

bodies a central theme of the novel. Another instructor, who treats the village boys with prejudice, asks the students to comment on the Latin adage, "Et in Arcadia Ego." Angelos takes issue with the romantic sense of the saying, "Even I have lived in Arcadia," which suggests the notion of Arcadia as pastoral paradise and draws instead on an interpretation he has read in books in the public library: "Even in Arcadia I (death) am present." Angelos explains, "Even in Arcadia death can come. Arcadia has never been a paradise. I think man has lost the true Paradise and the new Paradise he can hope to find lies not in a country but in himself."

Education allows Angelos to discover his internal Paradise. But this is no isolated, internal landscape. The more educated Angelos becomes, the more connected he remains to family and culture.

The Power of Family

"Many readers are struck by the powerful presence of the family in this story," Kokonis says. "In 'Arcadia, My Arcadia,' the family is container of narrative, theater of character, agent of significance."

Angelos' parents, despite the hardship it will cause, support his moving to Polis to attend high school. When Angelos' mother helps him move into this room in the city, she warns him to beware of the "eaters," the merchants, officials, politicians, and judges who feed on poor people.

It is family who nourishes Angelos. His mother brings him vegetables. His sisters pick potatoes for him. His Aunt Anna advises him, "Through patience, the mulberry leaf becomes a silk worm." Within the arms of his family, Angelos finds consolation, help, advice, and allies.

In return, Angelos helps his family. He waters the farm plot, tills the soil, cooks food and shows his love for his father by searching for him one desolate night. "Son, I can't believe you walked so far in the dark for me," Angelos' father exclaims as the two walk home together.

Throughout the narrative, Angelos confronts the specter of prejudice, and travels beyond the darkness of his own doubts, to help his parents. "From family," Kokonis says, "Angelos learns love of work, faith, and all those virtues that would ultimately enable him to redeem himself."

The Power of the Individual

Kokonis believes, "The human being is capable of the most extraordinary achievements. Nothing is unthinkable; nothing is impossible for us. Every person has in him/her

the seeds of success. We are buds with the potentiality to open up in time."

Through emphasizing the commitment to education and family, Kokonis hopes to inspire readers to unlock the potential within them. "Mind matters," he says. "The power of a trained, disciplined mind is incredibly immense and gives stature to the individual in society."

Angelos Vlahos transcends his oppressive circumstances because of his values. His love of family remains inseparable from his growth as an individual. As Kokonis puts it, "Angelos Vlahos was not born to fear; it is not in his Arcadian genes to measure the height, depth, or width of obstacles. The survival courage of his peasant ancestors will be the equalizer against the rich and the high-born, the smarter and the stronger. Courage will keep his soul higher and even higher. Atlas carried the world; Angelos must carry his whole family on his back."

"Arcadia, My Arcadia" speaks in a strong cultural voice imbued with a universal tone. "Clear and vital," Kokonis says, "the narrative sounds through every culture, inspiring tears of hope that are part of the eternal human condition. The stage of 'Arcadia, My Arcadia,' has room for every person's homeland."

Kokonis' vision is inclusive. He does not pit rich against poor but rather invites us all to transcend the limitations of exclusive thought, to break the egoistic shackles that imprison us in the illusion of self and other. Through participating in Angelos' journey, we are transformed.

How Nicholas D. Kokonis came to write "Arcadia, My Arcadia"

Entranced by the story of Angelos Vlahos, I asked Kokonis, who came to the United States on a student visa in 1963 and earned a doctorate in psychology, how he came to write his novel. The impetus for the novel occurred at a time of great tragedy. "When Kennedy was assassinated," Kokonis recalls, "I felt the world was going to collapse." Kokonis felt compelled to record his tightly packed and vivid memories of his childhood. "While working as a busboy, I decided to record ... (my) remembrances as 'My Story,' using a borrowed old Greek typewriter and only two inept fingers. I wrote this (just shy of 120 pages) with the only intention that it might someday serve as a convenient anamnesis."

Through the years, Kokonis revisited his homeland only to witness with dismay the desolation of the land and the departure of the shepherds. The goats, donkeys,

mules and horses had also vanished. The clay-mouthed Arcadian hills were falling into decay.

He says, "Standing stunned amidst the metamorphosed landscape a few years ago ... I pondered, 'Et in Arcadia ego.' Instantly I knew I had to write a story as a literary document of the bygone era. Upon returning to my American home, I took out 'My Story,' buried in a deep drawer of a basement cabinet and nearly forgotten ... in those precious pages, yellowed by time, I thought lay the leaven that would make the dough of my new story rise."

Kokonis kneaded his memoirs into the literary bread of fiction, and shaped the story of Angelos Vlahos, composing and revising it on his laptop. He chose to write much of the manuscript at the popular bakery, Panera, while he enjoyed coffee and baked goods served to him by hard-working immigrants. Kokonis donated a copy of "Arcadia, My Arcadia" to the

owner of Panera, in honor of his multicultural staff.

The Next Chapter of "Arcadia, My Arcadia" on Film

Since its publication, "Arcadia, My Arcadia" has a growing cadre of admirers.

"I feel greatly honored," Kokonis says, "that the board of the newly formed OPAH Book Club of the Hellenic Museum and Cultural Center chose to launch its program with a reading of "Arcadia, My Arcadia" and that upon the recommendation of the book club, the Hellenic Museum of Chicago asked me to present it to a larger audience. Presenting this story there ... remains one of the most gratifying moments of my life."

Directors John Kousakis and James Chressanthis, among others, have expressed interest in taking the story of Angelos Vlahos to the big screen. The screenplay is presently being written by Alexander Karanikas, Ph.D., Professor

Emeritus of English at the University of Illinois at Chicago. Karanikas' recent screenplay, "Marika," won the Neptune Award at the 2003 Moondance International Film Festival in Boulder, Colorado.

It is our hope that "Arcadia, My Arcadia" will continue to delight readers and filmgoers for many generations to come.

"Arcadia, My Arcadia" can be purchased for \$25, plus \$4 shipping and handling, from St. Basil's Publishers, P.O. Box, 1155, Deerfield, IL 60015. Read more about "Arcadia, My Arcadia" at Kokonis' web site at www.mycarcadia-book.com.

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