



# **Hold Fast the Mountain Pass: A Work of Historical Fiction about the Life and World of Nikos Kazantzakis**

*Theodora Vasils*

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Hailed as "my spiritual brother" by Albert Schweitzer, and oft-compared to fellow giants Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, Nikos Kazantzakis occupies a unique place among the literary notables of our time.

Kazantzakis was born in 1883 at the height of his country's last bloody revolts to break free of Ottoman oppression. As a child, he knew the sound and smell of fear and the sight of rampaging soldiers on the streets outside his window. He knew the blood-curdling sound of people being slaughtered, and the sight of his father standing guard at the door, his knife at the ready; knew, too, the sound of his father's voice in his ear, savage and tender, whispering *to not be afraid... to die like a Cretan*.

For a child living in Crete at that time, there were words that dripped blood upon which an entire populace were crucified: the words *revolution* and *freedom*. These were the words that shaped and defined the struggle for freedom and spiritual perfection that was to become the focus of his life.

Beginning with those first pivotal years, *Hold Fast the Mountain Pass* narrates Kazantzakis' life - his poverty, his life in exile, his struggle as a writer groping for a "voice," and describes the conditions under which that voice brought forth the prolific range of work that included *The Odyssey*, *Zorba the Greek*, and the controversial *Last Temptation of Christ*. It continues through the period of maturity when the floodgates opened to release the final great novels, and covers Kazantzakis from the historical perspective of his own country, and also in the larger context of the two World Wars which defined most of the twentieth century.

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