Lilika Nakos as Child

Mothers and daughters in the modern Greek novels of Lilika Nakos

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THE BOOKSHELVES ARE stuffed with books and papers in the dining room of Lilika Nakos in Halandri, a suburb of Athens. Nakos herself is sitting on the edge of the frayed couch, resting both hands on her upright cane. Mrs. T., a retired archeologist, is blinking behind thick glasses. Sophia Papadakis, one of Greece's most prominent poets,[1] sits at the table. "I hated my mother," Nakos says. The two other old women gasp, almost audibly. Unruffled, Nakos looks from one to the other with a smile and asks, "Did you love your mother?" "Of course I did," answers Mrs. T. in a sober tone, her eyes made huge by the glasses. "She was my mother!" Papadakis concurs. Nakos persists, "I don't think all children love their parents. When I grew up I loved my mother, but not when I was little."

This disturbing and ingenuous frankness is characteristic of the work as well as the conversation of Lilika Nakos,[2] one of the foremost writers of modern Greek fiction, and one of the first women writers in Greece.

To understand Nakos' contribution to it, one must recognize the recency of the development of modern Greek literature. Very little was written in Greece during nearly four centuries of Turkish rule. Greek liberation did not begin until the second decade of the nineteenth century and did not extend to the area now called Greece until the end of that century. When Greeks began writing

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prose, women had no place in it, even as characters.[3] As for women writers, before 1900 modern Greek literature boasts of just two, both coincidentally named Papadopoulos: Alexandra (1867-1906) and Arsenoe (1853-1943).[4]

After World War I, women's voices began to be heard in Greece, both in artistic expression and in political and social activism. A newspaper appeared in Athens between 1923 and 1933 called *The Woman's Struggle*. At the forefront of the movement for women's rights were women writers. Most well known of these, perhaps, were the poet Myrtiotissa (1881-1968), who fought great opposition to have her work published, and Galateia Alexiou Kazantzakis (1881-1962), who was from an extraordinary literary family from Crete which yielded three generations of writers.

Up until this time, Greek prose was written in *katharevousa* or "puristic," a synthetic combination of ancient Greek and spoken demotic which was imposed on the Greek people after their independence. Since no vital fiction could be written in this stilted language, the development of the modern Greek novel is inextricably intertwined with the cause of demoticism: the drive for acceptance of the spoken language as a literary vehicle. Galateia Alexiou, with her first husband the writer Nikos Kazantzakis, struggled for this cause on the political front at the same time that she wrote poetry, plays, stories, novels, and a mass of educational materials in demotic.[5] Together with her second husband, Marcos Avgeris, she became the hub of literary activity in Greece. In the 1920's, left-leaning writers and artists clustered around them in their Athens home and at the picturesque cafe in the park at Dexameni, Kolonaki.

The writers in this group included a number of young women who were to figure in the literary movement called "The Generation of the Thirties" which developed a social novel in Greek.[6] One of the most important of these women was Lilika Nakos.

Nakos' fiction (eight novels, more than two dozen stories, and at least 25 fictionalized biographies) was pioneering in two major ways. First, Nakos wrote in a startlingly simple, nearly conversational yet lyrical demotic language. Second, her work depicts the intimate experiences and emotions of women. The critic Pericles Rodakis asserts that every woman writing in Greece today is influenced by her style.[7] It would be more correct to say that every person writing in Greece is influenced, for the demotic language has become the only literary vehicle, and explicit treatment of personal experience is now commonplace in Greek as in other European literature.

Nakos had a special background which permitted her to become educated. Born in Athens in 1899 as the only child of a wealthy lawyer and socialist member of parliament, at the age of twelve Lilika moved with her mother to Geneva, where she attended high school and took two advanced degrees: one in piano at the Conservatory of Geneva and another in Belles Lettres at the University of Geneva. Although her father vigorously opposed first her education and then her writing, Lilika was encouraged in both by her mother. Eleni Papadopoulos Nakos was the sister of the already mentioned writer Arsenoe Papadopoulos and, like her sister, had been educated at the Arsakeion, the first institution of higher learning for women in Greece which their father had helped to found.

As a young woman, Nakos lived in Paris, where she became a member of the literary circle of Henri Barbusse, and her stories (set in Greece but written in French) were published in leading French journals. But in 1930 she moved to Greece and began writing in Greek. After her father died in 1932, Lilika supported her mother and herself by working concurrently as a high school teacher and a journalist, in both professions as the only woman among openly hostile male colleagues.[8]

Nakos' "important contribution to journalism," according to the *Great Encyclopaedia of Modern Greek Literature*, "was her investigation of social issues, which made her known and loved throughout Greece."[9] Her approach to literature is related to her perceived role as a journalist: to enlighten and give hope to her readers whom she sees as uneducated people in a country with no tradition of reading. Thus her novels, especially the later ones, are at the same time social documents and romantic visions. They expose the hardships of the oppressed: workers, children, and women, but they nevertheless end with optimistic affirmations of hope that life will improve. Nakos' early stories, however, depict a

bleak and piercing view of a vast gulf between child protagonists and upper-class parents who are portrayed as frivolous, superficial, and utterly insensitive to their children. This vision of childhood corresponds to the way Nakos characterizes her own early years, as in the social gathering described above. She says however that she loved her mother when she grew up, for indeed a great bond grew between them in Geneva and when they lived together as two adults in Athens.

The relationships between mothers and daughters in Nakos' work reflect this pattern: the portrayal of mothers is negative in the early work but becomes increasingly sympathetic in the later novels.

Nakos' early stories are about girls who hate their mothers. For example "Photini," which was published in *Nouvelles Litteraires* in January 1928 and appeared in February in the Athens newspaper *I Proia*, translated by Galateia Kazantzakis, is about an upper-class child who feels totally isolated in "the ancient house with its vast rooms in the old section of Athens—this house where she can never find a corner of refuge, a single quiet corner where she cannot hear her parents' shouts and quarrels." Photini hates both her parents: "And the child folds into herself and suffers from feeling so different from them." However, her negative feelings are strongest toward her mother: "One of the most intolerable torments for Photini is to sleep in the same room as her mother. . . . To always feel her presence."

One night Photini's parents return home late and tiptoe into the 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 motions! 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 reached 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.

Helpless with shame and rage, Photini later has a vision of "herself, her hair in disarray, bent over her mother's body, a knife in her hand. There was blood on the blanket." Recollection, hallucination, or nightmare, the vision gives form to her murderous impulses toward her mother who, as the father's sexual partner, acts out urges which are unthinkable for the little girl. This very early story sets a pattern which is recapitulated in other Nakos stories and in he first novel: a girl's inability to accept sexuality becomes focused in revulsion against her mother.

The image of a mother as her daughter's enemy is most apparent in another early French story, "And the Child Lied," which was reprinted in Greek along with Nakos' first novella. If Photini kills her mother in her mind, the mother in "And the Child Lied" kills her daughter, not literally, but practically; she sends her to a monastery. Marika's brother Andreas has invented a story because "he wanted to show [his mother] 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 had seen. "I saw the hotel cook, you know that short one with red hair, holding Marika 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."

Marika is beaten and marched off to a monastery between two nuns. At the end, the mother embraces her son and murmurs, "Now it's just the two of us," and he kisses her hand passionately. The implication is that the mother takes the lie as a pretext to send her daughter away because she prefers to be alone with her son. This too is a pattern recurrent in Nakos' work: mothers send their daughters away when they are little. Moreover, the responsibility for sexuality is transferred to the mother, while the daughter is an innocent victim.

Another story which associates a mother with a girl's negative attitude toward sexuality is "The Nameless One." Marina does not want her ailing mother to die, but she remarks, "At bottom I didn't care that much." Marina is introduced to sexual awareness through a double trauma linking sex with disaster, with her mother as a negative role model. Just before her mother experiences a miscarriage and is heard screaming in pain, Marina is sexually molested by the mother's lover. The second trauma occurs soon after, when a maid shows Marina the aborted fetus. Thus the mother's sexuality has destructive consequences for her daughter as well as herself. Marina hides by the road and, in an expression of rage reminiscent of Photini's, she hurls a huge rock at the lover's head. In the story's final image, he raises his hands to his face dripping with blood.

Nakos' first novella, *Le Livre de Mon Pierrot* (1928), published in Greek as *The Deflowered One* (1932), was hailed as "a new beginning for our literature."[10] One of the first social novels in Greek, it attributes the familiar estrangement between mother and daughter (now a young woman) not to sexuality but to social corruption. The narrator, Katina, repeatedly contrasts her bourgeois mother with the idealized mother figure, her childhood peasant nanny: "She makes other people's pain her own. Most peasants are like that. They have great compassion. While Mother, if you tell her such things, cuts you off. 'Oh, now you're exaggerating.' She's very bourgeois. Her life has always been mediocre. Without great sorrow and with meaningless joys." Katina reiterates often that it is her nanny whom she loves, not her mother.

The mother is associated with both sexuality and bourgeois values in Nakos' first full-length novel, *The Lost* (1935), generally acclaimed as "one of the most significant which the period between the wars has given us."[11] *The Lost* is the *Bildungsroman* of Alexandra Kastri, who searches endlessly for love without coming to terms with sex. The novel is suffused with a tone of tragic hopelessness created by the uncontrollable passion of Alexandra's mother, Nitsa, for her cousin Sotiris, which leads her to drive her husband away and totally neglect her children, especially her daughter. Just as Katina in *The Deflowered One* finds love from her nanny rather than her mother, so Alexandra is happy only during a brief period when she is sent to live with her godmother. With her mother she experiences only deprivation.

The Oedipal implications of *The Lost* could not be clearer. Alexandra's mother is the villain: selfish, self-indulgent, and ignorant. Alexandra can not understand why her father persists in trying to get Nitsa back instead of accepting his daughter in her place. She sees her own inadequacy in contrast to her mother's power: "I dreamt I was tall and beautiful like Mother," and, "I could never understand why Mother had such success. Me, for example, who had a pretty face according to [my brother], no one ever looked at me."

As the novel progresses, Nitsa becomes increasingly incapacitated by her monomaniacal longing for Sotiris, and Alexandra gradually takes over the management of the house. Before the mother dies, she comes to appreciate her daughter somewhat, and Alexandra comes to love the mother whom she is supporting. Nonetheless, the destructiveness of Nitsa's passion is a reflection of Alexandra's inability to accept sexuality. The daughter apes her mother by becoming involved in an obsessive and self-denying love affair, but she never succeeds in integrating sex into her love.

After the publication of *The Lost*, Nakos wrote a series of fictionalized biographies which were serialized in the newspaper *Akropolis*. When Greece was occupied by Germany in World War II, Nakos became a volunteer nurse in the Risarion Seminary where children found starving in the streets were brought to die of starvation in the makeshift hospital instead. She wrote a series of stories depicting the faces of hunger on these children and smuggled them out of Greece one by one. Published in Switzerland, they were responsible for the first shipments of milk to Greece by the International Red Cross. A collection of these stories, *The Children's Inferno*, was published in Hollywood in 1944, making this Nakos' only book available in English. (Unfortunately, the stilted translation is from the French and fails to capture the lyricism of Nakos' simple demotic language).

During this bitter occupation, Nakos and her mother suffered from cold and hunger (at one point they were found on the floor of

their apartment collapsed from starvation), and the ordeal cemented the bond between them. Nakos developed a method for temporarily quelling the pain of hunger by pressing her knee into her stomach. In this position she escaped the hell around her by writing a long novel, *Boetian Earth*, in which she recreated the world of her childhood summers in the province of Leivadia.

The young heroine of this novel, Barbara, lives with her grandparents because her widowed mother's new husband does not want the child around. Her mother's absence causes Barbara no suffering, because she is nurtured by her grandfather's love and the friendship of a village boy named Thanasis. In the brief scene in which the mother appears, she is seen as a mindless and cold society lady. Whereas Grandpa wants Barbara to be educated, her mother's dream is for her to become a lady-in-waiting at the palace. When Barbara must return to her mother at the end (her second husband has died), the child's departure is portrayed as a tragic wrenching away from parent-substitutes who truly love her, whereas her mother can only exploit her. *Boetian Earth* represents a major development in Nakos' writing, for its child heroine is happy, and the novel is marked by a strong sense of pride in and commitment to Greece which characterizes much Greek fiction of the war and postwar period. The mother/daughter relationship is not central to the novel, but it is the very absence of the mother that creates the child's positive feelings about her environment.

There is a striking change in the characterization of Barbara's mother in Nakos' next novel, a sequel to *Boetian Earth* entitled *Toward a New Life*, written right after the occupation but not published until 1960 because of its political nature. An expose of the repressive Metaxas dictatorship which oppressed Greece before World War II, this important novel finds Barbara a young woman living with and supporting her mother in Athens. Christina, the mother, though still bourgeois and superficial, is far more sympathetic than her predecessors. No longer able to afford the role of society lady, she keeps house for daughter. There is genuine affection between the two women, and Christina comes to see the errors in her bourgeois values before the end, when she embraces Barbara and Thanasis, giving approval to the engagement she would have considered beneath them, a short time before. Thus, the novel closes with an image of mother/daughter solidarity.

There remains one more novel in which a mother/daughter constellation is central. Painfully bereft following her mother's death in 1947 as a result of her suffering during the occupation, Nakos left Greece for Switzerland, where she wrote, in French, a novella entitled *Nafsika* (published in Greece in 1953). The hauntingly lyrical little work, which is one of Nakos' personal favorites, is like a paean to the author's mother,[12] for it creates the character Lena, a frail and gentle intellectual who comes from an island village. The portrait of the mother as an innocent victim of a cruel and grasping husband makes this Nakos' most feministic work.

When Lena is abandoned by her lawyer husband, her grief earns her the reader's sympathy but is nonetheless destructive to her daughter. Lena's grief poisons her daughter's life as surely as Nitsa's lovesickness poisoned the atmosphere of the house in *The Lost*. This effect is symbolized in the way Lena clutches Nafsika, as the child narrates:

> She cried and cried, and her tears salted my mouth, and I was entangled in her hair as in a net. I was very frightened. Suddenly the window was opened by the wind which charged into the room and put out the candle. We remained embracing in the dark. My hands had frozen and I trembled all over, but not a word escaped my mouth. Then my grandmother ran to rescue me from my mother's embrace which was cutting off my breath.

Thus the fact that Lena is a sympathetic character does not preclude the familiar pattern whereby Nafsika loves not her mother but her nanny. Moreover, Lena dies before the end, so that ultimately, as in Nakos' earlier work, the child is deprived of her mother.

Nakos' novels are concerned with women's coming of age: their introductions to sex, love, and social injustice. The relationships between the heroines and their mothers are central to this development. The girl's feelings toward her mother create and reflect her attitudes toward her sexuality and toward the society in which she is becoming a woman. Thus, the mother/daughter relationships are at the core of Nakos' early stories and novels. As Nakos' work

progresses, there is a gradual change in the depiction of mother/daughter relationships, recapitulating the development of a girl's evolving feelings toward her mother, from the uncontrolled rage of the young child to the love born of the reversal of roles which finds the mother dependent upon her adult daughter. In keeping with an autobiographical interpretation of the themes in Nakos' work, the two novels written after her mother's death do not concern mothers and daughters at all.[13] Moreover, the developing pattern of the child's attitude toward her mother as traced through Nakos' work corresponds to the development of the author's relationship with her own mother, as she herself recalls it in the following memoir.

Notes

1. This gathering took place in 1976. Sophia Papadakis died in 1977.
2. Those who know Greek may already have noticed that I am using the anglicized form of Greek women's names. In Greek, a woman's name is in the possessive form. Thus, while her father's surname is Nakos, my subject is Lilika Nakou, literally, the Lilika of (who belongs to) Nakos. However, her European publications bear the name Lilika Nakos (or Nacos), following the practice common (though not universal) among Greek women living abroad.
3. There are two striking exceptions, both of which were recently made into movies: Emmanuel Roides' *Pope Joan* (1865), which has a western rather than Greek heroine, and Alexander Papadiamantis' *The Murderess* (1903). This last work is a revealing document of women's place in Greece at the time: its heroine is a village woman who kills female infants to spare them the miseries of women's lives.
4. Alexandra Papadopoulos wrote first historical stories, then stories in the then-popular genre called "ethographic," describing life and manners in her native Constantinople. The other Papadopoulos, Arsenoe, wrote stories for primarily young readers.
5. For a discussion of the language question and Greek literature see Peter Bien, *Kazantzakis and the Linguistic Revolution in Greek Literature*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972.
6. For a comprehensive analysis of the literature of this period see Thomas Doulis, *Disaster and Fiction*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977.
7. Personal communication. Rodakis is the author of *Journalism and Modern Greek Prose*, Athens: Diana, 1966.
8. One other woman wrote a ladies' column under the pen name Daisy.
9. Athens: Hari Patsi, 1970, p. 458.
10. Constantine Dimaras, "A sure talent," rev. of *The Deflowered One, Politeia*, Mar. 27, 1932, p. 5. The sensational Greek title was not chosen by Nakos who commented that she didn't even know the word in Greek (*xeparthení*).

11. I. M. Panayiotopoulos, *Personalities and Texts*, Vol. 2, *Uneasy Years*.
12. Nakos herself commented that of the mothers in her novels, Lena most resembles her own mother. At least this is the way she has chosen to immortalize her.
13. *Mrs. Doremi* (1955), Nakos' only comic novel, is based on her year teaching French and music to over a thousand boys at a high school in the town of Rethymnon, Crete. It was written in French at the specific request of the Swiss magazine *Illustre*. Nakos' last major novel, *Ikarian Dreamers* (1963), is based on Greek-Americans Nakos met on the island of Ikaria, where she spent twelve summers in a row. Its characters are mature men and women, and the narrative point of view reflects the perspectives of one after another of them. The novel ends with its male protagonist's happy marriage, despite the disturbing threat of American atomic bomb tests in the Mediterranean.

Please note: all excerpts from Nakos' work are translated by Deborah Tannen.

Right: Lilika Nakos in Middle Years.

Bottom: Deborah Tannen with Lilika Nakos.

Lilika Nakos with her Mother.

Lilika Nakos writes about her mother

Translated by Deborah Tannen

IT IS NOT always correct to say that a child loves its mother from the first years of its life.

As a little girl, I saw my mother only when she was leaving, beautifully-dressed, to go to some reception or dance. At that time my father had an important place in society. The little girl that I was was raised by a woman of the people, from Epirus. I don't know if she was beautiful. For me, however, she was the most bewitching, the loveliest woman in the world. I loved her with a passion.

When one day she showed me the tatoos, the marks they had made with needles on her arms, for beauty's sake, I began to weep inconsolably, and to kiss her arms with passion. How much it must have hurt, to have made those marks on her!

Whatever Alexandra did (that was her name), was wonderful to me. Whatever was forbidden by my mother, if my "nanny" did it, it was well done. She had been forbidden to chew the food in her mouth and then give it to me. This was done by a lot of village women for their children. From the time I was little, I had a delicate stomach and was given a special diet. Nanny had no use for it. Hidden from my mother, she gave me chewed chick-peas to eat, which are considered heavy even for adults! However, never did I get sick from eating the indigestible chick-peas.

My Nanny was very proud of me, because, it seems, I was a pretty little girl. In the morning she'd take me by the little hand, and we'd go for a walk in the Royal Garden. You had to have a special card to get in.

I remember a tall gentleman, handsome, with a great moustache, as was the fashion at that time. He passed close by us, and as soon as he saw me, this gentleman (who was none other than King George of Greece) took me in his arms, lifted me high, and exclaimed: "Oh, what a lovely little girl! What is her name?" And in his boutonierre he had a carnation (they say that he always used to wear one) and he presented it to Nanny Alexandra. From that time she became a fanatic Royalist, and she took double care of me, because she said I was her pride.

And so we made our way around the parks together. Sometimes she lifted me in her arms; sometimes she took me by the little hand. Athens was then a lovely small town. It wasn't noisy, ugly, with concrete houses. Each one had its own courtyard full of sweetsmelling orange trees. It must not have had more than 250,000 inhabitants. Now it has two million.

The careless life of my first years was destined to end badly.

My mother was jealous of my love for my Nanny, and she decided to throw her out of the house. She found some excuse, and told her to leave. My father didn't agree with her about this. He said that it could traumatize the child's psyche. But my mother didn't listen because she couldn't stand her.

One morning I woke up and the bed next to mine was empty. I immediately started to cry. This lasted 24 hours, until I was taken with a 40° temperature. When my mother came near my bed, I didn't even want to look at her. I detested her. I searched for the sweet sympathetic face of Alexandra.

My father searched all over Athens to find Alexandra. But it was as if the earth had opened up and swallowed her. Perhaps she had returned to her village, crestfallen, insulted. Who knows.

The abyss that this woman left in my soul cannot be expressed. I started to feel loneliness, to feel that you can love a stranger more than one of your family. Of course these were vague feelings for a child of four or five years.

I began to close myself up in myself. The flowers in the Royal Gardens weren't so beautiful when I went with a French governess who replaced Alexandra. I wanted to speak with a Ianninan accent like my Nanny.

I became a bad child, strange. I didn't like the big people. I didn't want them to kiss me on the cheek, nor to call me a lovely little girl.

My mother despaired about my bad character. I didn't even want to go to school. And when I went I was unhappy. I didn't do

well in the lessons. Inside me I was always calling for Alexandra. In the street I kept looking at the women's faces, in case I'd happen to see someone who resembled her.

My mother gave up hope that I would become like the other children. I regarded my mother as a stranger.

Now, grown old, I wonder what happened in time that I came to love my mother so much. This happened when I turned about 10, 11 years old. I had grown, but I still wasn't a good child, neither in school nor at home. I sought after the company of the servants in the kitchen. I preferred them to the people that used to come to my mother's salon. I didn't like the adorned ladies. I preferred the maids who came from the islands of the Aegean. They spoke to me of the customs of their lands, and thus the Greece I lived in was vivid before my eyes. Their talk seemed more interesting to me than the conversations of the welldressed ladies.

One day however something happened which was to change my character. I heard loud voices discussing animatedly in the salon. It wasn't only the voice of my father, but also that of his brother whose presence frightened me. He was a high judge. An austere, humorless gentleman with a high forehead and dry face. Without wanting to, I stood behind the door. I heard what they said because I didn't dare enter the room. I realized that the two men were accusing my mother. That she neglected her social duties, that she let my father go to meetings alone, that she spent most of her life reading! I still remember my uncle's words: "Too much reading," he said, "is like a narcotic. It's an escape from reality. Reading is a real magic spell! And you, Helen, you're not facing reality, that your husband is leaving you, and it's not his fault!" And he continued to say, "A woman's role is to look after the house and her husband. Reading distracts her from her real life. That's how she gets ideas and lives in a spell!"

This word, "magic spell," which kept coming into the discussion, made an impression on me. I wanted to get to know this spell too. But how would I get to know it? Only, I thought, by getting close to my mother. And so it happened.

Evenings, my mother sat at home. My father abandoned it little by little. Thus we had time to get to know each other. She let me

leaf through her books. She read me books that she bought for me. A new world opened for me. We read together Robinson Crusoe, the child of the woods in Sumatra. I got to know America with "The Wonderful Orenoko." The Indians. The Blacks, with "Uncle Tom's Cabin." Magical, unknown worlds. They opened again before the shining eyes of the child that I was. The enchantment of the word, of reading, overcame me too. As much as my father forbade me to read lest I resemble my mother, so much did I read.

Thus my mother and I had a hidden secret which united us. The magic spell of reading. Oh, how much did I then begin to love and understand my mother! Together we traveled to the ends of the earth. Nobody reached us there. We were free. I realized what a treasure a Book is, to free the mind beyond borders and superstitions.

One time my mother interrupted her reading and explained to me, "All people are the same in the eyes of God. And God, whether he's called Allah or Buddha, is One. Christ was a Jew." I remember we were reading Ben-Hur, which spoke of the Jews. This book made an impression on me, translated from the American.

I realized then that my mother didn't resemble the other ladies who used to come to her salon and who scorned Blacks. She was more advanced than they, who talked only about wealth and gossiped about the social gatherings.

My mother was different from the other ladies. She surpassed them in beauty as well as Mind. This made me love her little by little. And when in time my mother abandoned the house and settled in Switzerland, I wanted to go with her. I didn't feel lonely any more. Something deeper bound us together.

We didn't lose our nerve when we found ourselves alone in a cosmopolitan city like Geneva. We had the love of mankind, of whatever race. And then Geneva had endless libraries open to all. And so we lived and continued to live with the enchantment of reading.

Thus I adore forever the memory of my mother, and I bless her because she left me as a legacy the passion, the best enchantment of reading.

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Tannen, Deborah. "Mothers and Daughters in the Modern Greek Novels of Lilika Nakos." Women's Studies 6(1978):3.205-215.