

responds with sudden hatred. "At that moment they ceased being a man and a woman. He was an Arab. She was a Jew" (382).

The book, though dealing with political issues of explosive implications, is devoid of impassioned emotions, rancor, and smug self-righteousness. The general tenor of the story is almost placid, suffused by gentle humanity and tolerance. The grim reality of a society torn by war is expressed indirectly by literary devices, such as obsessive memories, nightmares, and symbolic hallucinations. The combination of realism with flashes from the unconscious is an effective tool for conveying a state of mind overwhelmed by anxiety and ominous premonitions in the face of war, violence, and death.

Anne Hébert

LE PREMIER JARDIN

Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1988. Pp. 188. \$19.95

Reviewed by Uta Doerr

Flora Fontange, the heroine of *Le premier jardin*, is an aging actress who returns, somewhat reluctantly and with misgivings, from France to the stage of her native Quebec. She soon finds childhood memories welling up in her. Such is the gist of this plotless novel. *Le premier jardin* (The First Garden) will strike many a reader as disconcerting for it lacks the suspense, the intensity, and the interest created by the unusual characters that have fascinated Hébert's readers in the past. It resembles a tapestry woven with threads of many colors that seem initially unrelated and incoherent till one steps back to contemplate the finished ensemble. Like most of Anne Hébert's novels (*Les chambres de bois* [1958], *Kamouraska* [1970], *Les Enfants du Sabbat* [1975], *Heloïse* [1980], *Les Fous de Bassan* [1982], *Le premier jardin* is multifaceted. Into the tapestry of Flora's memories are woven the themes of alienation, artistic creation, and the relationship of men and women. Past and present, reality and imagination are inextricably intertwined. Flora Fontange has always had to deny her own self, cover it up, silence it to comply with the prescripts of her environment. She is made into an object, squeezed into the narrow mold considered suitable by her adoptive parents. Conformity becomes normative. She thus becomes devoid of feelings and emotions, a lifeless, truncated tree without leaves or branches. The only escape route from alienation is artistic creation. As an actress, Flora is finally allowed to transcend the limits imposed on her by her adoptive family, to become truly alive and experience the full gamut of human emotions in the characters she incarnates on the stage.

The first garden (*Le premier jardin*)—a symbol of Flora's childhood—produces no flowers, boasts no colors, remains drab and gray. But the first garden is also a symbol of creation. At the same time as giving us a glimpse into the origins and processes of artistic creation (we may safely assume that Flora shares certain traits with the author), Anne Hébert picks up one of her favorite themes: the relationship between men and women. Contrary to some of her earlier work where men and women were in the grip of the most intense desire and the deepest hatred (such as *Kamouraska*, 1970 and *Les Fous de Bassan*,

1984), *Le premier jardin* portrays the shallowness of the male/female relationships encountered by the actress. The passions and emotions that erupted and led to crime and destruction in Anne Hébert's earlier work are absent or repressed in *Le premier jardin*. Various people gravitate into the orbit of Flora's life but they leave no permanent trace. They remain encapsuled in their own existence, unable to form any lasting attachments with anyone. The women of the past that Flora conjures up are analogous to her in their defenseless conformity to an alienating mode of life. But they remain colorless, faceless, one dimensional. Refraining from developing them into full-blown characters, Anne Hébert epitomizes their condition. Unfortunately these characters add nothing that Anne Hébert has not expressed in other novels in a more convincing form.

Georgios Vizyenos

Trans. William Wyatt, Jr.

MY MOTHER'S SIN AND OTHER STORIES

Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1988. Pp. 229.

Reviewed by Robert Pepper-Smith

Georgios Vizyenos, a Greek writer who died in an asylum at Dafni in 1896, has a character in *The Only Journey of his Life* proclaim, "all of you are living in golden times now, in golden times! You travel whenever you want, to whatever lands you want. And in any event, my dear, you know what you are." For many of Vizyenos's characters, nothing could be farther from the truth. To be sure, the narrative voice in these stories, all which were first published in the late 1800s, is often that of one who has traveled for many years. And because of events that have taken place during his travels or at home during his absence, the narrator finds that he has a tale to tell. Still these characters hardly know "what they are."

For instance, the narrator in "Moscov-Selim" is drawn to an eccentric Turk who, despite recent hostilities between Russia and the Ottoman Empire, persists in dressing like an impoverished Russian soldier. In another instance an infant boy is dressed and reared as a girl in order to avoid the Yanitsario--Turks who indiscriminately apprehended young Greek boys for service in the corps of Jannissaries, a Muslim military elite. When the boy is too old for conscription, his father grabs him, cuts off his long braids and says, "Look here Yoryia, from now on you're a boy," a manner of rebirth.

Such reversions of identity, whether national or moral, familial or gender, are at the heart of this collection of stories. No one is who he or she seems to be; ties based on self-deception or deceit are strengthened over long years, only to suddenly collapse in a flash of genuine recognition.

Hailed as the father of the modern Greek short story, Vizyenos is adept at bringing out both the lyric and comic aspects of such themes. At times his prose attains the clairvoyant lyricism that one has learned to associate with the