, Marina cannot share her emotions with anyone:

> All afternoon I wandered by the shore, on the opposite side of the island. I didn't want to see anyone. And when the other children came close, I threw rocks at them to make them go away. I ran in the solitude, into the wind. (118)

Although Barbara is much more reconciled to her sexuality than Marina, and her introduction to it is accordingly more positive, yet she is still hopelessly ambivalent. She is torn between her physical attraction to Thanasis and a platonic love for an ethereal, bedridden boy named Andreas. To Barbara, Thanasis represents the flesh: "Thanasis' strong, peasant body made of the soil of the Boetian earth, pulled her own body strangely, like a magnet, and inside her a heap of longings awoke, which she herself couldn't yet sort out" (331). In contrast, Andreas represents the soul: "Everything in him was pure and his feelings ethereal. Nothing fleshly drew the girl to Andreas. It was a pure love, deep and spiritual."

Thanasis surmises, correctly, that Barbara cannot reconcile these two forces within her. He tells her, " 'Now that I'm growing up I understand, Barbara, that in order to be complete, love wants the body as well as the soul. You're looking sometimes for one and sometimes the other, and you separate them' " (316). Barbara and Thanasis begin to kiss and embrace in the woods, but Barbara is hounded by guilt. The young couple begins to argue.

> "Don't you want to come walk in the woods with me any more?"
> "No, I don't want to any more! I won't go again!... it won't do for us to kiss each other like lunatics."
> "And why won't it do?"

> "It's wrong..."
> "And why? Is love a bad thing?" Thanasis asked.
> "Love isn't a bad thing. Agreed! But our crazy kissing, that's bad," Barbara answered him, always laughing. (333)

When Andreas' physical condition takes a turn for the worse, Barbara's guilt leads her to feel responsible: "She was thinking that maybe Andreas was suffering all this, because God wanted to punish her, because she wasn't virtuous and did crazy things with Thanasis..." (337)

Barbara's ambivalence about sex is not resolved in Boetian Earth. The novel ends as she is taken away from Leivadia by her mother, so that she is forced to leave both Thanasis and Andreas. The issue is left to be settled in a sequel to this work named Toward a New Life *(Yia Mia Kainouryia Zoi)* which Nakos wrote several years later.[8] The later work finds Barbara an adult living in Athens with her mother whom she supports by working days teaching high school and nights at a newspaper (again, these circumstances correspond to Nakos' own life just before World War II, the time during which the novel is set).

At the end of Boetian Earth, Barbara is leaning toward Andreas rather than Thanasis, whom she has refused to continue meeting in the woods. In Toward a New Life, Thanasis reappears, and Andreas is back in a Swiss mountaintop sanatorium, close to the sky and far from Barbara. Barbara is now ready to accept Thanasis' earthy love, as she tells him:

> "Yes, Thanasis, I love Andreas, I don't hide it from you. Indeed, until the time I saw you again, I believed that I loved only him in the world. But I love him as an exceptional being. . . . But now, Thanasis, that I saw you before me... sturdy and strong... I felt that real love is not to love only the other's soul, but his body too..." (197)

It is true that Barbara is pleased that Thanasis does not approach her sexually when they meet secretly in her attic room: "It seemed to her that in this way he showed his affection more deeply" (228). But when the couple find themselves in a pine forest shortly before Thanasis is to go to war, they are irresistibly drawn to each other; they no longer can nor wish to suppress their physical longing for each other as they did when they talked all night in Barbara's room. Thanasis is overcome with reverence for Barbara's womanhood reminiscent of his reaction to her first menstruation when they were adolescents. The adult Thanasis "felt suddenly a respect and awe for the womanly body." They make love.

> The young woman then put her mouth against his neck and then... he too rolled on top of her. It was like a strange force overtaking the two of them, like a whirlwind. As if there passed over them a fertile wind which shook them to the roots of their beings. (256)

This romantic vision of consummated love is a far cry from the disastrous first lovemaking in Nakos' first novel The Lost, in which Kostas first refuses to make love to Alexandra because she is a virgin and then leaps from the bed where he ruthlessly abandons her because she tells him she disposed of her virginity "scientifically."

Barbara feels no guilt following her lovemaking with Thanasis in Toward A New Life. Rather, she is elated at the thought that she may be bearing within her "a new life," and she and Thanasis repeat their experience as he spends his last night with her in her bed. Barbara is happy, "for is there any greater happiness than to be beside the one you love on such a night?" (337). This happiness furnishes the novel with its optimistic ending, a new phenomenon in Nakos' fiction.

A reflection of the fulfilling union between Barbara and Thanasis is embodied in the character of Victoria: a cross between Zorba and Mary Poppins who is the surprise heroine to Toward a New Life. Victoria is androgynous: a moustached collossus with equally strong passions for motherly kindness and ruthless administration of "Swift Justice" (in keeping with her nickname). Victoria is self-sufficient and competent, a midwife with no children of her own. She has "a thick manly voice" and "a masculine step," but she is also an excellent housekeeper and masterful cook. In the end, she marries an irascible and eccentric little professor whom she reforms in the best taming-of-the-shrew tradition. Victoria's success mirrors the positive view of connections between men and women through sex as well as love which characterizes Toward a New Life.

Nakos' last major novel is Ikarian Dreamers *(Oi Oramatistes tis Ikarias)*, published in 1963. This novel is unique in Nakos' canon in a number of ways. It concerns mature men and women, and it is the only novel Nakos wrote from the point of view of a man and with a man for its protagonist rather than a woman. Moreover, Ikarian Dreamers is about Greek expatriates returning to Greece, whereas Nakos' early works concern Greeks who leave their country, and her middle period (the two novels which have just been described) deal with characters who never left. The most striking difference, however, is that this last novel is pervaded with an intense pulse of sexual energy.

The novel takes place on the island of Ikarias, the birthplace of Dionysos. The protagonist, Kosmas, having returned to his native Greek island from New York, where he was entombed alive in his restaurant below a skyscraper, is rejuvenated by the island through physical union with a woman named Despoinio. In contrast, his wife Sophie refuses to succumb to the island's enchanting power; in her, its effect becomes destructive, driving her with an equally strong and equally physical passion for a married fisherman named Pantelis.

As Sophie senses, "Sex reigned everywhere." She is obsessed with her desire for Pantelis:

> She wanted him for herself, to sleep with him. The longing of her body increased day by day and muddied her mind. Who knows? Perhaps it was the fault of the climate which had changed, perhaps that she had no work to do, perhaps her forty years which boiled her blood and made her feel the last flame of youth. (35-6)

When Pantelis rejects Sophie's advances, she determines to murder his baby daughter for revenge. At the last moment, she abandons her plan because the child innocently and affectionately embraces her; Sophie returns for good to New York and divorces her husband, who stays on permanently in Ikaria.

While the island's sexual power becomes destructive in Sophie, it is fruitful and healing for the novel's protagonist, Kosmas, as well as for other characters. When Kosmas meets the village woman, Despoinio, their relationship

begins where Barbara's and Thanasis' relationship culminated: making love in a pine forest. Kosmas thinks he is alone in the wood, when Despoinio happens by and gives him some bread.

> And suddenly there was a surge inside him, an unconquerable longing for the woman's body overcame him. Without realizing what he was doing, he lay down on the earth next to her. . . . He squeezed her to him with passion. For a few seconds he lost the awareness of a sense of time. Caught, both of them, in the net of a force all mystery, they had their bodies unite in a fleshly throb which intoxicated them. (47)

Neither Kosmas nor Despoinio feels guilt nor remorse. Their physical passion seems utterly natural. "The attraction of their bodies didn't surprise them"; these are fully mature and sexual adults.

Although Ikarian Dreamers is no simplistic romance, for the novel closes under the shadow of the threat of atomic war as the Mediterranean is rocked by atomic bomb tests, yet the relationship between Kosmas and Despoinio (as between other couples in the novel as well) is satisfying, and, despite their apprehensions about the future of the world, they decide not to abort the pregnancy Despoinio discovers near the end.

The development of the theme of sexual awareness in the work of Lilika Nakos follows a pattern of coming of age. In the early stories which Nakos wrote in French in the late 1920's, the heroines are young girls who are repelled and traumatized by sex. Alexandra, whose childhood and young womanhood furnish the material for Nakos' first major novel, The Lost (1935), is thoroughly asexual. Barbara, the young heroine who is seen through adolescence in Boetian Earth (written during World War II), begins to have a positive rather than traumatic initiation into sexuality, but she remains ambivalent and guilt-ridden and leans toward a purely spiritual connection rather than an earthly one. In Toward a New Life, the same character moves tentatively toward sexual union with her robust childhood lover, but their physical relationship comes at the very end, just before the couple separate because of the war. A true acceptance of sexuality comes only in Nakos' last major novel, Ikarian Dreamers (1963), in the form of a full sexual relationship between the male protagonist, Kosmas, and his lover, a village woman who represents "the Ikarian earth" just as Thanasis in the two earlier works represents "the Boetian earth."

This movement toward acceptance of secuality coincides with the increasing age of Nakos' subjects as her work progresses. Moreover, the fairly romantic view of sexual relations which characterizes her later work serves a quite different function that the startling frankness with which she protrayed young girl's private agony in her early work, startling Greek literature into its own adolescence at the same time.

NOTES

1. See Thomas Doulis, Disaster and Fiction (Berkeley: University of California Press, forthcoming), for an excellent discussion of the writers of this generation.

2. Personal communication. Rodakis is the author of Journalism and Modern Greek Prose (*Dimosiografia Kai Neoelliniki Pezografia*), Athens, Diana, 1966.

3. "Photini," Nouvelles Litteraires, Jan. 1928. Unsigned Greek translation by Galateia Kazantzakis, *"Foteini,"* *I Proia*, Feb. 4, 1928, p. 3

4. Nakos herself did not tell me about this story until I discovered it by myself. When I told her I had located it, she seemed to know all about it and told me who had translated it. When I asked why she hadn't told me about it earlier, she said that she preferred to forget it, since it was this story that had turned her father against her and caused her much heartache as a result.

5. The tenses in the translation reflect the tenses used in the original. Nakos often changes tenses in her prose, shifting to the present tense in order to create more immediacy and emotional impact. In the later work, the tenses shift into the present during the most emotionally charged episodes and then shift back into the past tense when the emotion is resolved. In this early story, her control is not total.

6. See my book-length study, Lilika Nakos (Boston: Twayne World Authors Series, forthcoming).

7. A History of Modern Greek Literature (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973, p. 260.

8. This novel was published in 1960 but written some time before. The most precise information Nakos herself has told me is that she wrote it "after the Occupation." Since she left Greece and wrote mainly in French immediately after the War, I surmise that she wrote this novel around 1955, when she returned to Greece. Since it is a scathing expose of the oppression inflicted upon Greece by the Metaxas Dictatorship which immediately preceded World War II, Toward a New Life was banned when it was published, and Nakos was subjected to harrassment by the police.

Tannen, Deborah. "Coming of Age in the Modern Greek Novels of Lilika Nakos." Regionalism and the Female Imagination 4(1978):1.