

Eyewitness in Greece: The Colonels Come to Power by John A. Katris

(Dutton; 317 pp.; \$9.95)

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During a recent trip to Greece to do an article on Greek public opinion about the colonels, I put the following question to a Greek friend who had lost his job when the dictators came to power: "What do you Greeks who dislike the dictatorship intend to do about it?"

"My dear friend," he replied without hesitation, "the question is not what do we Greeks intend to do about our government. The question is what do you Americans intend to do about your government in Greece?"

Before reading John A. Katris's new book I believed that I had a fairly good understanding of events in Greece leading up to and including the coup of the colonels on April 21, 1967, and the related role of the United States as it meddled in Greek politics. But after reading *Eyewitness in Greece* and thus becoming privy to Mr. Katris's inside information (especially the information derived from his association with George Papandreou) it seemed I had been cognizant of only the top of the historical heap. Buried beneath the surface and now meticulously uncovered by Katris in a display of journalistic surgery is a senile body politic crawling with disease and rot.

Even the semifictional drama of the movie *Z* (whose factual details are explained here) pales before the scenes offscreen. Torture follows on crime, crime follows on betrayal, betrayal follows on treason in "a ballad of horror" that seems without beginning and which appears to stretch on beyond the pages of the book so long as it suits the purpose of the CIA. In the words of the author:

"A review of the past decade

shows that the Greek Establishment has not hesitated to use whatever means it found necessary to maintain its grip on power. Means chosen depend on the dimensions of the danger and on the approval of the United States. When propaganda, corruption, and terrorism prove ineffective weapons of control, the Establishment resorts to military power. Finally, when armed forces fail, the foreign 'protector' rushes to their rescue, with or without invitation, and a brazen dictatorship is imposed."

And what do the Greek people think of this sick ballad—people like my friend in Athens who threw my question back at me? "Like all peoples," Katris says, "Greeks do not discriminate among tyrants; they simply abhor tyranny."

The frustration in having some personal knowledge of the Greek situation and in reading such a book lies in the awareness that few Americans will ever bother to avail themselves of the facts that are available concerning their own nation's role in making and keeping the Aegean "banana republic."

The facts which Katris gives us in this book are involved and complicated, the names are strange, the places often unknown. It's often difficult to follow, and since the book is about people and parties who are at best slippery, it's difficult to understand the political gyrations they go through. Added to this natural confusion is the dark rôle of the CIA in protecting the so-called American interest. But at one point in the book Katris leaves names, dates and statistics of betrayal behind and gets down to the essence of tyranny—the story of one girl who

joined the fledgling resistance against the colonels and ended up under the name-extracting machinery that every tyrant eventually uses.

The tenth chapter of Katris's book is devoted to a long letter that he received around the end of June, 1969. "The letter," Katris informs us, "arrived 'via Geneva' . . . I shuddered at every line. The plain phrases, the simple thoughts burned like hot iron. I felt the sacred obligation to quote it verbatim in this book. The only change I had deemed necessary was with respect to a name and an address."

No reviewer—no reader—of *Eyewitness in Greece* can ever forget the chapter titled "A Ballad of Horror," in which a young girl tells the story of her own capture by the colonels. Beginning with November 20, 1967, she writes:

"I can sense that my time is coming. My life as a fugitive was about to end. I felt a chill of fear. This morning while I was checking out the street from my basement window, I saw a man across the street who, my instinct told me, was suspicious. . . . My food supplies were soon gone.

"November 23, 1967. I decided to risk leaving. I didn't know how to escape or where to go if I did. To leave through the front door was out of the question. . . . I hid my notes and at four in the morning started out. I walked through the laundry room to the stairwell leading to the first floor, where there was a small window overlooking the backyard. I opened it and slid out feet first. Almost the moment my feet touched the sidewalk I felt the cold touch of steel at my left ear. Four hands grabbed me. A handkerchief was stuffed into my mouth. Handcuffs were snapped onto my wrists. I was carried to a jeep parked around the corner. I was in the claws of the beasts; my time had come. I said over and over to myself, 'You must hold out. Forget the names you know. The worst is that you will die. You must.'"

Electra Papa was taken to the in-

famous Bouboulina, the building being used as the headquarters of the General Security of Athens, where she was promptly taken to the fourth floor. She writes of that experience—an experience that went on and on and on for days:

“Then Karapanayiotis took a break. He lit a cigarette. He puffed a few times and came close to me. The others stopped their work. Karapanayiotis untied the ropes which bound my legs. With deliberate movements he raised my dress. He took one more puff and put the cigarette out against my thigh just above the stocking. I screamed with pain and felt myself sinking.”

And later, after days of the same treatment, she writes: “In a single movement he tore away my bodice. He took hold of my left breast and squeezed it with all his might. . . . He released the breast and struck a match. The small flame revealed drops of sweat. . . . The beast had fixed his eyes on mine—relishing my reaction in advance. The flame touched the nipple and the flesh. . . . From within me welled up the groan of a slaughtered animal.”

Such is the government of Greece today, a government supported by the American tax dollar. In the February 6, 1972, issue of the *New York Times*, a Greek, Mr. John Zigdis, a political moderate and highly respected former Cabinet minister, was interviewed in a hospital the day after his temporary release because of illness resulting from the four-and-a-half-year prison term he is serving for having expressed opposition views. Mr. Zigdis said: “I hope the American Government will soon understand that it is more important to have the traditional friendship of the Greek people than only the free use of Greek territory.” Mr. Katris’s book contributes to that understanding for the benefit of Americans who have the time and inclination to understand how their money is being spent in one small country.

A girl called Electra Papa is only one recipient.

The Schlemiel as Modern Hero by Ruth Roskies Wisse

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Stanford Morris Lyman

In an age of heroes and anti-heroes, of revolution and counterrevolution, of neo-nationalism and intranational colonialism, it is fitting to study a form of survival that stands apart and yet participates. The schlemiel, a Jewish folk-type in fact and fiction, is such a survivor. His is not the role of guiltless innocent before the outrages of tyrannical society, nor that of brave protagonist of an unjustly wronged people, nor even that of mocking anti-hero before the absurdities of a world to which he refuses to belong. The schlemiel is guilty of the sin of worldliness, wronged both as an individual and as a Jew, victimized even as he attempts to “make it,” impractical in his own praxis and, in all of these, one whose existence ironizes the situation, the society, and even—perhaps necessarily—God. The schlemiel combines the social remoteness of Simmel’s stranger with the worldly activities of that of Sombart, yet he is never Weber’s puritan ascetic. His artlessness and misfortune are separated from their external exploiters by ironic distance. The schlemiel keeps faith in the same breath as he mocks fatalism. Neither resigned nor removed, he reacts. But against the powers of state and economy he has only his words. Rhetorical weaponry is not only the last but also the first defense of the people of The Book.

Such a stance, as Professor Wisse shows so well, is suited to a situation of recognized impotence but not one of unregenerative annihilation. Thus the literature of the schlemiel is a literature of the Eastern European ghettos before World War I. Neither emancipated nor enslaved, the Jew was both a necessity and a super-numerary in kingdoms that regularly punctuated their general persecution of peasants and workers with special

pogroms against the Jews. But irony is not at all suitable when the penultimate of persecution shifts to the permanence of the final solution. Thus almost no schlemiel literature arose out of the Holocaust.

But the schlemiel did not die. He emigrated to America. There, amidst the many failures-in-success, he survives as a success-in-failure. The schlemiel could not emerge immediately in American Jewish fiction because there was first the necessity of overcoming the American theory of Jewish anti-civilizational conspiracy as represented in the philosophical epistles of Henry Adams and the romantic bravura of Ernest Hemingway. Once these voices had been stilled, or, to be cautious, quieted for a while, the schlemiel could be afforded. In the fiction of Saul Bellow, in whose stories schlemiels abound, a quintessential schlemiel is presented by *Herzog*. Herzog is not only a failure in his professional and personal life but also a schlemiel in his private pretensions. But in his musings he mocks not only his society but also his own intellectual perceptions and inflated aspirations. Thus he emerges as a liberal humanist. If Herzog seems small in today’s world it is because, as Bellow wrote, “people appear smaller because society has become so immense.”

Perhaps America, with its ideology of worldly success and its ontology of bitchiness and *ressentiment*, is the final home of the secular Jewish schlemiel. Even here, however, the species is endangered. As Wisse states, “Ours is not a hero for all seasons.” The schlemiel’s position is precarious because its “ironic balance” teeters “dangerously between self-indulgence and self-hatred.” Philip Roth reveals the schlemiel as overburdened with both and in great need of therapeutic relief: “Portnoy’s