

Kokkinidou, Anna

An epic journey: Ioannis Kazazis (1947–2021)

Neograeca Bohemica. 2021, vol. 21, iss. [1], pp. 75-77

ISBN 978-80-11-01324-0

ISSN 1803-6414 (print); ISSN 2694-913X (online)

Stable URL (DOI): <https://doi.org/10.5817/NGB2021-1-8>

Stable URL (handle): <https://hdl.handle.net/11222.digilib/144754>

License: CC BY-SA 4.0 International

Access Date: 02. 12. 2024

Version: 20220831

Terms of use: Digital Library of the Faculty of Arts, Masaryk University provides access to digitized documents strictly for personal use, unless otherwise specified.

An Epic Journey: Ioannis Kazazis (1947-2021)

Anna Kokkinidou

<https://doi.org/10.5817/NGB2021-1-8>

Professor Ioannis Nikolaou Kazazis (often undersigning with the acronym of his name “INK”, thus giving rise to a playful pun) literally led a life, which resonates an epic journey back and forth from his own Ithaca. His own Ithaca has been the Greek language, his talent in an instinctive, intuitive and genuine study of the language’s multi-layered nature. A glance at his office, and you could find him behind his desk, amidst a thousand notes and papers, facing a wall full of excerpts from his “journeys” in science and in love for his field, photos full of moments with his lifelong associates.

The wall like a *tableau vivant* of his progress and recognition and then two screens side-to-side, where you could hear him endlessly tapping on a keyboard and checking on the screens, leaning and standing upright, dreaming about and in the Greek language. His projects pertained to the widest imaginable spectrum of knowledge, varying from lexicography to the study of the ancient Epos, from teaching at the university to managing the Centre for the Greek Language.

As an aspiring, talented, and determined young scholar, he found himself among the best in the field, working with D. J. Georgakas in South Dakota on the national dictionary of the Modern Greek language entitled *A Modern Greek-English Dictionary*, a work which is actually a breakthrough in the history of Modern Greek lexicography. His focus started shaping into his main academic occupation, which evolved around two main fields, ancient Greek lyric poetry and historical lexicography. Having been galvanized with renowned classic philologists, his aspirations led him to Illinois, where he completed his postgraduate and doctoral studies, always contributing with pioneering work in his field, while he continued his postdoctoral studies at the Centre for Hellenic Studies of Harvard and at the Austrian Academy of Sciences.

With a long history of studies, collaborations and writing, Kazazis was soon settled as a renowned scholar and a talented professor. He fused his work with his own life story, eventually leaving the “Sirens of the USA” and returning home to Greece. Meanwhile, he had met his lifelong companion, and ideal partner, Deborah Brown Kazazis, who followed him back to his Ithaca. A brilliant career followed at the Aristotle University of his hometown, Thessaloniki. Many

people have already written for his work; thus, I will spare the ergographic details. I wish to write a farewell note to the man.

Marginalia, notes, intuition, talent, passion, authentic studies, a lifetime of active dedication to Greek words and their power to infuse other structures, to produce and inspire a permanent intelligence. If we ever tried to define Professor Kazazis, then the first trait that would come to mind is that he constituted an authentic *Homo Universalis*, a witty polymath, a cunning Ulysses of the Greek letters, who gradually developed his natural talent to inspire, create and not only envisage but also build a bigger picture.

He made everyone near him, his audience and in particular, his fellows who felt the kinship, be part of that picture. The one that he was building every single day of his life. A Greek scholar who transcended the boundaries of academic knowledge and who has never been sterile; he communicated his dreams, cast his projects in fire and iron, led the way to delve deeper into the real understanding of an ancient quest. A charming man, with sparkling eyes, full of the “*joie de vivre*”, he impersonated the combatant intellectual who dared provoke power and imagine the unimaginable: the comprehensive charting of a four-thousand-year language, the distilling of Greek into the fine language it is.

He was John, Ioannis, Yannis, and a man with a thousand registers, who with incredible ease charmed the politicians and convinced his peers, held his audience in suspense like a rare Mandarin, a Talisman of the Greek Language, the miraculous orator and the charismatic storyteller.

Yet John N. Kazazis has mainly been a man of action. His real *opus magnum* has been his crucial contribution in transfusing the fresh breath of meticulous studying into educational praxis. Each time about, on and in the Greek Language. Greek surrendered to him in its diachronic nature and, he was one of the language’s fervent and active supporters. Kazazis was always so enthusiastic about a new word, a fresh notion, you could see him underlining with a little pencil, devouring newspapers, manuscripts, books, keeping notes like a young student.

If he were a King, then the Centre for the Greek Language (CGL) would be his castle, his kingdom, his real home. The Professor eventually became the Centre’s President, while the whole endeavour – of establishing a national research centre and institution, pertaining to all the functions and stages of the Greek Language – has been the fruit of an insightful company of philologists, originating from the long tradition of the Aristotle University into Greek language matters. At the CGL, Kazazis found not only work and shelter but also the field and the stage of action: designing the language policy for Greek worldwide, organizing the educational curricula, building and thesaurizing the corpus of

Greek in its historical and interwoven stages. Kazazis, like his father who was into the craft of carpentry, was an artisan for the Greek language. Managing this promising Centre was the man's real craft and in a way the zenith of his lifelong pursuits.

It is true that in life, we rarely engage in meaningful dialogues where our interlocutor is giving, grateful and modest enough to offer us some of his/her wisdom. That was the case for Professor Kazazis or the President (Ο Πρόεδρος/ Ο Πρόεδρος), as we called him at the CGL, meaning that him and only him could be so effortlessly respectful to be designated our President.

In one of his letters, he wrote to me that he was full of enthusiasm and felt like his dream came true, when the Ministry entrusted him with the task to design the curriculum for Ancient Greek in state secondary education. That was our President, enthusiastic like a child, adventurous like Ulysses, brave beyond death. He was the man with the dream, the man with the words and the action to realize that dream.

The circumstances of his loss bewilder and leave us at a loss for words. It was an epic life, with a lyric closure. He only surrendered to the end of a life, but that does not mean the end of a lifetime in letters, academia, productive thought and a creative legacy.

Farewell, Mr. President. May your soul continue its epic quest.

Ρήνα Κατσελή (1938-2021): Απολογισμός και αντιπελάργηση

Δημήτρης Δολαψάκης

<https://doi.org/10.5817/NGB2021-1-9>

Η Ρήνα Κατσελή (1938-2021), το γένος Χαραλαμπίδη ή καλύτερα η κόρη του Σταυρή του Λόρτου, υπήρξε μια πολύπλευρη προσωπικότητα. Αφιέρωσε το σύνολο του έργου της στην ανάδειξη του γενέθλιου τόπου της, της Κερύνειας, και στην καταγγελία της κατοχής της Κύπρου από τα τουρκικά στρατεύματα. Το πολύπλευρο ταλέντο της ξεδιπλώθηκε στην ξυλογλυπτική, τη βυζαντινή αγιογραφία, τη μουσική, την ποίηση, το θέατρο, το διήγημα, το μυθιστόρημα, το