

# *The CHARIOTEER*

*An Annual Review of Modern Greek Culture*



NUMBERS 22 AND 23  
1980 / 1981

SPECIAL ISSUE

KAZANTZAKIS:

LIFE AND WORKS

THE CHARACTERS IN  
FREEDOM OR DEATH

ASCENT, THE INTERPRETIVE  
FIGURE OF BEING

*from SAVIORS OF GOD*

REVIEW OF BOOKS

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*Edited by D. M. NICOL*

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*Published by Parnassos, Greek Cultural Society of New York*

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THE CHARIOTEER participates in the sorrow for the two substantial losses suffered by modern Greek literature in the recent deaths of Anghelos Terzakis (1901-1979), the outstanding novelist, playwright, essayist and critic, and of Stratis Tsirkas (1911-1979), the poet, short-story writer and novelist.

THE CHARIOTEER gratefully acknowledges contributions received in memory of Calliroe Constant, wife of the late George Constant, artist, whose work was presented in THE CHARIOTEER, Number 19.

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NIKOS KAZANTZAKIS

"... His appearance was like that of a Saracen, and his face also was exotic, something like an African mask. Impulsively, he held out his hand, ornamented with a ring of a broad stone set in gold...."

—Prevelakis

## **EDITORIAL**

Since the summer of 1960, THE CHARIOTEER has been presenting the arts and letters of Modern Greece to the English-speaking world. During the past twenty years, the record in these pages shows that the artists and writers of Greece today speak as they have always spoken, for the civilization of the West.

One reason why they do so is that, even though she has long ceased to be the center of the West, Greece continues to be the arena, often blood-soaked, of struggles which are crucial to the survival of the West. Since her phoenix-like awakening from four hundred years of Turkish rule, Greece has survived not only the internal upheavals which beset most new-born nations, but also the cataclysms of two World Wars. She fought in both of these, as she has always fought, for Western democracy. While she was trying to recover from Nazi occupation, a civil war inflicted a blood-letting more dreadful than any she had previously suffered—again, for the sake of Western democracy.

These and other fateful particulars of Greek experience, past and present, have in varying degrees determined the character of the works presented in THE CHARIOTEER. Yet, each work is also borne along by the Aegean consciousness which has been informing Western culture in a continuous, unbroken stream for more than twenty centuries. Indeed, according to Professor Julian Jaynes of Princeton University, what we call *consciousness* first came into being in the mind of the Homeric Greeks. In his book, *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind* (Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1976), Jaynes asserts that the critical development of the human mind from archaic or *bicameral* to modern or subjective is first discernible in the *Iliad*. "Since we know that Greek culture very quickly became a literature of consciousness, we may regard the *Iliad* [sic] as standing at the great turning of the times, and a window back into those unsubjective times when every kingdom was in essence a theocracy and every man the slave of voices heard whenever novel situations occurred" [pp. 82-83].

Consciousness was, according to Jaynes, a lesson taught by centuries of catastrophic experiences and was first learned by the Greeks 3,000 years ago. Before the Greeks, human nature was divided between "an executive [*bicameral*] part called a god, and a follower part called a man" [p. 84]. The individual was a *bicameral* automaton who was commanded by auditory hallucinations. These "voices" from the god part of his brain constituted his volition in any "novel situation." The mind of Homeric man is the first evidence of *consciousness* as we might generally say: as the conduct of a nature that is simultaneously involved in "interacting reciprocity of stimulation" [p. 85] among experiences, not necessarily related, inside and outside the individual, according to idiosyncracy, capacity, and spontaneously willful, personal inclination. Thus, among the Greeks, humankind first began to study phenomena and formulated the first law of human nature—*Know thyself.*

Poetry was the primal source of *consciousness*; "The Greek subjective conscious mind . . . has been born out of song and poetry. From here it moves out into its own history, into the narratizing introspections of a Socrates and the spatialized classifications and analyses of an Aristotle, and from there into Hebrew, Alexandrian, and Roman thought. And then into the history of a world which, because of [the Greek subjective conscious mind] will never be the same again" [p. 292]. The history of Greek literature—indeed, of the Greek people—bears out the truth of Professor Jaynes' words. Greece, free or enslaved, has been addressing the world since the days of Homer, through her poets.

So, today, the attention of the world is drawn to that small nation by the central voice of her poets. During the past sixteen years, though many crises have threatened, her poets have twice been awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature: in 1963, George Seferis, and in 1979, Odysseus Elytis. Their poetry demonstrates the central steadfastness of the *Greek subjective conscious mind* as a shield and sword against chaos. In each instance, the Swedish Academy noted that the work of the poet further enhances the ideals of humanity which were first conceived in the Greek mind and which have never ceased to inspire. While each poet has, of course, drawn from a personal and collective past, their works

show two contrasting sides of Greek consciousness. In the poetry of Seferis, prevails a delicate, elegiac irony flowing from a tragic perception of unattainable ideals. The work of Elytis reminds us that the human spirit can transcend suffering and reconcile warring factions of reason and emotion, fact and fantasy, duty and desire into a joyous celebration of life. THE CHARIOTEER devoted Numbers 6 and 9 to the work of George Seferis. We are honored to announce herewith that the forthcoming issue, Number 24, will be dedicated to the work of Odysseus Elytis.

This double issue, Numbers 22 and 23, is also dedicated to a Greek poet—Nikos Kazantzakis (1885-1957), who, in the opinion of many critics, should have received the Nobel Prize. The paradox that he did not, underlines the truth that to an achievement as monumental as that of Kazantzakis, a prize of any magnitude is superfluous. A further paradox is that while Kazantzakis was, in many ways, an archetypal Greek, he developed, as man and artist, by struggling to discard his Greek identity and even, at times, his *Greek subjective conscious mind*. If he is not the greatest writer of Modern Greece, he is, as the essays of Prevelakis and others in this issue demonstrate, one of the most engrossing. In the light of world literature, Kazantzakis is the sort of “case” that Henry James dramatized in his parable about literary criticism, “The Figure in the Carpet.” Kazantzakis lures the addicted reader to explore—as the critic in James’ story explores—the works of the distinguished author to learn “his undiscovered, not to say undiscoverable secret,” to find “the particular thing” that author wrote his “books most for.”

The “case” of Kazantzakis is complicated by the fact that the man is more interesting than the artist. The testimony of his life more than of his works can be said to mark the end of an intellectual movement which began many decades before him and made itself felt in many different fields of the arts and sciences; that movement was a search for the ultimate authority, for a superhuman guide or leader, for god, for *The Absolute*. Kazantzakis can be said to be, if not the last, certainly the most fanatic, of a long line of fellow-seekers, mystagogues or philosophers, artists or scientists, especially during the last century—like Nietzsche or Darwin or Bergson—who tried to crack the old “riddle of the universe.” Kazantzakis’ personal martyrdom, how-

ever, not merely to break away from tradition and from the prosaic substance of "each day's quiet need," but even to transmute the very quality of his *Greek subjective conscious mind*, suggests that he may belong to a new intellectual dispensation, not of the past but of the future.

THE CHARIOTEER is not now offering belated homage to Kazantzakis. Twenty years ago, in Number 1, we published selections from his work, together with selections from the works of his friend and colleague, Anghelos Sikelianos and of Stratis Myrivilis. Each of these writers is significant, but the presiding presence in that first, 1960 issue of THE CHARIOTEER, was Kazantzakis. His career, which straddled two centuries, as essayist, dramatist, novelist, poet and philosopher, had—then comparatively recently—in 1957, just ended. The triumph of his masterpiece, *The Odyssey: A Modern Sequel* (which appeared in 1958, brilliantly translated by Kimon Friar, our former editor), was, in 1960, still reverberating throughout the literary world.

The first issue of THE CHARIOTEER is notable because it presented segments of Kazantzakis' controversial philosophical work, *The Saviors of God: Spiritual Exercises*, with illuminating commentary (quoted in these pages) by his intimate friend, disciple and Cretan compatriot, Pandelis Prevelakis. A first-rate critic and author in his own right (whose remarkable work appeared in a double issue of this publication, Numbers 16 and 17), Prevelakis, in this issue, now casts further light on the enigmatic genius of Kazantzakis.

Prevelakis makes clear that whoever would study the "case" of Kazantzakis should bear in mind that almost any statement about him must be qualified. What can be said with some certainty is that he was skilled in many *genres*: his works—drama, essay, novel, poem—bespeak his virtuosity; and that he was not an innovator, but (we hasten to add), neither was Shakespeare. An oneiric quality pervades Kazantzakis' personal and artistic experience; yet most facts of his life prove he was firmly grounded in everyday reality. Before he turned to literature, he was, like many illustrious predecessors, a student of law (the Great Mother of novelists). During his literary career, he was often active in public affairs: e.g., director, then director-general of the Ministry of Welfare, founder of the Socialist Workers Union in

Athens. He often resided abroad and was an indefatigable traveler and a keen observer of the world from Spain to Siberia, to the Middle East, Egypt, the Orient. He roamed, all the while, just as indefatigably through the world of books.

His restless physical wanderings were meagre outward signs of a profoundly restive "messianic drive" that hurtled him out of the temporal world into the arms, not always hospitable, of *absolutes* embodied in the deeds and words of great guiding souls. The stations or phases of his mystical pilgrimage do not lead sequentially to an appointed destination. They mark a devious, if not confused trail along which one phase seems to swallow or cancel out another. His phases were acts of passion goaded by intellectual and spiritual malaise (not, as usually occurs, the reverse).

In his search for the ultimate authority who could "formulate," as Prevelakis records, "a world-view [as to] the origin and destiny both of the world and man," Kazantzakis would immerse himself in the identity of those great ones he worshipped. William James, Bergson, Christ, Sikelianos, Buddha, Lenin, St. Francis, Homer, Mohammed, Genghis Khan, Shakespeare, El Greco, and, above all, of course, Nietzsche—each of these and many others had a niche in the sacred gallery of "'great spirits to whom'"—Kazantzakis said—"I lighted candles. . . ." To begin to understand Kazantzakis requires knowledge of those from whom he borrowed—as Prevelakis describes—with "piratical avidity." More imperative is knowledge of the climate of Kazantzakis' soul when he succumbed to each of those "'great spirits.'" He adopted so many masks he might almost be said to have been a born dissembler who conjures up illusions for his readers which he suddenly, capriciously, dispels so as to exult in our disenchantment and thereby measure his success.

Kazantzakis cultivated self-drama or even self-mythicizing in his person. "On the street, his dress, though plain, had a certain affectation," as Prevelakis describes him. "He wore a tieless shirt, on which the top button was replaced by an upright pin with a gold coin of Alexander the Great. His coat had four buttons and narrow lapels, in the military style. . . . The baggy trousers were fastened at his narrow waist by a silver Caucasian

belt. Strange as it may seem, Kazantzakis never went out without his gloves in his hand, or at least without a book...." Kazantzakis was, however, desperately dedicated to his exalted vision of man's fate: "his ultimate purpose"—according to Prevelakis—"was to express an inexpressible experience." However derivative his works may be in ideas or craftsmanship, he commands lasting attention because of the intensity with which he was consumed by the meanings he embraced. His novels for instance, are full of clichés of plot design, description, characterization and melodramatic contrasts established by Balzac and Dickens and copied by many followers, but especially adapted to the novel of ideas by Dostoevski.

Of all literary figures, Kazantzakis is most akin to that Russian. Both men were obsessed by the meaning of *freedom* as a philosophic concept; and they projected dimensions of their own ego in rebellious iconoclastic anti-heroes who are trapped in a vortex of self-immolating emotion that charges their thoughts into action that spawns further emotion, and so on, almost without respite. Both writers also clamored for *freedom* through avenues of despair that have become commonplace during the last hundred years: as Prevelakis, quoting Herman Hesse, summarizes, "'the disintegration of myths and customs, the doubt thrown on traditional values—in short, the "death of God"'". Everyone today is aware that a world—our own western civilization, alas!—is crumbling.'"

Dostoevski's nineteenth-century clerk, *the underground man*, and Kazantzakis' twentieth-century Odysseus, or as Prevelakis aptly names him, the *desperado*, both react to that disintegration by rejecting human fellowship and human happiness so as to exercise their free will. They prove they are superior to the mass of humankind by selecting the worst, rather than the best or even the better, of all possible choices. The difference between the two anti-heroes measures the distance between the two centuries and the two writers: Dostoevski's underground man cowers, miserably free but safe in the "mouse-hole" of his soul; Kazantzakis' Odysseus sails, dauntless, on a suicidal course into the ultimate void of *absolute freedom*.

To the Greek temperament the very word *freedom* has always been a call to arms. It signals battle for positive human

values rooted in love and self-sacrifice for a fellow human being. To the Cretan blood of Kazantzakis, freedom was a summons to a metaphysical combat for non-human absolutes—a combat between his *Greek subjective conscious mind* and some other, atavistic force that impelled him, just as it drove his Odyssean alter ego, toward Nothingness. That force was at once inscrutable and yet transparent. It can, perhaps, be called his Cretan consciousness whose roots reached past the Aegean toward the exotic mixture of cultures where Europe meets Africa. It was a force apart from all others in him and made him unique—almost grotesque—among his contemporaries in Greece and abroad. It lived in him as in a kind of labyrinth—a labyrinth not of one but of many doors, and the inquirer who enters there can hardly trust to come out from the same threshold he initially crossed.

Kazantzakis seems to have perceived that force as a kind of sub-human creature with something of a super-human sentience—a “sacred beast,” he said; and in teaching “independence from every attachment, the sacrifice of all human happiness,” he would (according to Prevelakis) declare, “‘Happiness [is] the giving of your soul to a huge beast to eat!’”. In a letter to Prevelakis, August 1, 1927, Kazantzakis described the effect of such “giving” upon his own subjective consciousness: “...I have been liberated almost entirely from what is human, and have succeeded in concentrating the substance of my soul—which is certainly without human form, being both beast and god. More and more I free myself from human nature and I struggle, like the Egyptian god, to find an organic synthesis of beast and god—of a beast of prey (falcon, tiger or what you will) and of a restless ephemeral god who does not love the ephemeral, transient form of man.”

At such words, the addicted reader can hardly suppress a gasp of astonishment. To break away from *what is human?* To become *a synthesis of beast and god?* How could such a statement come from him who claimed to have taken up the task of epic poetry from the very hands of Homer, the hands that first cast man and god into one ideal alloy? How could he who claimed himself a reincarnated Odysseus, yearn for *a . . . god who does not love the . . . form of man?* Is not Odysseus that most human of humans whose form was most beloved by the goddess

of wisdom, herself the most civilized and civilizing synthesis of the human and the divine?

Prevelakis does not expand on this extraordinary departure of Kazantzakis from that love for man by which man is the measure of all things, and the very gods are conceived in man's beloved form. "All the values hammered out by Hellenism," Prevelakis notes, "from the moment when Homer bequeathed solid shapes to the Olympian deities . . . — all have gone under, have drowned, in our modern Odysseus' mind. . . . The poet . . . plucks away every hope. Odysseus hopes for nothing, fears nothing, is free."

The shared thrill of national pride in the achievement of Kazantzakis adds lustre to the image which Prevelakis portrays; the portrait of the artist as hero soon gives way to the icon of the man, and he becomes a "a great spirit" to whom we should "light candles." We must struggle to understand the reasons for his Herculean, blood-stained ascent toward the martyrdom which his nihilism invited. Yet, we helplessly ask, "Freedom, for what? To do what?" So that—as Prevelakis observes—"not only the values [but] even the commonplace ingredients of quotidian human existence [may be] traduced?" If so, then, with all due honor to Kazantzakis, the spirit of Greece and we, his readers at large, even while paying deepest homage to his memory, turn sadly away and say, "No."

In doing so, however, we turn away from a part of ourselves. What Dostoevski did for his times, Kazantzakis does for ours. He defines twentieth-century man who reaches beyond his sensory experience toward metaphysical mirages, who ransacks the richest depositories of earth and sea and of human culture, and who tries to alter his very consciousness, in his desperate search for the talisman that will help him, if not exorcise, at least endure, his fearful passion for the unspeakable.

Of Kazantzakis, as man and artist, the pity and fear of tragedy strike home. His tragic flaw may well have been the narrowness of vision or of spirit that caused him to ignore the humanity of one half of the human race—woman. His failure to portray the feminine principle as fully as he cultivated the masculine, is a fatal shortcoming that keeps him from the ranks of a Shakespeare or a Tolstoy. To Kazantzakis, "Woman is the

agent of the Evil one." Such archetypal fear of woman requires that she be annihilated, ostensibly because she distracts man from his archetypal quest. Hence, Kazantzakis maintained, "Man slaughters woman—in the literal and metaphysical sense . . . to dedicate himself completely to his Rule." A similar assault must be mounted against the world of the senses, seen, in Kazantzakis' view, now as Woman, other times as Nature who creates only to destroy.

Such idiosyncracies in Kazantzakis invite more inquiries about the man than the artist. Was his "vengeful nihilism" against woman and Nature the result of an "unsatisfied desire for communion with them?" Or do we, in Jaynes' terms, "need a paleontology of consciousness," so that "we can discern stratum by stratum how this metaphorized world [of Kazantzakis'] subjective consciousness was built up and under what particular social pressures" [p. 216]. What traces of Minoan imprints on that consciousness linger in his confessed tendency to find "harsh pleasure of great violence and sudden obliteration" or in his bizarre credo about the soul's *happiness* at being devoured by *a huge beast?* Did he fling himself upon so many altars to pray for a superhuman guide because he required a father figure? Or was it something more profound than his personal psychic needs? Was his search for that *absolute* caused by vestiges of the *bicameral*, god part of his brain, hence his violent flight from the human for a power more authoritative than his own *subjective conscious mind?*

These last speculations arise from recollections about the man recorded by Prevelakis: "Ever-present in his eyes was the brightness from the 'great moments of ecstasy' he had been granted. All one had to do was look at him to understand that he had truly known inexpressible experiences of the kind that abolish the sense of individual limits and check the flow of time. He was easily overcome by emotion; at such moments his speech became impetuous and his inflammable soul revealed itself in shudders that traversed his body. If you had bent over and placed your ear on his breast, you would have heard the seething turmoil of a man who aspired to become a god." Were such *shudders* and *seething turmoil* symptoms of his need to resurrect the *bicameral*, god part of his mind? Or were they the

stirrings of a hitherto unknown, yet unborn, segment of the brain, signalling a new development, a *third* kind of consciousness beyond the *subjective*, which will some day gradually characterize the consciousness of future generations as they try to—and must—meet the challenge of artificial intelligence now being geometrically multiplied by the computer?

All of the above and more deepen the enigma of Kazantzakis, as man and artist, the more we study his achievement. It is like a huge conflagration that lights up distant skies. We may never know what it is all about but it stops us now in our tracks and we stare in wonderment. He fled from the human and conquered an ice-bound peak to kindle there a blaze for us. His is one of a chain of many beacons along the topmost ridges of human thought which have been lighted for humankind from one age to another. Each of those beacons has leaped from the kindling of one great consciousness to another—as the fires from Troy signalled from one mountain peak to another, toward Mycenae. Many more such beacons must be lighted before humanity will know whether they spell victory or defeat.

Far more remains to be said of Kazantzakis than this occasion allows. We have tried to give a swift over-view to help our English-speaking readers see his place in the firmament of world literature. Whatever fuller judgment time may bring, there is no denying that Kazantzakis was an artist, he was a Hellene, he was of Crete—in what order, who can tell? Let the rest be silence, or—as he would say, *The Silence*.

DESPOIINA SPANOS IKARIS  
*for Parnassos and the Staff of THE CHARIOTEER*

## THREE POETS: Notes in Passing

BY ANDONIS DECAVALLES

*Nikos Kazantzakis*

Late in life, a life of gigantic and thorough dedication to an unceasing consideration of life's supreme meaning and of man's nature and his potential to transcend matter into spirit and thus achieve the highest freedom, Nikos Kazantzakis saw his work receive the wide appreciation and recognition it deserves. Unfriendly times, critically changeful circumstances, conflicting ideologies as well as practical and intellectual necessities, had obstructed that appreciation and recognition, particularly in his own country. For a long time his work was viewed, not in itself—as the work of an extraordinary gifted mind—but in the light of current national, ideological matters.

A few of his fellow countrymen early enough, began to appreciate his great intellectual endeavor to validate his own culture and to expand its vision of man beyond time and place, but only in his later years did his message reach the wider acceptance. That acceptance came mostly from abroad, at a time when the anguishing world-intellect was to find in his work encouraging and liberating answers to some of its crucial, searching questions. Such acceptance was made possible through the publication of his work in English translation mainly in the United States. The translation allowed the work to reveal its intrinsic value independently and beyond objections as to its language and its ideological-practical advisability. He himself claimed that he viewed man and the world through his *Cretan Glance* and that the *Cretan Glance* contained not only the Greek but also the Oriental, African and Western, age-long experience which all Crete had gathered in its relations with the world at large.

The satisfaction Kazantzakis experienced in his fast-growing popularity and the interest in his work was unfortunately cut

short by his death in 1957. He died before he could enjoy the privilege of seeing his supreme desire fulfilled by the publication in English of his *magnum opus*, *The Odyssey: A Modern Sequel*; he was, however, much gratified in helping the progress of Kimon Friar's masterful translation which appeared in 1958. Kazantzakis' fellow-countrymen did not fall short of eventually discovering his value and offering their tributes to him. Much has been written about him and his work ever since. The most outstanding and knowledgeable of all such considerations is Pandelis Prevelakis' *Nikos Kazantzakis and his Odyssey: A Study of the Poet and the Poem*, published in the original Greek in 1958 and in Philip Sherrard's English translation in 1961. Prevelakis is a most distinguished pupil, a fellow-Cretan, intimate life-long friend and collaborator, and a creator himself of first range, and thus, has thorough knowledge of Kazantzakis and his work. Prevelakis viewed his master's accomplishment in the light of its superior virtues as well as its failure to remain faithful to its elements. Unreserved affection and admiration are combined with frank critical consideration based on standards that spring from a culturally and temperamentally different approach. The result of Prevelakis' study has the fascination of higher dialectics which Kazantzakis himself would have appreciated.

Prevelakis' more recent consideration of Kazantzakis' life and work opens the present issue of THE CHARIOTEER.

\* \* \*

### *Seferis and Elytis*

Within less than sixteen years, modern Greek poetry has twice won the most highly coveted international recognition, the Nobel Prize for Literature—George Seferis in 1963 and Odysseus Elytis in 1979. This twice-won award has, understandably, caused puzzlement to the world-intellect and to the reading public around the world. How did a small country, like Greece—materially poor, a late arrival among the technologically-oriented nations, a country reborn out of ashes less than two centuries ago and after four centuries of political and national extinction—

succeed twice in achieving such a prize which larger, advanced nations, long in ease and autonomy, failed to win? For, even during the two hundred years of her freedom, Greece has been under continuous turmoil in fighting to regain her native soil and her political-social stability. Greece has, too, been constantly victimized by the greed of her neighbors and by almost every war fought on the European continent.

Could intellect prosper under such circumstances? Paradoxical as it may sound, that very battle for rebirth and survival, strengthened by the continuous cultural tradition of more than three thousand years, has kept intellectual Greece spitefully alive under all her mishaps and painful adventures. There lies partly the secret of her two recent literary victories and of the overall current prosperity in her intellectual life. A combatant spirit, positing light against darkness and life against death, with resources drawn from immemorial experience, has kept producing its miracle, more particularly in the poetic word as the supreme human expression of that spirit. In her poetry, the essence of life has stored itself with an undiminished, impulsive and intuitive youthfulness, combating the awareness of age and decline. Not that modern Greek poetry has been unrealistically optimistic. On the contrary, faithfully close to a painfully changeful reality, the poetry of Greece has unfailingly reflected and recorded that reality. In that honest, lively, even, at times, desperate record lies much of the power of Greek poetry. In it survive all the losses and deaths that time has brought.

Despite the twelve-year difference in their age, Seferis and Elytis, the two Nobel Prize winners, belong to the same literary generation, that of the Greek 1930s when they both made their initial and highly decisive literary appearance central in launching a literary renaissance in the Greek letters which caused the demise of much of the so-called "Karyotakian" despair and of a stagnating west-oriented post-symbolism. With the 1930s, and more particularly with Seferis and Elytis, Greek poetry may be said to have come into its own. Its power has thoroughly assimilated whatever foreign influence was felt within a genuinely Greek historical-cultural consciousness whose effort was to evaluate itself constructively. That was the essence of "modernity" established by the generation to which Seferis and Elytis belong.

Different in origins, personal experience and temperament, in intellectual affinities, background and training, Seferis and Elytis have at least two common sources of their creativity. On the one hand, each has been concerned to discover and evaluate the essence of cultural-historical Greekness of all times and to express it in his verse; on the other, they shared concern for poetry itself as a difficult art that should accomplish esthetically a well-balanced form of beauty, no matter how different the concept or style of that beauty. Indeed, as to these latter elements, there was to be much difference between the mostly tragically-oriented Seferis and the mostly lyrically-oriented Elytis. The former, under an initial influence of *poesie pure* and of T. S. Eliot, turned to the Greek past to discover its tragic essence as it bears upon modern Greek consciousness in its current historical experience. The latter, receiving a first impulse from French surrealism, has used the liberation of the unconscious to express the eternal youthfulness of the Greek soul and land and its inherent promise for the future. On the whole, Seferis' tragic awareness of time and age contrasts with Elytis' unabated projection of a lyrical youth and its eternal value. Beyond this apparent contrast, lie several essential similarities which make their two views complementary to one another and true to the cultural nature of Greekness itself, its oldness and its newness. The national resources of both poets were much the same. It was their temperament and experience that made the difference in choice and emphasis. Both share a belief in the transcendental power of poetry itself, with such a transcendence as poetry's very function.

In our present short consideration we should further add that on the whole Seferis stayed to the very end within the painful awareness of time and of history, whereas Elytis, also aware of both and giving them their due, has unceasingly tried to take a step beyond them.

Short and instantaneous moments of revelation spring from the poet's deepening into the simple things of life, more particularly in Nature and its eternal elements as they correspond to those of the human soul with which they are inseparable. In the Aegean world of his origin, his childhood and youth, which he has never ceased to revisit, strangely considering it as his own private estate and even more a world within him, he has

discovered a physical yet spiritual eternity that was embodied in its elements, the sun, the sea, and the islands. Frequently all have their quintessential expression in the beautiful body of a young girl. She inspires the poet with Eros for her as well as for what she embodies—life itself, its purity and innocence as savored and evaluated through the purity and innocence, the “saintliness,” of the senses themselves.

Elytis has strongly objected to be simplistically and superficially called “the Poet of the Aegean” by some of his negative critics. Such nomination suggests the happy-go-lucky, sensual and simplistic optimist: the “insensitive,” the “indifferent,” one “who trusts his body only,” “the antichrist and callous satanist of the century,” as he himself has summed up the deliberate narrow-mindedness of those critics in Psalm X of *To Axion Esti*. In the poetry he wrote after the war, he passionately deepens and widens the meaning of his symbols and of the vast physical-spiritual significance of the Aegean world itself. He has shown that moral and spiritual essences and values are embodied in the all-ruling, imperial sun, in the sea with its metamorphic and revelatory power, in the sky with heaven in it and a promise of Paradise. So, too, the girl that is to inspire love against enmity and hatred, helps man’s ascent to a humanly possible Paradise which is to be built within, in the reconciliation of the warring opposites of our Herakleitean world. His poetry projects a reality of affection, or purity and equality, of universal justice, considerably Platonic in its nature, uniting height and depth, the sea and the sky, man and nature. He perceives a more real world, above time, mortality and death as they plague the “rotating world full of dog’s barkings.” Such a higher realm is to be reached through perception, recollection, vision and dream.

As to the development of his poetry, Elytis sees it in three stages. “In the first stage,” he states, “nature and metamorphosis predominate.” In the second—as supremely expressed in *To Axion Esti*—“historic and moral awareness” enter, “yet without the loss of the vision of the world that marked the first stage.” The third stage—best reflected in *The Light Tree and the Fourteenth Beauty* (what he has called his “solar metaphysics,” inherent in his entire work), reaches its climax in the process by which the sun and its mystical, purifying and transcendental

light, together with other elements, in "instantaneous impressions," bring a "kind of meteorism," an upward motion, an ascent to a higher level of perception. It is a gratifying revelation which finds expression and eternity in poetry, a poetry of constant creative experimentation with the language, more particularly in the Greek words as "born on the shores of Homer."

On his collection *To Axion Esti*, of his middle period, the Swedish Academy chose to bestow its highest praise, deeming it his masterpiece and one of the highest poetic accomplishments of our century, not only because of its literary virtues but also because of its masterful dealing with Greek tradition and the Greek and the world experience through the highly critical decade of the 1940s. The Academy's choice must have been influenced by the accessibility of that poem in its English and Swedish translations, and no less by the wider popularity that poem has gained through the musical treatment of Mikis Theodorakis. The Swedish Academy called it "one of twentieth century literature's strictly personal yet most concentrated and ritually faceted poems, filled with Greek history and mythology of their present-day parallels, expressing what its author has described as 'emotions and ideas intended for all people.'" The statement added further that what the Academy wished to praise in the Greek poet was "the notion he has of dignity and of the invincible spirit of man," his belief that "what is of essence is not to succumb. What is important is that we should constantly be conscious of what man can create for himself as against all those things that threaten to destroy and violate him."

Responding to the announcement of the award, Elytis said:

I believe that with its decision the Swedish Academy wished to indicatively honor in my person the entire contemporary Greek poetry written after Seferis, a poetry that is indeed of a very high level. The Swedish Academy wished, in other words, to draw the attention of the international public opinion to the fact that Greek poetry in its entirety has the oldest tradition in the Western World and it has never stopped creating from Homer's time to the present day. For this reason the honor is not exclusively mine; it be-

longs to everyone of us. My personal joy is that this way also I managed to offer another service to my country.

Justifiably, Elytis' victory was received with great enthusiasm in his country, by the intellectual world, the people at large, as well as by his friends and readers abroad. Kimon Friar's selected translation in *The Sovereign Sun* (Temple University Press, 1974), and Edmund Keeley's and George Savidis' translation of *To Axion Esti* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 1974) have gone into second editions. THE CHARIOTEER in Autumn 1960 presented selections from the poetry of Elytis translated by Friar. Our next issue, Number 24, will be devoted almost entirely to Elytis. In this current issue, we share in his victory, rejoice greatly in the event and extend to the poet warmest congratulations from Parnassos and the Staff of THE CHARIOTEER.

# KAZANTZAKIS: LIFE AND WORKS \*

BY PANDELIS PREVELAKIS

*translated by Peter Bien*

Honorable Mr. Mayor of Iraklion:

Through your voice, I have been invited by Nikos Kazantzakis' birthplace to deliver the memorial address on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of his death. I could not decline such an honor. Yet allow me to wonder whether poets worthy of the name ever die. Like all of us, they pay their debt to nature, but they do not cease therefore to live on in men's hearts. Kazantzakis' immortality is demonstrated by the large audience present at today's ceremony — we owe this audience our heartiest thanks. Poets are not content to be loved by one person; they need the love of many.

Ladies and Gentlemen: Cretans have been taught by their high mountain peaks to admire grandeur. They have been taught the same thing by the great men that Crete has engendered. The subject of my talk today will be the nature of Kazantzakis' greatness.

## Legendary vs. Earthly Image

Intuitively, everyone knows that Kazantzakis was one of the most prominent artists of his era. His numerous writings, his world-wide fame, his ascetic life, the public praise and blame he elicited — all these have been more than sufficient to inscribe a fabulous halo around his features. Those features are what we are trying to recall today. Goethe, in one of his conversations with Eckermann, defined personality as that which enriches a nation's culture. By this he surely meant that the particular

\* Memorial address on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of his death, delivered on October 26, 1977 in the hall of St. Mark's Basilica, Iraklion, Crete.

achievements of extraordinary individuals come into general consciousness only with great difficulty.

It is with reverence that I approach the intuited icon which has captured our imaginations. By means of methodical literary investigation, I shall attempt to make it accessible to our logical faculties. I shall recollect the time and place that created Kazantzakis, shall describe his spiritual struggles, and shall examine both his world-view and his creative works. It would be easy for my attempt to be considered rash and its outcome uncertain, were it not for the fact that I have conceived a holistic sense of his being, as a result of a half century's intellectual communion with this man who was my spiritual father, and have verified this conception through extensive research.<sup>1</sup> This does not mean that the picture I shall offer you is the definitive one. Neither the creator nor his work can be contained within a single formulation. In order to describe a man's character we undervalue human contradictions, and we employ criteria belonging to our own time to interpret an *oeuvre* which has entered into dialogue with the future. Nevertheless, in setting down our testimony we fulfill an obligation both to our contemporaries and to future generations.

### Ancestors and Early Education

Nikos Kazantzakis was born in Iraklion, Crete on Friday, February 18, 1883. Michalis Kazantzakis was his father and Marigo Christodoulaki his mother. His birthplace was then under Turkish domination. Michalis Kazantzakis was a taciturn, uneducated man who personified the warlike ethos of his race, while his wife was a sweet, gentle woman, the model of devotion and submissiveness. Nikos was their first child; two sisters followed, and also a brother who died in infancy. In other words, Nikos was raised as an only son bearing the responsibility to fight side by side with those of the Greek Orthodox faith, following the example of his ancestors, and to liberate his homeland. Twice during his childhood and adolescent years he drank the bitter dram of exile, initially in Piraeus (1889), then in Naxos (1897-99). At the age of fifteen he saw Crete

become half-free when Prince George arrived on the island in 1898 as High Commissioner representing the Great Powers. Crete was destined to wait another fourteen years before it could be united with Mother Greece.

We have drawn attention to the different personalities of Kazantzakis' parents. Kazantzakis saw this difference as manifesting itself in his own emotional and intellectual life. We may observe an analogous difference between the kind of education he received in Crete and the kind he imbibed on Naxos as a student in the monastery-school there, the French College of the Holy Cross, between his fourteenth and sixteenth years. For a Cretan of that era, the true schooling was the colossal struggle of his co-religionists to shake off the Turkish yoke. Instructional materials consisted of the military achievements of Cretan Christendom, and not just those already immortalized in legend, but also those still pulsating on people's lips. Contrariwise, in the foreign school on Naxos the young refugee from Crete was suddenly introduced to an unknown world. He learned French and Italian, and he assimilated the rudiments of western culture. As Kazantzakis himself has stated, "Only two or three primitive passions had governed me until this time: fear, the struggle to conquer fear, and the yearning for freedom. But now two new passions were kindled inside me: beauty and the thirst for learning."<sup>2</sup>

### The Lesson of Crete

When the youthful Kazantzakis returned to Iraklion in 1899 to resume his studies in high school, he knew what fruits are produced by nations whose citizens are free. He had already conceived the idea that the traditional heroism of his ancestors could be elevated to the spiritual realm: indeed, a sense of his individual vocation had taken possession of him. To become worthy of Crete: that was his innermost desire. Reviewing his struggle at the end of his life, he was to say, "This earthen womb knows unerringly the worth of each of her children, and the higher the soul she has fashioned, the more difficult the commandment she imposes on it."<sup>3</sup>

The yearning for superhuman accomplishments enkindled Kazantzakis' soul without interruption from his early childhood until his ripe old age. His studies in the Faculty of Law at the University of Athens were destined to offer him a new start toward a broader self-education that became the essential one for him. They were to prepare him to take part in the spiritual contest whose umpire is history and whose opposing forces are immortal heroes. It was Crete that urged Kazantzakis to fight "for the highest prizes."<sup>4</sup> But since Crete saw "that [he] could not help her by fighting, [she] placed other weapons in [his] hands."<sup>5</sup> Actually, his aspiration was that of a man who had been deprived of the chance to compete in the arena and to receive the rewards that follow a fabulous struggle. "In peace-time," as Nietzsche has said, "every person with martial instincts turns upon himself."

#### Self-Education: (a) Friedrich Nietzsche

I have referred to Friedrich Nietzsche. In connection with Kazantzakis, this name must be pronounced with religious awe. It was Nietzsche who initiated Kazantzakis into the mysteries — who was, in a word, Kazantzakis' great hierophant. The poet of the modern *Odyssey* remained true to his master's teachings to the very end. The first sliver of Nietzschean philosophy penetrated his soul as early as his university years (1902-06), since, willy-nilly, the poet breathed in the ideas of his time. At the turn of the century, celebrated writers in both western Europe and Greece were allowing themselves to be ensnared by the preaching of this great Protomartyr who "recognized, a whole generation ahead of his time, the atrocious mess that we recognize today," as Hermann Hesse has put it. This mess involves the disintegration of myths and customs, the doubt thrown on traditional values — in short, the "death of God." Everyone today is aware that a world — our own western civilization, alas! — is crumbling. Nietzsche was the first to hear the alarming cracking and to prophesy the terrible consequences.

During the period from October 1907 to February 1909, when Kazantzakis was in residence in Paris for his postgraduate

studies, he developed an extraordinarily complete knowledge of Nietzsche's philosophy. The hierophant fascinated the initiate to such a degree that the two became identical for hours at a stretch. Since Kazantzakis himself has advanced this claim so many times, there is no need for me to produce the evidence for it here. Those years in Paris were to prove the most decisive of his life, because they enabled him to amass almost all the ingredients that he would eventually bring into harmony in his *Spiritual Exercises* and would illustrate in the adventures of his Odysseus. His aim was clearly stated as early as January, 1908: "I want to formulate an individual, personal conception of life, a theory about the world and man's destiny, and, in agreement with that theory, systematically and with a definite purpose and program, to write — whatever I write."<sup>6</sup>

Initially, Kazantzakis discovered in Nietzsche "the impudence and arrogance, the unyielding mind, the rage for destruction, the sarcasm, cynicism, impious laughter — all the talons, fangs and wings of Lucifer."<sup>7</sup> This was the destructive aspect of Nietzsche's philosophical program, the aspect in which an inflamed prophet was traducing the value system developed by Europeans over the course of centuries: commandments dictated by the gods, laws enacted by judicious leaders, rules of behavior contrived by philosophers, and teachings handed down by history. In his doctoral dissertation entitled *Friedrich Nietzsche's Philosophy of Law and the State* (Iraklion, 1909), Kazantzakis methodically expounded Nietzsche's views about man as a social being, the family, the state, religion, morality, and justice. If these views were subversive, the reason was precisely the philosopher's yearning to fashion a new myth out of Nothingness (*Nada*). In the same study, Kazantzakis did not overlook his teacher's constructive ideas, which are known to us under rubrics such as the will to power, the superman, hierarchical order in the ideal state, tragic or dionysiac heroism, and so forth. These Kazantzakis expounded in summary fashion. The numerous testimonies he set down concerning his intellectual adventures demonstrate that his old-fashioned (not to say primitive) temperament absorbed Nietzsche's ideas not as bloodless lucubrations but as occasions for existential crises. We shall see this confirmed later on as we continue our study of his life and

work. At this point, however, it is essential to note that Kazantzakis did not find deliverance by following the nihilistic spirit of Nietzsche's philosophy. Setting out like his master from the point of Nada, he yearned to devise a new metaphysical interpretation of the world, to propose a new morality — in other words, to become the founder of a religion. As he himself stated: "I had been struggling for a lifetime to stretch my mind until it creaked at the breaking point in order to bring forth a great idea able to give a new meaning to life, a new meaning to death, and comfort to men."<sup>8</sup>

### Self-Education: (b) Henri Bergson

Kazantzakis' second hierophant was the French philosopher, Henri Bergson, whose lectures at the Collège de France our novice prophet attended. In another study — entitled "Henri Bergson" and published in the *Bulletin of the Educational Association* in 1912 (pp. 310-24) — Kazantzakis, obviously using the occasion to lend some order to his recent learning, summarizes the additional teachings that he received in Paris — noteworthy ones, since they are in large part the source of his worldview, his ethical philosophy, and indeed of the vision of the Struggling God, whom we shall encounter subsequently in the *Spiritual Exercises* and who is nothing more than the *élan vital* of Bergson's *Creative Evolution*. Life, according to the French philosopher, is "endless creativity, a leaping upward, a vital gush, a colossal effort to elevate matter."<sup>9</sup> Men must coordinate their activities with this effort and — to use Kazantzakis' well-known expression — become "Saviors of God."

### Self-Education: (c) William James

One additional, and less important, layer is discernible as we gaze down into the sources of Kazantzakis' thought. This is the vitalistic theory of the American psychologist William James. According to this theory, which follows the same road as Bergsonism, every person ought to be consummated in his wholeness —

ought to contact his furthermost boundaries. Moreover, individual experience and personal truth are more authoritative than rational knowledge. This time Kazantzakis repaid his indebtedness by indirect means: in 1911 he published his translation of James' writings on "Instinct" (Chapter XXIV of *The Principles of Psychology*, vol. II), and in 1941-43 he personified James' vitalistic theory in the personality of Alexis Zorba. When Kazantzakis writes that the people who left their traces most deeply embedded in his soul were Homer, Buddha, Nietzsche, Bergson and Zorba,<sup>10</sup> we can substitute the name of William James for the final name. The American's message, though almost forgotten today, made a profound impression on European writers at the turn of the century, since it coincided with identical notions in European philosophical thought. As early as 1897 André Gide in *Les Nourritures Terrestres* had preached a total, dionysiac adherence to life, saying to his disciple Nathanael, "Je ne veux t'enseigner d'autre sagesse que la vie" ("I do not wish to teach you any wisdom other than life").<sup>11</sup>

### Initial Attempts at Salvation: Christ

The years that followed Kazantzakis' return to Greece in April 1909 may be characterized as a time of disquiet, if not anguish. He was tortured by his sense of a higher calling; his literary successes did not put him at ease; the huge bulk of translation work that he undertook in order to make ends meet exhausted him. But the greatest torture of all was his yearning to put into practice the ideas he had imbibed during his apprenticeship to the great hierophants. If he had lived in an age characterized by firm religious belief, he probably would have taken refuge in a monastery and have gained salvation through total dedication to God. "What I wanted was to comply with an austere rhythm, to enlist in an army which had set out to gain the supreme hope, to board in my turn the Christian Argo with its abstemious, destitute, virginal heroes — and we would heave out the red sail, and the mystic vine of the Eucharist would sprout from the mainmast, and we would cruise as pirates in order to snatch the golden fleece of immortality from God's shoulders."<sup>12</sup>

The tone of this quotation is not misleading. Kazantzakis' religious craving can be defined as a doubt-tormented love for the divine. Quite apart from its other unpleasant consequences, this love excluded Kazantzakis from the society of human beings, since human society is bogged down by mediocrity. "Mediocrity is Lucifer's true face," as a great scholar has said,<sup>13</sup> because it prevents the exceptional individual from demonstrating his divine descent. Kazantzakis' first wife, Mme Galateia Kazantzaki, despite the derisive tone she gives to her testimony, presents him as agonizing all alone at the mountaintops — the theater of prophetic inspiration — and as testing out the power of his utterances on the guileless souls of shepherds.<sup>14</sup> What was his goal? "If you received your impetus from known ecclesiastical symbols," he heard an inner voice telling him, "you would be able to propel yourself into religious experiments of your own, and to give (you are seeking this but have not yet discovered it) a contemporary form to the age-old passion of God and man."<sup>15</sup>

The personality exhibited by such confessions will attract whoever else has had some taste of similar experiences, but will scandalize those with a dogmatic faith and also in all probability those who place their faith in humanism. Our hero belongs to the type of religious person who attempts to understand why he is alive, and who maintains his life at a level of unceasing intensity as he struggles to give shape to that life and to raise it higher. Only if you can see Kazantzakis from this viewpoint will you feel sympathy for his struggle and understand the reasons for his extreme exertions. Yet I fear that in a society which is metaphysically exhausted, or given over to the worship of conventionality, a case such as Kazantzakis' will remain incomprehensible, and he who hungered after the Lord will be pronounced "put out of the synagogue."

Kazantzakis did not invent his ideas; he collected them from illustrious teachers of his own time and from hierophants of times past. Nor did he go through a methodical process of doubt before the old idols fell in his consciousness. These facts account for his inconsistencies and retractions until the time when he was able to give definitive shape to a personal world-view — it too an amalgam. His personal eclecticism is not the only explanation for this phenomenon, however. Our century itself, one

of disbelief and doubt, is also to blame. Wherever a commonly held faith disappears, the vacuum is invaded by the most disparate of beliefs. One sees this in ancient Rome around the time of Christ, for example, when a multitude of imported gods adulterated men's barren souls. On the other hand, when Kazantzakis changed location he also shifted his consciousness of time. After he returned to Greece and was overwhelmed again by the spirit of his homeland, his anguish — caused by the traducement of contemporary western culture and the clamor of new demons— retreated to a secondary position so that meditations on the nature of Christ might come to the fore. These have been described by Kazantzakis himself.

### The Wanderer Returns Home. Sikelianos

In 1910, the invigorating breath of Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos awakened the Greek nation. In the intellectual sphere, certain events such as the founding of the Educational Association boded well for a cultural renaissance. Distinguished intellects aligned themselves with the forces of demoticism, healing in this way the sense of homelessness that torments the Greek intelligentsia. Ion Dragoumis, to whom Kazantzakis dedicated his play *The Masterbuilder* (1910), had already been recognized by many as the prophet of national rebirth. Greece's victories in the Balkan Wars confirmed the faith in the nation's destiny held by both the common people and their leaders. Above and beyond this, in 1914 Kazantzakis had the good fortune to meet and become closely associated with Anghelos Sikelianos (1884-1951), a man just one year his junior. This poet so greatly endowed by the muses and so conversant with the intellectual currents of his era, had already distinguished himself as the renewer of lyricism in our land. His verse had emerged with the absolute-ness that characterizes humanity's most fundamental instincts; ignoring society, the proprieties and personal gain, the poet nourished his inspiration on unbroken communication with nature. Kazantzakis was ripe for such a man. Even before meeting Sikelianos and developing a strong friendship with him, he had been enchanted by the latter's *Alafroiskiotos* ("The Visionary,"

1909), a youthful poem that intoxicates the reader with its fluent sequence of emotions and impressions, with its divine insouciance, and with the author's manifest ability to assimilate the foreign world into the intellectual traditions of his own country. The modern Dioscuri immediately recognized each other as brothers. Each stood at the height of his powers. They lacked nothing but eternal life to be called gods.<sup>16</sup>

The two poets' pilgrimage to Mount Athos in November-December 1914 has remained legendary in the intellectual history of that place. "How we experienced our race and the faith of our fathers!" Kazantzakis noted in his diary.<sup>17</sup> "How we everywhere exalted the soul, how we greeted life, which climbs toward the heavens like an arrow of divine grace! . . ." Later he added, "how we read Dante, Buddha, the Gospels! How we conversed about Greece and life!" Another entry is also worth noting. It is dated December 18, 1914 at Vatopedi Monastery: "I read Dante [Canto 26] on Odysseus. Then Buddha, and tears filled my eyes." This entry is invaluable because it tells us how early Kazantzakis' imagination was kindled by a vision of the modern *Odyssey*. As is well known, the *Odysseus* whom we encounter in the twenty-sixth canto of the *Inferno* does not return to Ithaca. He is the centrifugal type of *Odysseus* imagined by various poets in contradistinction to Homer's nostalgic hero. When he escapes Circe, his craving for knowledge of still other lands urges him to pass beyond the Pillars of Hercules — in other words, beyond the limits of human daring — and, insolently, to challenge the unexplored ocean. Setting his course southward with a handful of companions, he sails for five moons and is granted a glimpse of *tutte le stelle . . . dell' altro polo*, "all the stars . . . of the other pole," before being swallowed up by the sea.

For Kazantzakis' soul, the pilgrimage to Mount Athos was equivalent to a reinstatement of the "household gods." Somewhat later, the two pilgrims undertook a new journey, this time to the holy sites of Greece in search of "the consciousness of their land and people": Daphni, Eleusis, Mega Spilaion Monastery, Corinth, Mycenae, Argos, Tegea, Sparta, Mystra, Delphi. On May 2, 1915 Kazantzakis noted in his diary: "My entire new development I owe (a) to my excursions to Mount Athos, Mystra, Delphi; (b) to my recent reading: Dante, Rodin [*L'Art, entre-*

tiens réunis par Paul Gsell, and *Les Cathédrales de France*], Bergson, Claudel [*Cinq grandes odes*]; (c) to my companionship with Sikelianos." Truly, the example of this companion who remained firmly attached to Greek traditions enabled our wanderer over the world of ideas to gain self-confidence and to rediscover his roots.

## Literary Works

Despite the national schism and the calamity of World War I, the years 1916-1918 proved to be fertile ones for Kazantzakis. During this period he blocked out three plays, *Odysseas*, *Christos* and *Nicephorus Phocas*, the actual writing of which was destined to be completed in the years immediately following.<sup>18</sup> His return to his roots had the beneficial result of bringing him back to poetic creativity. "I love Odysseas immensely because, after a silence of many years, he emerged from my insides and — as the Scriptures say — 'opened [my] womb.'" <sup>19</sup> In this dramatic trilogy Kazantzakis elucidated three subjects divided from each other by approximately a thousand years. His vision was able to embrace the full panorama of Greek myth and history — an accomplishment he was to demonstrate by means of other plays as well. "Great shadows jammed around the pit of my heart," he wrote subsequently<sup>20</sup> "and sought to drink the warm blood which would bring them back to life: Julian the Apostate, Nicephorus Phocas, Constantine Palaeologus, Prometheus." <sup>21</sup> "I know," he added, "that what I write will never be artistically consummate, because I intentionally struggle to surpass the boundaries of art, and thus harmony, the essence of beauty, is distorted." Truly, his goal was more than art. Prophets do not concern themselves with the rules of such-and-such a literary genre, but with the message they are bringing to mankind. If necessary, they will speak and write even when the Muses have abandoned them.

It is worth adding that Kazantzakis' poetry never passed through the lyrical stage that usually marks the beginning of a literary career. He ranked lyrical poetry beneath drama and epic, calling the lyricist a "divine nightingale" — incapable in other

words either of exploring man's fate, which is done by tragedians, or of soaring like an all-seeing god to the heights of epic. According to an observation made by André Malraux,<sup>22</sup> French classical drama is equivalent to an ordering of the cosmos, to affirmation and not to inquiry, whereas the dramas of Shakespeare and the novels of Dostoevski are equivalent to inquiry. Kazantzakis' plays belong to the latter category. Their value lies in the questions of an ultimate nature that they pose, if not in the heroic salvation they offer in a way that becomes almost stereotyped. Actually, Kazantzakis' dramatic protagonists are incarnations of the world-view that he formulated in his *Spiritual Exercises* — which explains their uniformity as characters and also the unorthodox structure of the works, in which psychic intensity derives more from what is said than from what is done (*Oedipus at Colonus* being the supreme model).

### Disparate Experiences

The years 1917-1920 held disparate experiences in store for Kazantzakis. In 1917 he found himself in the village of Prastova in the Mani with George Zorbas (the Alexis Zorba of the novel *Zorba the Greek*), endeavoring to organize the exploitation of a lignite mine meant to produce fuel for wartime needs. In 1918 he toured Switzerland, starting from Zurich. Still tormented by messianic visions, he embarked on a pilgrimage to Nietzsche's haunts. In May 1919 Venizelos appointed him director (soon afterwards he was promoted to director-general) of the newly established Ministry of Welfare, and in July of the same year he set out from Athens as leader of the mission entrusted with repatriating the Greeks of the Caucasus. The repatriation of 150,000 refugees was followed by their installation in villages of Macedonia and Thrace. "Horrible, feverish work," Kazantzakis noted in his diary. (He had not the slightest inkling that the experiences connected with the lignite enterprise and the others deriving from his patriotic mission to the Caucasus would subsequently furnish him with material for the novels *Zorba the Greek* and *The Greek Passion*.) This unexpected interval in his life came to an end in November 1920 when he resigned from

the Ministry after Venizelos' Liberal Party met defeat at the polls.

### A Critical Period

To salve his bitterness (a feeling shared by the entire progressive segment of the nation) Kazantzakis departed on a tour of western Europe (France, Germany, Italy). After returning briefly to Greece, he left again in May 1922 for Austria and Germany. This new period abroad lasted precisely two years until May 1924; it was one of the most significant of his life, since during it he (1) aligned himself temporarily with Buddhism and wrote a play entitled *Buddha*, the same that he was to re-work later, (2) composed his *Spiritual Exercises*, (3) became an initiate of communism, and (4) found temporary refuge in Assisi, where he "served" the local saint, the "poor man of God," Saint Francis.

### Buddha

The name of Buddha has already been encountered twice in this survey. Kazantzakis declared in his *Report to Greco* that Buddha was for him "the bottomless jet-dark eye in which the world drowned and was delivered."<sup>23</sup> In Chapter 24 of the same work, in passages whose intellectual fervor thrills the reader, he describes his progress toward Buddhism under the guidance of (who else?) Nietzsche, who himself had harkened to the Buddhistic teachings with Schopenhauer serving as the intermediary. "'He [Buddha] is the final Savior,' the voice kept saying to me [the voice of the tragic prophet whom I loved]. 'He delivers man from hope, fear, and the gods. Follow him! I myself failed to do so in time, for along came the Superman holding out a hope for me, and I went astray. I had no chance to push him aside. But you push aside your superman, the Nazarene, and attain what I had no chance to attain — the utmost freedom.'<sup>24</sup>

He who denied life — who abrogated desire and prophesied non-existence — conquered Kazantzakis provisionally, depositing

in the latter's spirit many of the elements which would soon appear in his definitive credo. But Kazantzakis never carried any particular religious belief to extremes, as he himself has confessed. During one of his crises of conscience described in *Report to Greco*, he heard his inner voice say to him: "Your belief is an unholy mosaic of many disbeliefs. You do not realize that God sits waiting at the end of every road; you will always be in a hurry, will always become discouraged at the halfway point and turn back to take another road. . . . Christ, Buddha, and Moses all found abysses. But they erected bridges and crossed over. For centuries now, human flocks have been crossing over behind them. . . . As for you, . . . unable to subdue the chaos inside you and to create the one integral Word, you whine away in self-justification: 'The old forms are too confining.' But if you advanced further in thought or action, you would be able to reach the heroic boundaries wherein ten souls such as yours could fit comfortably and be able to work."<sup>25</sup>

### Lenin

After Christ and Buddha, the third prophet to conquer Kazantzakis' soul was Lenin. During his stay in Berlin (1922-23), Kazantzakis allied himself spiritually with the idea of social revolution. 1923 was a year of rampant inflation and famine for the defeated Germans. The foundations of the social structure had long ago begun to crumble, customary institutions to be called into question, values to go bankrupt. Kazantzakis had been prepared by Nietzsche to view the German situation as a Day of Judgment, and Oswald Spengler — another, more recent, prophet of doom — had convinced him that civilizations are not immortal.<sup>26</sup> Lastly, the harrowing experience of Hellenism's recent disaster in Asia Minor (September 1922) had swept away his old nationalist convictions. The Nada he had predicted was now a reality. The only remaining hope for his agitated soul was the revolution which the divinely inspired people of Russia had brought to pass under the leadership of a prophet armed to the teeth. Lenin won Kazantzakis over — Lenin, not Marx. Marxism inherits the tyranny of rationality called into question by Berg-

sonian philosophy; Lenin, on the other hand, represented that impetuous and uncontrollable flight from logic, that "world-begetting power which converts us humans — as well as our antecedents the flowers, animals and minerals — into its carriers, its beasts of burden, and which moves hastily along as though it had a purpose and were following a path."<sup>27</sup> What attracted Kazantzakis to the Soviet Union was not a political theory, and still less a philosophy of history; it was an inexplicable passion.

### The *Spiritual Exercises*

If Lenin had not descended from on high and entered Kazantzakis' life, the *Spiritual Exercises* (which were written in Berlin from the end of December 1922 until March 20, 1923) would have been just a philosophical dissertation and not a credo *cum* political manifesto. But how can we characterize this work? Elsewhere, I attempted at some length to summarize it and to investigate its intellectual origins.<sup>28</sup> Here I shall be less expansive. According to the *Spiritual Exercises*, man must prepare himself before he rushes headlong into his destiny. First, it is his "duty" to accept the fact that his mind can understand nothing but phenomena, never the essence of things, and not even phenomena but simply certain relationships among phenomena. Secondly, it is his duty to deny these mental limits by means of a leap of the heart, i.e. of the faculty which attempts in its own right, again in vain, to become one with the essential principles governing all being. His third and final duty is to free himself from his hope of transcending the cosmic darkness that surrounds him. At this point he will be "prepared" to proceed toward the abyss of unknowing where death lies in wait. "What is our goal? To be shipwrecked!"<sup>29</sup> After this preparation, a person will live and create in an intoxication of tragic joy (that is, governed by the Nietzschean heroism that abrogates the irreconcilable contradiction between pessimism and optimism). He will embark on the particular "march" meant especially for him, mobilizing all of his powers, following the "primordial cry" that impels him upward, and continually broadening his consciousness: from self to race, from race to humankind, from humankind to the

entire earth and the universe. Revealed to him at this point will be the Invisible Principle (Bergson's *élan vital*) which permeates all matter — from the grain of sand to the Milky Way — and liberates it from inertia. After the "march" he will follow the road of "action," along which the relationships between God and man, man and man, and man and nature will be elucidated.

Kazantzakis, in a paragraph of *Report to Greco*, did not neglect to include his own summary of his world-view and also to designate its historical application: "...A man given over to the struggle ascends from minerals to plants, from plants to animals, from animals to man, and then fights for liberty. The struggler assumes a new appearance in every decisive age. Today he is the leader of the rising proletariat. He shouts Justice! Happiness! Liberty! giving the comrades slogans and encouraging them.... We have a duty to follow and to aid this eternal assault in our own epoch, to work in collaboration with it."<sup>30</sup> Afraid that he might be left standing again midway along his path, Kazantzakis followed the "cry of his times"<sup>31</sup> — adopted in other words the communists' assertion that the motivating power of history is to be found in their hands, in their capacity as the natural leaders of the proletariat. Indeed, in his role as genuine convert, Kazantzakis hastened to bring his behavior and even his dress into conformity with his new faith. At long last he hoped to fulfil his destiny!

### Saint Francis

We would expect to see Kazantzakis enroll as a Communist Party member and partake in revolutionary activity, whether in Germany or in Greece. Even though the story of his life has accustomed us to surprises, it is astonishing to see him pass from Lenin to Saint Francis. His shift did not involve a conversion, however, but rather (at a minimum) a change of psychic climate and a new religious experience which he was destined to turn to good account afterwards. Around the middle of January 1924, Kazantzakis abandoned Germany and headed for Italy. After he had sojourned in Naples for a brief period, an opportunity made possible by someone else brought him to Francis's birthplace,

Assisi. "This saint," he wrote to his first wife, "was not as effeminate and gentle as his biographers and scholarly exploiters have wished to make him appear. He was full of persistence, obstinacy and conviction, and he grew frightfully angry when people opposed his aims. He was a great idealistic communist.... Sometimes," he added, "the blood rises to my head, so overcome am I by the conviction that, for me, only one great duty now remains: to follow, like Saint Francis, this road that renews Life."<sup>32</sup>

"This road that renews life" was social revolution. When Kazantzakis returned to his birthplace shortly afterwards (1924-25), he involved himself in an illegal political action which he recalls in a two-page entry in his diary.<sup>33</sup> But he fared poorly as a revolutionary, and it did not take him long to flee once again to literary creativity as a refuge, i.e. to the therapeutic power of imagination as a substitute for reality. At the end of 1924 he withdrew to a small house in Poros, a suburb of Iraklion, and commenced his enormous epic, the modern *Odyssey*. The poet was forty-one years old and at the height of his powers. His prolonged intellectual involvements had prepared him to undertake this work which would be decisive for his entire life.

### Commencement Of The *Odyssey*

The dual presuppositions of Kazantzakis' decision to devote himself to writing the *Odyssey* were (1) that he relinquish his search for God and (2) that he give up active participation in politics. This does not mean that he was reduced to metaphysical lethargy; on the contrary, the *Odyssey* was meant to describe his theological struggles and to illustrate his definitive world-view. As for political action, his epic addresses itself to the citizen and the state, constituting therefore a *political* act in the literal sense of that term. If read with the care it deserves, the poem is sufficient to alter the reader's soul. The poet has elevated himself to a position much too high for any specific political party to control him, and he is obligated to maintain this lofty impartiality to the very end so that he may judge human activity as would a god, from a perspective beyond good and evil. "To god all things are beautiful and good and just, but men have supposed

some things to be unjust, others just.”<sup>34</sup> Herein precisely lies the difference between Kazantzakis’ epic and literature that is militantly “engaged.”

### Travel Books

We shall defer our discussion of the *Odyssey*’s nature until after the second draft, when the body of the work was fleshed out completely. During his stay in Iraklion (the winter of 1924-25), the poet managed to erect the epic’s scaffolding and to compose its first six books. The remaining books and the successive improvements of the whole were to occupy him (though not exclusively) until May 1938. After this poetic sortie he abandoned Crete; the separation was destined to be quite a long one. He passed his summer holidays in the Cyclades and then departed for the Soviet Union in October 1925 as the foreign correspondent of an Athenian newspaper. The following year he divorced his first wife and, representing a different Athenian newspaper now, undertook new journeys: to Palestine and Cyprus (April-May 1926) together with Eleni Samiou, who was to become his second wife; to Spain (August-September 1926); to Italy (October 1926); and to Egypt and Mount Sinai (December 1926-January 1927).

One trip after another! Kazantzakis’ public life was extremely restricted, involving disturbing encounters and vicissitudes passed over in silence by his biographer. His inner, mental life — a spirit that craved challenge — was what chiefly determined his psychic development. Yet this sedentary life was interrupted now and then by travel; the motionless body was awakened by hunger. Like the lion or the imperial eagle, our hero displayed his vigor on the hunt. Despite the idolatrous admiration he felt for his birthplace, he did not hesitate to say, “Crete is fine, but only as a jumping-off point!”<sup>35</sup> The only arena large enough for his struggles was the entire earth, as he was to demonstrate both in his life and in the plot of the modern *Odyssey*. “All my life one of my greatest desires has been to travel — to see . . . new lands, seas, peoples and ideas with insatiable appetite. . . , then to close my eyes and feel the riches deposit themselves inside me. . . .”<sup>36</sup>

"Greece," he was to state as well, summing up his impressions after a tour of the Peloponnese, "was divulged to me as a huge Crete — it too had been struggling for freedom (such was its destiny) since the beginning of time. What then was my duty? It was to work with her, to throw my life and soul into the struggle at her side."<sup>37</sup> This quotation needs to be brought out into the open, since Kazantzakis' passionate devotion to Crete has been the pretext for misunderstandings with regard to his feelings about his homeland in the broader sense, i.e. about Greece as a whole.

### Traveling

Kazantzakis' impressions after each journey, appearing as they did in a succession of volumes entitled *Taxidhevondas* ("Traveling"), determined his initial relationship with the Greek reading public and, like a seductive curtain, obstructed for quite some time the view outward to his other, more meaty, works. The author's ostensible interest in current political issues in these travel books was the concession he had to render to the newspapers that underwrote the cost of his journeys. To salve his wounded soul, however, Kazantzakis cast insatiable eyes upon the innumerable spectacles offered by our planet. In the midst of his impetuous, elliptical and frequently frenzied style, one can sense the religious and political struggles that have been concealed. Various themes of a more intellectual nature cross paths in these idiosyncratic travelogues: the mortality of civilizations, the psychology of specific peoples, heroism of action or thought, observations about places, ancient monuments, museums . . . , and, imperatively, love of beauty, yearning for universal justice, anguish over the problem of existence — the perpetual dreaming of an ardent soul building castles in the air!

### Two Cretans Meet

At this point in Kazantzakis' life, the present writer had the great good fortune to meet him and to feel an instantaneous love

for him, as happens when fate reveals her wishes. The date was November 12, 1926. I was seventeen years old, he forty-three. In the first book that I devoted to him I described his physical appearance and the circumstances of his life at that time.<sup>38</sup> I have no need to close my eyes to bring him before me! His bearing matched his ethical physiognomy: his thin body was fitting for an ascetic, his high brow for a thinker, his clever, aristocratic hands for a creator. Ever-present in his eyes was the brightness from the "great moments of ecstasy" he had been granted. All one had to do was look at him to understand that he had truly known inexpressible experiences of the kind that abolish the sense of individual limits and check the flow of time. He was easily overcome by emotion; at such moments his speech became impetuous and his inflammable soul revealed itself in the shudders that traversed his body. If you had bent over and placed your ear on his breast, you would have heard the seething turmoil of a man who aspired to become a god.

The commonplace opinion of the marketplace had failed to prepare me to register his full magnitude. Glory is a difficult thing for a person with self-respect. In our country, fame is provided as a rule by political propaganda after it has levied its toll of blood. Youth, however, requires no other adviser than its own enthusiasm. The man I had in front of me was living proof of the reality of the spirit! So governed was he by his sense of personal destiny that he found it natural to ask someone else, the very first moment he met him, "What is your purpose in life?" His hierophantic method, though instinctive, was extraordinarily effective. Without the slightest consideration for your inexperience, it tossed you into more crucially meaningful activities. Self-esteem forced you to live up to his opinion of your capabilities, and that was all he needed to call you comrade and brother. From that point onward he allowed you to share in his own spiritual struggle. An educational relationship on the Platonic model was established.<sup>39</sup>

### Continuation of the *Odyssey*

The year 1927 was the most productive of Kazantzakis'

career. Isolating himself in Aegina from May 19th until September 22nd, he managed in four months to write the remaining eighteen books of the *Odyssey* (from VII to XXIV) — approximately 20,000 lines! In his diary he noted: "Intense, sublime labor: *Odyssey*. Never in my life have I worked at such a pace. I have finished the *Odyssey*." This poet who had been fascinated by miracles of human willpower turned out second to none in his own achievement. What has been said about Lope de Vega, and could be repeated about Shakespeare and Balzac, applies as well to Kazantzakis: he was a "monster" in the sense that he surpassed human potentialities. We must insert here a paragraph from *Report to Greco*: "There is a kind of flame in Crete — let us call it 'soul' — something more powerful than either life or death. There is pride, obstinacy, valor, and together with these something else inexpressible and imponderable, something which makes you rejoice that you are a human being, and at the same time tremble."<sup>40</sup>

### Tour of The Soviet Union (1)

The first draft of the *Odyssey* was completed in September 1927, but the six subsequent drafts (improvements in the text) occupied Kazantzakis for another eleven years. The poem became intertwined with the events of his life and was influenced by the development of his thought. It is essential, therefore, that we continue both aspects of his biography, the external and the internal.<sup>41</sup>

During this period (1927-28), the most decisive events were two new trips to Russia, the first from October to December 1927, when the Soviet government invited Kazantzakis to the celebrations of the tenth anniversary of the Russian Revolution, the second from April 1928 until April 1929, when Kazantzakis, sometimes in company with Panait Istrati and sometimes not, tried to establish a bond with the actuality of life in the Soviet Union and to undertake some kind of action there. His yearning for political activism had manifested itself even while he was writing the *Odyssey*. (Had he failed, therefore, to relinquish definitively his messianic dreams?) "As soon as I finish the

*Odyssey*, this tiny service of mine," he wrote to me from Aegina on August 25, 1927, "I shall give myself over entirely to this problem. If I live elsewhere, if I find non-Greeks as companions, I shall emerge victorious. In other words, I shall do what my nature is capable of doing."<sup>42</sup> His inner drama had not yet reached the point of catharsis. At an age when others have created an *oeuvre* or have made their choice, Kazantzakis was still going out to track down his destiny.

After the celebration of the Revolution (November 7, 1927) an international congress which had been convened in Moscow, and which included one thousand participants all friendly to communism, discussed the question of how another world war could be averted. Kazantzakis, scornful of evasions, mounted the speakers' platform. To the representatives of forty-three nations who were attending the congress he delivered a message meant for workers everywhere in the world: A capitalist war is unavoidable because the capitalists, who wrap you around their little fingers, stand to gain by making such a war. There is only one means of escape. You must prepare yourselves for a socialist war and then, when the capitalist war breaks out, convert it into a socialist war.<sup>43</sup>

### Panait Istrati

"They tell me you're supposed to be a mystic," the well-known Greek-Rumanian writer Panait Istrati, another guest at the tenth-anniversary celebrations, said to Kazantzakis on the following day, "but I see that you're got a weather eye open and that your tummy doesn't get filled just with fresh air." That moment was the start of an enthusiastic friendship cut short by eruptions of disagreement and ending in permanent estrangement. The two friends differed in personality, education, and especially in their daily habits. The only thing holding them together was the literary profession they practiced in common and the admiration they both felt for the world which the Russians had created. Throughout his life Kazantzakis yearned to find "brothers and comrades." Moreover, in this shared activity he hoped to cure his fear of getting his hands dirty in complicated

affairs. Thus when Istrati offered him an opportunity he jumped at it, momentarily overlooking his natural disposition.

Accompanied by a group of foreign writers, the two friends shifted their base from Moscow to Kharkov and from there toured the Caucasus as guests of the Soviet government. They had all this time at their disposal to plan some kind of joint activity. "I'm going to try to put down roots here," Kazantzakis wrote to me from Baku on November 22, 1927, "and to turn my life abruptly around in a different direction."<sup>44</sup> To work out their plans in a more comfortable setting, the two friends came to Greece (December 30, 1927), where they publicly proclaimed their admiration for the Soviet Union. The following year (April, 1928) they met in Kiev and decided together, with the approval of the Soviet bureaucracy, to undertake a methodical journey throughout the entire nation and to collaborate in the writing of a series of articles for the western press under the general title "Following the Red Star." Their tour prospectus included the Volga, Astrakhan, the Caspian Sea, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Armenia, Turkestan and Siberia. Thanks to the Soviet government, the two pilgrims, and also the two female companions who were to accompany them, received free passes valid for all the railways and shipping lines in the country. To prepare for their journey, they sojourned temporarily in Bekovo, forty kilometers from Moscow, in a dacha surrounded by a spruce forest. Kazantzakis buried himself in work: he had to read a whole pile of books in order "to cram one-sixth of the earth into [his] head."<sup>45</sup>

### The Revised *Spiritual Exercises*

Kazantzakis' temporary stay in Bekovo is linked to a significant event in his intellectual life: his turn toward absolute nihilism. It is curious yet true that in the Soviet Union, the land where a new society was being built, and at the onset of a journey meant to produce a hymn of praise, Kazantzakis should have formulated the frightening conclusion to his initiation into the mysteries. "I am correcting the *Spiritual Exercises*," he wrote to me from Bekovo on June 11, 1928. "I have added a short

chapter called 'The Silence' — a bomb that blows up the whole *Spiritual Exercises*. But it will explode in the hearts of few people." <sup>46</sup> And indeed, the original text was now enriched with an eschatological prophecy: "Fire will surely come one day to obliterate the earth. . . . One day the entire universe will become a single conflagration." <sup>47</sup> Added to this was a proclamation of absolute nihilism. The beatitudes of the "Saviors of God," which concluded the confession of faith in the original version, now took on an entirely different meaning: "Blessed be all those who free you and become united with you, Lord, and who say: 'You and I are one.' And thrice blessed be those who bear on their shoulders and do not buckle under this great, sublime, and terrifying secret: THAT EVEN THIS ONE DOES NOT EXIST!" <sup>48</sup>

This supplement to the first edition of the *Spiritual Exercises* <sup>49</sup> really does blow up the work's philosophic (more precisely, its Bergsonian) basis. If the "Invisible One" suffuses matter with his breath and releases it from inertia, how can this force be proclaimed devoid of existence? Can the source of life be Nothingness? Despite these problems, Kazantzakis applied his nihilistic world-view to the various drafts of the *Odyssey* that followed, passing over his former conception whereby man obeys the "cry of his epoch" and, by struggling, "saves" God. The insolvable contradiction caused Kazantzakis some uneasiness later on, after the *Odyssey* was published (1938). In a letter to a friend dated Aegina, October 23, 1943, he wrote: "Every great soul is sometimes ready to burst because it senses that the supreme achievement, the supreme joy or sorrow, and the most daring of ideals are all too large for it. Everything is too large for it except one thing, Nothing. It lets out a cry. Then it recovers its strength, gains courage, silences the demon inside it, and continues on its ascending path. Odysseus does precisely this. The nihilistic cry 'Even this one does not exist' is not the climax of his struggle; it is an escape valve that he opens for a moment in order not to burst. He listens intently, gains courage from the horror [Kazantzakis' italics] and continues to follow the path he has chosen: the Ascent." <sup>50</sup>

Kazantzakis' nihilistic world-view in its final form loomed up around him like a wall: "My life is solidifying all the time, it's becoming wild and isolated. The day will come when it shall

resemble a large stone where — as a mystical nun of medieval times has stated so well — only rock-swallows can build their nests.”<sup>51</sup> His sense of isolation was never more acute. A journey that he and Istrati actually did complete — as far as Murmansk, “Russia’s furthermost rock,” two thousand kilometers north of Moscow — filled him with cosmic fright. His companion did not share such emotions, however. “Sometimes he experiences a tragic shudder, but he forgets it immediately and gives himself over again to food, coffee, cigarettes and light conversation. I say nothing — what other salvation do I have? — and stew, alone.”<sup>52</sup>

### Tour of The Soviet Union (2)

I shall not attempt to explain Kazantzakis’ mental fever and his cruelty toward himself. I shall confine myself to repeating once again that what is perhaps revealed here is the psychology of a man who is incapable of establishing a bond with reality and becoming reconciled to mediocrity. In any case, the preparations for the journey proceeded in the meantime. Istrati still had not calculated how large a gulf divided him from his traveling partner, but Kazantzakis was more perspicacious: “My companion is losing courage; he dares not face the entire trip, and would like to get out of it. I’m afraid that he’ll stay behind in the middle, and that I’ll continue on by myself.”<sup>53</sup> Kazantzakis’ forecast was to prove correct: only the first part of the trip was destined to take place with the full group participating. The four companions — Kazantzakis, Istrati, Eleni Samiou, and Bili Baud-Bovy — set out from Moscow on August 28th, heading south: Nizhni Novgorod, Kazan, Samara, Saratov, Stalingrad, Astrakhan, Azerbaijan, Borzhomi, Erivan, Echmiadzin, Tiflis, Sukhumi, Neos Athos Monastery. At the end of December they turned northward, their aim being to stop over in Moscow and then to set their sights (for the second time) toward the Arctic Ocean.

However, anxiety was secretly gnawing at these two companions. The notorious “Rusakov affair” provoked the explosion. An elderly Russian worker and former revolutionary was being destroyed by the Soviet (Stalinist) machine, along with his entire

family, for reasons of party rivalry — a foretaste of the cruel treatment to be experienced by the Trotskyites. Istrati proclaimed his solidarity with those being oppressed — they happened to be friends of his — and insolently accosted the Soviet hierarchy while Kazantzakis remained indifferent: an individual case was not enough to cast a shadow over the face of Russia. "You should have seen Panait going out of his mind then, locking himself up in his rooms in Moscow, weeping and cursing with rage! . . ." <sup>54</sup>

The two traveling companions parted "without shaking hands." <sup>55</sup> Istrati, disillusioned with the Soviet Union and bearing the stigma of apostasy on his brow, returned to Paris. Kazantzakis resumed the journey all by himself in the murderous winter cold: from Moscow to the Arctic Ocean, from the Urals clear out to the Pacific via Siberia, from Moscow to Turkestan. Three immense itineraries! Our hero was a prisoner of railway timetables; he lacked both funds and permission to follow other routes. He returned to Moscow in mid-April, his trip having lasted approximately three months (from January 20 to April 15, 1929) under the harshest possible conditions. Yet in his mind he had already clarified the meaning of this dangerous adventure: "All these things that I see and experience — people, colors, deserts, rivers — have one and only one purpose inside me: they must turn into *Odyssey*." <sup>56</sup> "I'm continually aware of something terrifyingly cruel within me, of clarity, obstinacy, silence. As soon as I'm able to be alone, I think I'll feel a shudder of fright in confronting myself. Oh, if only I could be alone on some high mountain top and hold in my hands every part of the earth that I've seen!" <sup>57</sup> Fate did not procrastinate in granting him the "high mountain top" he craved. It was in the Erzgebirge range on the border between Czechoslovakia and Germany. The exact place where the poet settled on May 10, 1929 is called Gottesgab and stands at an altitude of 3300 feet; it proved to be an ideal environment for the second and third drafts of the *Odyssey*. "Terrific snowstorms, gales, the house ice-bound, and, inside, the profoundest, most tranquil withdrawal from worldly cares. One of man's greatest joys, I think, is to work on a high, snow-covered mountain." <sup>58</sup>

### The Modern Odysseus, A "Desperado"

The *Odyssey*'s second draft, in which the epic plot received its definitive shape, was completed on March 3, 1930. Whoever has followed me carefully must have penetrated to the core of Kazantzakis' creative imagination — indeed, must have comprehended from my résumés, first of the *Spiritual Exercises* and then of the new ending added to that work, the world-view incarnated in the modern Odysseus. But what sort of figure is this Odysseus? A national hero? A protagonist modeled on the original created by Homer, i.e. nostalgic for his homeland and representative of the maritime nation which in the earliest years of recorded history terrorized a landlocked sea between the Nile Delta and the Pillars of Hercules? The progenitor of an entire race, like Vergil's Aeneas? No, he is none of these. Rather, the modern Odysseus is a rebel, an uprooted man, and indeed a *desperado*.<sup>59</sup> The arena of his struggle is the entire globe. In this epic we see the menacing horizons of the Dark Continent instead of the Mediterranean's benign landscapes; magical masks instead of familiar faces; desperate piracy instead of the fruits of honest toil. What is Odysseus' psychic climate? Isolation and revolt, a sense of homelessness, exaltation of the self, passionate love of life beneath the mark of death, heroic nihilism.

### The *Odyssey*'s Plot and Meaning

Why have we recounted Kazantzakis' own intellectual odyssey so completely? Because this precisely is what he incarnated in his epic hero. ". . . I bent over the blank page. It was not a blank page, it was a mirror in which I saw my face. I knew that all I wrote, no matter what, would be a confession."<sup>60</sup> As a rule, epics are underpinned by some national myth; in the case that concerns us, however, the story was invented anew from start to finish. We are not going to follow its every detail through the poem's twenty-four books. Instead, I shall present the plot with extreme concision.<sup>61</sup>

The modern *Odyssey* begins where Homer's *Odyssey* leaves off. We have come full circle. Odysseus, having killed the suitors

and regained his kingdom, feels suffocated in Ithaca. He chooses several companions and sets sail on his final journey. Anchoring in the port of Sparta, he proceeds to the celebrated city, abducts beautiful Helen, and sets his course for Crete. There, on the "fabled isle," the reign of Idomeneus (who previously fought side-by-side with Odysseus before the walls of Troy) has turned rotten. Odysseus favors the barbarian invaders who are threatening Idomeneus. The palace at Knossos is burned; Helen has intercourse with one of the barbarians and remains on the island. Odysseus sets sail for Egypt, the country of the Nile, where a social revolution is taking place. Here too the palace-destroyer sides with the rebels. Afterwards he fights his way toward the heart of Africa, eventually arriving with his companions at the source of the Nile, where he constructs his own city, becoming the lawgiver for a virgin world. But an earthquake splits open the ground and the city caves in. Singed by death, Odysseus begins a trek southward. On his long march he encounters various great leaders — the archetypes of Hamlet, Don Quixote, Faust, Homer, Buddha, Christ and Lenin (all under different names, of course) — who have brought mankind a new religion, an illusory vision, an innovative world-view. After vying with them in the course of lengthy conversations, he continues on his way. Reaching the southern tip of Africa, he builds his last ship and sails off for the unknown. While crossing the Antarctic Ocean he founders, but manages to reach some land inhabited by wild seal-hunters. When the weather clears, he constructs a raft from the skin of a seal and goes out again to sea. While he is rowing toward the sun-that-never-sets, Death (who looks exactly like the much-wandering Odysseus) comes and sits down beside him. Each smiles at the other as they sail along in silence. Suddenly an iceberg looms out of the mist and smashes the raft. Odysseus succeeds just in time in scrambling up onto it. He has now reached the desolate wastes of the South Pole; his end is near. He bids farewell to his five senses and recalls all the people he had loved. The iceberg fills with specters. The moribund greets them emotionally, waves his arm, and utters in a fearless voice the signal of final departure: "Luff round, lads! and may Death's breeze blow fair!"

Kazantzakis, at the termination of his superhuman effort,

might be pictured as a master-craftsman resting in front of the exotic temple he had just constructed. But this depiction will be found satisfactory only if we limit ourselves to external appearances. In its inner meaning the huge epic of the modern *Odyssey* is equivalent not to a temple but to a mountain of débris. The circle begun by Homer does indeed close with Kazantzakis. Yet this full circle fails to constitute a figure of perfection and therefore fails to relieve our spirits; on the contrary, in this case the circle signifies Nada. All the values hammered out by Hellenism from the moment when Homer bequeathed solid shapes to the Olympian deities, values supplemented by Christianity with its proclamations of love and its promise of eternal life — all have gone under, have drowned, in our modern Odysseus' mind. And not only the values: in this poem, even the commonplace ingredients of quotidian human existence have been traduced. The poet derides every attainable venture, plucks away every hope. Odysseus hopes for nothing, fears nothing, is free. The one and only transcendence of individuality that he will come to know is his own death.

### The Modern Greek Language

Unfortunately, time will not permit me to examine either the *Odyssey's* language, prosody and style or the problems that a reading of the epic calls forth.<sup>62</sup> I shall limit myself to stressing the significance in Kazantzakis' intellectual development of his love for the modern Greek language — the great passion of his life!<sup>63</sup> "Demotic Greek is our homeland!" he once exclaimed. "Only he who loves our demotic language with such passion, only he will sense that it does not matter where he was born, does not matter that he is struggling without any help amid the ignorance, sloth and indifference of his race."<sup>64</sup> These words indicate the degree of fanaticism with which Kazantzakis adored, studied and served the neohellenic tongue. Demotic Greek constituted not just the material and vehicle of his creative works, it also granted him a sense of Hellenism's durability. Above and beyond historical events, above and beyond wars and enslavement, the modern Greek language has advanced — changing, becoming

richer or poorer, assimilating diverse elements yet always maintaining its natural character and beauty. An idea of the continuity of Greek history may best be acquired through the continuity of the Greek language.

### Journeys and Literary Works

We must cut short these reflections on language, however, so that we may complete our survey of Kazantzakis' life. This struggler who has captured our imaginations did not consider himself entitled to rest after the second draft of the *Odyssey*. In the succeeding years his prime concern was to rework the poem and polish it. Even so, important events and imposing literary works were to interpose themselves between the various drafts. In 1929 while still in Gottesgab he wrote *Toda Raba*, a novelistic resumé of his Russian experiences, following this early in 1930 with a *History of Russian Literature*. This was the way he recompensed the Soviet regime for the hospitality it had extended him. Afterwards he moved to southern France, where he translated or adapted approximately fifteen children's books for two Athenian publishers. He returned to Iraklion for a month, as though led by the presentiment that in a short while he would be deprived of his parents, spent the winter in Aegina, and then returned to Gottesgab (in 1931) in order to devote himself to the *Odyssey*'s third draft. 1932 was a year of misfortune for Kazantzakis since he lost his mother in the month of March. After Gottesgab, he resided temporarily in Paris and subsequently settled in Madrid for three months. In December he lost his father. The blow was terrible but at the same time liberating.<sup>65</sup> Returning to Greece, Kazantzakis came to Aegina to live with me for about eight months. All these shifts of residence abroad had a double rationale: to ensure him a means of livelihood on the one hand and on the other to enable him to remain far away from his despised compatriots. On Aegina, he completed his translation of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, which he had begun in Paris, and also devoted himself to the fourth draft of the *Odyssey*.

1934, spent in the seclusion of Aegina, turned out to be a

relatively tranquil year for Kazantzakis. He continued the series of "Terzinas" he had commenced the year before, and at the same time drafted three school textbooks to submit to a competition sponsored by the Ministry of Education, seeking as always some exodus from the house of financial bondage. No matter how much he had restricted his material needs, he still had not managed to "free [himself] from Eurystheus," as he was in the habit of saying. In 1935 (February through May) he traveled to Japan and China, whence sprang his nearly autobiographical novel *Le Jardin des Rochers* (*The Rock Garden*); during the same year, he reworked the *Odyssey* yet again (the fifth draft). The summer of 1936 he spent translating Goethe's *Faust*; the months of October and November found him serving as foreign correspondent for the Athenian newspaper *Kathimerini* in a Spain torn apart by civil war. A new volume of the series *Traveling* would be engendered by that adventure. 1937: Sixth draft of the *Odyssey*; tour of the Peloponnese; writing of the play *Melissa*. 1938: Final draft and publication of the *Odyssey* — a labor brought to termination at last after thirteen years! It is worth glossing this feat with a parable confided to us by Kazantzakis himself: "Some nettles once asked a rose-bush, 'Madame Rose-bush, how do you make roses? Won't you tell us the secret?' And the rose-bush answered: 'The secret is very simple, dear sister nettles. I work the soil patiently, faithfully, lovingly all winter long with only one thought in mind: roses.' " <sup>66</sup>

### Publication of the *Odyssey*

One would have expected Kazantzakis' achievement to have stopped the Greeks dead in their tracks. (Kazantzakis himself expected this.) 33,333 lines; "the longest epic of the white race"! However, the Greeks preferred to await the verdict of time. This does not mean that a few men-of-letters neglected to display their great learning, not to mention their malice. The poem's bulk, language and prosody offered them so very many opportunities to sneer at the poet and his work. The exceptions can be counted on the fingers of one hand. In the last analysis we are obliged to acknowledge that time was required for readers

to discover adequate ways to judge this strange epic. Since we are dealing, however, with a poet who lived enclosed within the non-contingent world of artistic creativity, his popularity or rejection involved the social environment more than the artist himself. In the meantime, Kazantzakis still had not solved any of his problems; he had succeeded neither in assuring himself a means of livelihood nor in acquiring fame. His life returned to its familiar routines: travel, seclusion, writing. From July until November 1939, he sojourned in England as a guest of the British Council. The Second World War broke out in August. During the military lull preceding the great German offensive, Kazantzakis, installed in Hall's Croft, the former home of Shakespeare's daughter Susanna in Stratford-upon-Avon, wrote his play *Julian the Apostate*. In December he returned to Aegina.

### Zorba

In the spring of 1940, Kazantzakis traveled through Crete. On October 28th of that same year, the Italian-Greek war erupted. The tempest was sweeping over Greece as well. Western civilization, which Kazantzakis had already judged and condemned, was now disintegrating in a vortex of destruction. In order to ward off the dangers threatening his mode of existence, he concentrated obstinately, on literary productivity. This was the moment to proclaim that the world was devoid of substance and prey to a blind, murderous will. Taking up his old drama on Buddha once more, he reworked it into its definitive form. At the same time, he wrote the novel *Zorba the Greek*, which proclaims a dionysiac lust for life. The vitalism taught him in his youth awakened now and embodied itself in a primitive human type, an "extraordinary eater, drinker, workhorse, woman-chaser and vagabond."<sup>67</sup>

Kazantzakis had been storing the Zorбatic type inside him all the while, as is indicated by certain secondary characters in the *Odyssey*. After he had been liberated from this greatest and most majestic work of his lifetime, Zorba emerged from his subconscious and captured his imagination.<sup>68</sup> Leaving the epic genre, Kazantzakis switched to the picaresque novel. "Khozyain piruet!

The owner is having a good time!" he had exclaimed in October 1938 in one of his letters. This is what a Russian-Greek baker used to write on his door every time he closed up shop and went off on a spree. Fifteen years later, when Kazantzakis had become an internationally acclaimed novelist, he was to fill in the remainder of his exclamation: "Forgetting the bakery I've opened and the bread I knead, I too write 'Khozyain piruet' on my door in large red letters, and do as I please. I laugh, tell shady stories, spin truths and falsehoods, bring the beloved dead back to life. . . . To relieve myself a bit; to manage, before it is too late, to feel some laughter on my lips; to allow my mind — mine too — to turn its back on the abyss for a moment."<sup>69</sup>

### Gifts to the Greek Nation

During the difficult years of the German Occupation, Kazantzakis began to translate the Homeric epics, immediately after completing *Zorba*. He did the *Iliad* first and then the *Odyssey*, with Professor John Th. Kakridis initially as a helper and subsequently as a close and valued collaborator. These translations, together with his others of the *Divine Comedy* and *Faust* — i.e. of western civilization's central masterpieces — constitute a citizen's gallant offering to his compatriots at a time of great national affliction. It is proper that we accept in this same spirit the plays on national themes written in 1943 and 1944 — I mean *Capodistria* and *Constantine Palaeologus*. These writings signify our much-wandering poet's renewed repatriation. The change was entirely conscious on his part. Once, at the beginning of the enemy Occupation when I wished him "Happy Fatherland!" in one of my letters, he hastened to adopt my expression: "What you say is correct. The time has come for us to return from expatriation. 'Happy Fatherland!': I like that cry."<sup>70</sup> In the same letter he went on to explain: "I have made a definite decision to set aside my writing for several years and to help our people in this crucial moment as best I can." Kazantzakis' decision to renew his ties with the common people of Greece was not a recantation, despite what one might think. The poet did not feel antagonism toward the common people even when he led a life

of seclusion; on the contrary, he kept a place open for them in his heart, and he considered perfect communication with them to be a condition of his own complete development. The people's metaphysical torpor was what constituted an obstacle to friendship between them and Kazantzakis, until they were forced by suffering to thirst for the poet's word. Many uprooted intellectuals came to understand this during the Occupation, when the common man acquired the status of model and lodestone for the intelligentsia while the people, in their turn, acknowledged their national authors. Kazantzakis' resumption of political activism when he founded the Socialist Workers Union in Athens in 1945 is explicable from this point of view, as are other concessions he made to communal needs. The same explanation may be ascribed to his participation in the three-man commission that traveled up and down Crete in July 1945 with the purpose of verifying atrocities committed by the German occupiers,<sup>71</sup> and lastly to his brief service as minister without portfolio in the Sofoulis government (November 1945).

### The Final Expatriation. The Novels

Fate (more accurately, his own nature) prohibited Kazantzakis from putting down roots. In June of 1946, invited once again by the British Council, he departed for England on a journey destined to inaugurate his final expatriation. "I left Aegina for forty days," he declared to me in Antibes in 1953, "and was never deemed worthy of returning." His English journey was followed by temporary domicile in Paris, appointment as literary advisor at UNESCO, and settlement finally in Antibes. These years were characterized by feverish creativity right up to the moment of his death. God had graced him with "youth . . . renewed like the eagle's," as the Psalmist says.<sup>72</sup> During this time he wrote the novels *Christ Recrucified* [published in America under the title *The Greek Passion*], *Freedom or Death*, *The Last Temptation*, *Saint Francis*, *The Fratricides* and the auto-biographical *Report to Greco*, as well as the plays *Sodom and Gomorrah*, *Kouros*, and *Christopher Columbus*.

It is imperative that we devote a paragraph or two to the

novels. In *Zorba the Greek* (1941-43), Kazantzakis had allowed a pen-pusher's nostalgia for the "pragmatic" life that wells up in a natural man to burst out into the open.<sup>73</sup> In *Christ Recrucified* (1948), he expanded on Kierkegaard's bitter reflection,<sup>74</sup> painting a huge mural in which he included the full range of his vision of the common people, both damnable sinners and holy martyrs, mercilessly blackening the vicious hordes and elevating a model of innocence, the new Emmanuel, above their wickedness. In his characterization of this hero, Kazantzakis applied the findings of modern psychology according to which the imitator (actor) is sometimes entirely governed by the figure he is portraying, even if the latter is rushing to his death.<sup>75</sup> *Freedom or Death* (1949-50) shows Kazantzakis struggling "to resurrect the Iraklion of his childhood," he himself astonished at how much material he had amassed over the years, foreordained as he was by nature to take the world's ephemeral appearances and render them immortal.<sup>76</sup> If he had remained truly faithful to his memories, however, his hero Captain Michael would have borne greater resemblance to fighters in Cretan insurrections and less to the *desperado* contained within Kazantzakis himself. Heroism may be defined as action that affirms life's purposes; it is not an irrational rebellion against fate. When a man discovers a value strong enough to make him lay down his life, he gives irrationality the slip. In *The Last Temptation* (1950-51), Kazantzakis fictionalized the Savior's efforts to conquer his human nature so that he might dedicate himself to his divine calling; in *Saint Francis* (1952-53) he described the self-torture that Francis went through, as well as the ecstasies he experienced when united with God. Kazantzakis' early attempts to Christianize his soul were finally given an outlet in these novels.<sup>77</sup> Lastly, using *The Fratricides* (1954) as his vehicle, he sent to a Greece torn apart by civil war, a message of brotherhood and tolerance, despite the fact that the novel's hero, Priest Yannaros, is presented more as a prophet disheartened by humankind than as a Good Shepherd.

### *The Work Versus Secondary Works*

These novels provoked all sorts of adverse reactions and also

a heap of erroneous judgments about Kazantzakis himself. The general public, since they came to know him primarily through his novels, misunderstood him and accordingly assumed that he was a humanitarian author, a fervent advocate of social justice, if not a writer of saint's lives or of fairy tales; his fellow writers in Greece, on the other hand, greeted him with reserve, accused him of violating artistic canons, and attributed his international success to his "leftist" views or to other extra-literary factors. Kazantzakis, remaining unperturbed in the face of fame's contradictory outcome (in the same way that he had ignored the previous conspiracy of silence), continued to deem the *Odyssey* the prime work of his lifetime. It is characteristic that in *Report to Greco* he did not carry his autobiography beyond 1938 (the year in which he completed the epic); thus he neglected to mention either the subsequent events of his career or his later writings — omitting, in other words, approximately twenty years from the definitive account and justification of his life. In one of the notebooks found among his posthumous effects, we encounter the heading "Secondary works: [followed by the titles of most of his writings]. Obra [i.e. *The Work*]. *Odyssey*."<sup>78</sup> Odysseus, nourished on Kazantzakis' heart-blood, accompanied his creator until the end. In 1943, when the poet gave the name "Cretan glance" to his heroic ethos,<sup>79</sup> he spontaneously allowed the creature he had fashioned to share in his new discovery, even though Odysseus had ceased to evolve after 1938, when the epic was published. "Now in my old age I stand before the abyss tranquilly, fearlessly. I no longer flee, no longer humiliate myself — no, not I, but the Odysseus I am fashioning. I create him to face the abyss calmly, and, in creating him, I strive to resemble him. I myself am being created."<sup>80</sup> Precisely! The poem had fashioned the poet at least as much as the poet the poem.

### *Report to Greco*

On June 21, 1951, Kazantzakis received a terrible blow: the death of his old friend and fellow-struggler Angelos Sikelianos. "So then, do even poets die?" he must have asked himself — assuredly did ask himself, since his own health was already im-

paired. Along with international renown, fate had prepared a difficulty for him which he had previously been spared. And, as if this were not enough, two churches — the Greek Orthodox and the Roman Catholic — sought to censure him. Ignoring all this adversity, Kazantzakis continued to write and also to travel, whether for diversion or for reasons of health. His disease was incurable and he knew it. The folk saying "he saw death with his own two eyes" expresses the horrifying experience that makes a man value life in a new way. Revealed to Kazantzakis' spirit as thesis and antithesis were life's absolute worth on the one hand and his own mortality on the other, while at the same time the urgent and tragic need for creativity was revealed to him as the dialectical resolution of those opposites. In 1955, in Lugano, Switzerland, Kazantzakis began to write *Report to Greco*, the "report of a soldier to his general," as he put it (more accurately, it would have to be called the "Poetry and Truth" of his life). "I collect my tools: sight, smell, touch, taste, hearing, intellect. Night has fallen, the day's work is done. I return like a mole to my home, the ground. Not because I am tired and cannot work. I am not tired. But the sun has set.... Compassionately, tranquilly, I squeeze a clod of Cretan soil in my palm. I have kept this soil with me always, during all my wanderings, pressing it in my palm at times of great anguish and receiving strength, great strength, as though from pressing the hand of a dearly beloved friend. But now that the sun has set and the day's work is done, what can I do with strength?"<sup>81</sup>

Enough strength — spiritual strength — remained nonetheless to enable him to complete the first draft of *Report to Greco*, to rework his translation of Homer's *Odyssey*, and to undertake a new journey to China in June 1957 as a guest of the Chinese government, along with his wife. Yet he knew what lay in store for him. "This trip is a farewell journey," he wrote to me from Peking on June 30, 1957. "Following Buddha's command, I am viewing everything with 'elephant's eyes': all for the first and last time. 'Farewell,' I cry. 'Nevermore.' The fairytale is reaching its end."<sup>82</sup>

### The End

Having to travel via Japan to return to Europe, Kazantzakis was obliged to receive injections against smallpox and cholera. These were administered in Canton on July 19th. But the inoculations became infected en route since his blood, undermined as it was by leukemia, lacked the power to react. By the time he flew over the North Pole on August 6th on his way to Copenhagen, his right arm was suffering from a swelling that developed into gangrene. Though he received treatment at the National Hospital of Copenhagen, his condition grew worse. On August 28th he was transferred to Freiburg, Germany and admitted to the University Clinic there. Aided by the appropriate therapeutic measures, his iron constitution succeeded in conquering the infection; his physician pronounced him saved. But then he contracted asiatic flu, and failed rapidly. Within four days, this man who in his prime had been called an "ogre," was destroyed.

On the night of Saturday, October 26th, at 10:20 p.m., in the University Clinic at Freiburg-im-Breisgau, Nikos Kazantzakis gave up the ghost. He was seventy-four years old. Eleni, the faithful companion of his life, closed his eyes. The final words that she heard from his lips were: "Water! Water!" So many oceans our modern Odysseus had crossed, yet he still lacked his fill of water!

The coffin with the body reached Athens by train on the evening of November 3rd. His wife and two or three friends took charge of it in Eleusis. We placed him in a mortuary cubicle in Cemetery A, and kept vigil over him throughout the night. On the next day, November 4th, we accompanied him on the aeroplane that transferred him to Iraklion. The body lay in state in the cathedral so that the public might pay its respects: the Church of Crete had displayed more Christianity than had the Church of Greece. The requiem mass commenced at 11 a.m. on November 5th. Funeral orations were delivered by the Minister of Education (Achilles Yerokostopoulos), representatives of intellectual societies, and envoys from the various cities of Crete. The procession passed through the streets of Iraklion, which were overflowing with masses of people. Interment took place on the Martinengo Ramparts of the Venetian walls. The mortal

remains of that great soul were lowered into the grave enclosed in a sealed metal coffin — without official vestment or uniform, without medals, without any external signs of consecration: no flags were lowered, no music was played. Yet all of us felt that this unostentatious grave would become a shrine venerated by people from all over the world, for ever and ever.

Honorable Mr. Mayor of Iraklion, Ladies and Gentlemen: Nikos Kazantzakis was not vouchsafed an exceptionally long life. But because he had the wisdom to devote his time to his work and to keep his soul superbly fit, he succeeded in living doubly and triply the actual span of life allotted him as a mortal. Working under the conditions offered by a heartless century and turning them to his own advantage, he brought himself close to those creative artists who lived in more fortunate times. His life and works attest to his greatness — the life of a poet, prophet and martyr, works commensurate with his aspirations! For as long as time continues to pass, the earthly image of the heroic child of Crete will increase in purity, until it is assimilated into his legendary form.

May his memory be eternal!

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> I have in mind my treatise *O poitis kai to poiima tis Odysseias* (Athens, 1958) [translated as *Nikos Kazantzakis and His Odyssey, A Study of the Poet and the Poem* (New York, 1961)] and my Prologue in *Tetrakosia grammata tou Kazantzaki ston Prevelaki* (Athens, 1965) ["Four Hundred Letters of Kazantzakis to Prevelakis"], several paragraphs of which I have taken and used in the present study.

<sup>2</sup> *Anafora ston Greco* (Athens, 1961) [translated as *Report to Greco* (New York, 1965)], p. 117/96. [In all cases where an English translation is available, its relevant page(s) will be cited after the Greek page(s) in this way, separated by a slash.]

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 524/435.

<sup>4</sup> Pindar.

<sup>5</sup> *Anafora ston Greco* [hereafter cited as Greco], p. 176/147.

<sup>6</sup> Letter from Paris, Jan. 4, 1908, published in Petros Markakis, "Anekdhota grammata tou Nikou Kazantzaki," *Kainouria Epobi*, Autumn 1959, p. 35.

<sup>7</sup> Greco, p. 381/319. For a systematic review of the Nietzschean ideas that

attracted Kazantzakis, see Peter Bien, "Kazantzakis' Nietzscheanism," *Journal of Modern Literature*, II/2 (1971-2), 245-66.

<sup>8</sup> Greco, p. 570/474.

<sup>9</sup> From Kazantzakis' study, "H. Bergson," *Dheltio tou Ekpaidheftikou Omilou* (Oct., 1912).

<sup>10</sup> Greco, p. 535/445.

<sup>11</sup> In *Livre II*, p. 46 of the 1942 N.R.F. edition. Compare pp. 23-4, 31-2, 35, 41, 75, etc.

<sup>12</sup> Greco, pp. 350-1/293.

<sup>13</sup> Jacob Burckhardt.

<sup>14</sup> *Anthropoi kai yperanthropoi* (Athens, 1957), pp. 137-41.

<sup>15</sup> Greco, p. 329/275.

<sup>16</sup> Shakespeare in *Coriolanus* (V. iv), speaking of Caius Marcius: "He wants nothing of a god but eternity . . ."

<sup>17</sup> Unpublished diary bearing the heading "Nov.-Dec. 1914."

<sup>18</sup> He also wrote a drama called *Herakles*, now lost. *Nicephorus Phocas* was published in 1927, *Odysseas* and *Christos* in 1928.

<sup>19</sup> Letter to me from Kiev, Mar. 25, 1928. *Tetrakosia grammata tou Kazantzaki ston Prevelaki* [hereafter cited as 400 Letters], p. 74.

<sup>20</sup> Greco, p. 542/451.

<sup>21</sup> To these must be added Theseus (in *Kouros*), Odysseus, Periandros (Melissa's husband), Buddha, Lot (in *Sodom and Gomorrah*), Christ, Christopher Columbus, and Capodistria. See Kazantzakis' collected plays: *Theatro*, 3 vols. (Athens, 1955-6).

<sup>22</sup> In *Les Nouvelles Littéraires*, Apr. 3, 1952.

<sup>23</sup> Greco, p. 535/445.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 413/345.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., pp. 328-9/274-5.

<sup>26</sup> In *Doktor Faustus*, Thomas Mann has his narrator Zeithlom say, referring to the First World War: "Ich habe es ja selbst . . . vermerkt dass die Erschütterung und Zerstörung scheinbar gefestigter Lebenswerte durch den Krieg namentlich in den besiegten Ländern, die dadurch einen gewissen geistigen Vorsprung vor den anderen hatten, sehr lebhaft empfunden wurde. Es wurde sehr stark empfunden und objektiv festgestellt: der ungeheure Wertverlust, den durch das Kriegsschehen das Individuum als solches erlitten hatte" (Stockholm, 1947, p. 557. Chapter XXXIV, Fortsetzung). ("I have called attention above . . . to the disturbance and destruction of apparently fixed values of life brought about by the war, especially in the conquered countries, which were thus in a psychological sense further on than the others. Very strongly felt and objectively confirmed was the enormous loss of value which the individual had sustained . . ." (*Dr. Faustus*, New York, 1948, p. 365). It is these historical circumstances that explain the precocity of Kazantzakis' ideas. A Second World War was needed for them to become common property.

<sup>27</sup> This passage is taken from Kazantzakis' travel book *Ti eidha sti Rousia* ["What I Saw in Russia"] (Athens, 1928), obtainable now in the 1956 reissue entitled *Taxidhevondas — Rousia*, p. 10 [translated into French as *Voyages: Russie* (Paris, 1977)]. The reader will recognize in the phrase "world-begetting power" (*kosmogoniki dynami*) none other than Bergson's *élan vital*, which we shall encounter once more, with the same nomenclature, in the *Spiritual Exercises* (*The Saviors of God*).

<sup>28</sup> See *O poitis kai to poiima tis Odysseias* [hereafter cited as Poet and Poem], pp. 78-85/46-50, 220-2/134-5.

<sup>29</sup> *The Saviors of God* (New York, 1960), p. 59. The section called "The Preparation" ends: "I know now: I do not hope for anything, I do not fear anything, I have freed myself from both the mind and the heart, I have mounted much higher, I am free. This is what I want. I want nothing more. I have been seeking freedom." The words "I do not hope for anything, I do not fear anything, I am free" (Dhen elpizo tipota, dhe fovoumai tipota, eimai leteros) were engraved on Kazantzakis' tomb. It is essential to stress that they constitute the end of a preparation for "the march" and for action.

<sup>30</sup> Greco, pp. 507-8/422-3.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 500/416.

<sup>32</sup> *Epistles pros ti Galateia* (Athens, 1958), pp. 249-50, 258-60.

<sup>33</sup> The diary entry is reproduced in 400 Letters, pp. 158-60 (footnote 3).

<sup>34</sup> Heraclitus, B 102.

<sup>35</sup> Greco, p. 375/313.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 187/156.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 213/177.

<sup>38</sup> Poet and Poem, pp. 29-33/21-3.

<sup>39</sup> The consequences of this educational relationship, which become apparent in 400 Letters, were foreseen by Kazantzakis (see the letter of August 1, 1927, pp. 33-4). It is not appropriate for me, however, to develop this subject. This must be left to others.

<sup>40</sup> Greco, p. 99/82.

<sup>41</sup> See Poet and Poem, p. 204 f./125 f., for an extensive relation of events during this period (1927-38).

<sup>42</sup> 400 Letters, p. 38.

<sup>43</sup> See the account in the newspaper *Proia*, Jan. 10, 1928.

<sup>44</sup> 400 Letters, p. 61.

<sup>45</sup> Letter from Moscow, Aug. 15, 1928. 400 Letters, p. 91.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 77.

<sup>47</sup> *Askitiki*, 2nd ed. (Athens, 1945), p. 76/*The Saviors of God*, p. 128. Compare *Odyssey* XXIII, 932-6.

<sup>48</sup> *Askitiki*, 2nd ed., p. 78/131.

<sup>49</sup> The Askitiki was originally published in Dimitrios Glinos's periodical *Anayennisi*, issues 11-12 (1927), pp. 599-631. It also circulated as an offprint.

<sup>50</sup> See Emile Hourmouzios's review of Pandelis Prevelakis, *O poitis kai to poiima tis Odysseias*, in the newspaper *Kathimerini*, Mar. 12, 1959.

<sup>51</sup> Letter from Bekovo, early July, 1928. 400 Letters, p. 82.

<sup>52</sup> Letter from Moscow, July 28, 1928, 400 Letters, p. 88.

<sup>53</sup> Letter from Moscow, Aug. 18, 1928, 400 Letters, p. 92.

<sup>54</sup> Eleni Samiou, *La verdadera tragedia de Panait Istrati* (Santiago, Chile, Ercilla, 1938), p. 168.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 171.

<sup>56</sup> Letter from Astrakhan, Sept. 21, 1928. 400 Letters, p. 96.

<sup>57</sup> Letter from Neos Athos, Dec. 6, 1928. 400 Letters, p. 104.

<sup>58</sup> Letter from Gottesgab, Jan. 4, 1930. 400 Letters, pp. 173-4.

<sup>59</sup> Kazantzakis himself has defined the word *desperado*: "*Desperado* means the man who knows perfectly well that he has nothing to hold on to; who believes in nothing; and since he does not believe, is governed by a wild rage." (*Taxidhēvondas-Ispānia*, p. 156/*Spain* [New York, 1963], p. 174.)

<sup>60</sup> Greco, p. 575/478. Compare what Nietzsche says in *Human, All Too Human* (I, 513): Der Mensch mag sich noch so weit mit seiner Erkenntniss ausrecken, sich selber noch so objectiv vorkommen: zuletzt trägt er doch nichts davon als seine eigne Biographie. ("A man may stretch himself out ever so far with his knowledge; he may seem to himself ever so objective, but eventually he realises nothing therefrom but his own biography.")

<sup>61</sup> In *O poitis kai to poiima tis Odysseias*, pp. 111-23/65-73, I attempted a full resumé of the plot. Kazantzakis proposed a much shorter summary (see 400 Letters, pp. 476-9), and it is from this latter that I borrow the elements which follow.

<sup>62</sup> I pursued these inquiries in *O poitis kai to poiima tis Odysseias*.

<sup>63</sup> I judge the following paragraph to be indispensable since Kazantzakis, in *Report to Greco*, said nothing about the great passion of his life, the demotic Greek language. This omission (which is not the only one) indicates that *Report to Greco* is a work that Kazantzakis never really completed. For a study in English of Kazantzakis' passion for the Greek language, see Peter Bien, *Nikos Kazantzakis and the Linguistic Revolution in Greek Literature* (Princeton, New Jersey, 1972).

<sup>64</sup> *Taxidhevondas-Anglia* (Athens, 1941), pp. 98-9/*England* (New York, 1965), p. 107.

<sup>65</sup> It is well known that the shadow of Kazantzakis' father weighed heavily upon the son (see Greco, pp. 571-2/475). Kazantzakis' battle against the establishment may be interpreted as a struggle against paternal authority.

<sup>66</sup> Greco, p. 570-1/474.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 552/459.

<sup>68</sup> Romain Rolland expressed a similar feeling with regard to his novel *Colas Breugnon*, calling it a "réaction contre les contraintes de dix ans dans l'armure de Jean-Christophe.... J'ai senti un besoin invincible de libre gaieté gauloise, oui jusqu'à l'irrévérence." ("...a reaction against a decade's constraint inside the armor of *Jean-Christophe*.... I felt an invincible need for free gallic gaiety, yes! even to the point of irreverence.") Cited by André Maurois in his *De Gide à Sartre* (Paris, 1965), p. 130.

<sup>69</sup> 400 Letters, p. 598.

<sup>70</sup> Letter from Aegina, Jan. 8, 1942. 400 Letters, pp. 502-3.

<sup>71</sup> I have deposited a copy of the Committee's unpublished report with the Society for Cretan Historical Studies, in Iraklion.

<sup>72</sup> Psalm 102, verse 5 (Douay version; Psalm 103 in Protestant Bibles). Goethe explains this phenomenon at length: "...Men [who are] natural geniuses ... experience a renewed puberty, whilst other people are young but once."

"Every *Entelechia* is a piece of eternity, and the few years during which it is bound to the earthly body do not make it old.... Thence it comes that in men of superior endowments, even during their old age, we constantly perceive fresh epochs of singular productiveness; they seem constantly to grow young again for a time, and that is what I call a repeated puberty" (*Conversations of Goethe with Eckermann and Soret*, tr. John Oxenford [London, 1892], pp. 308-9, Tuesday, March 11, 1828).

<sup>73</sup> The "pragmatic life": i.e. consistent with William James's "pragmatism." Kazantzakis, in his youth, had written an essay in French entitled "Pragmatisme." (See *O poitis kai to poiima tis Odysseias*, p. 286, fn. 9).

<sup>74</sup> "If Christ returned, we would recrucify him at once." — Kierkegaard.

<sup>75</sup> We must remember that Manolios, the novel's hero, portrays Jesus in a

reenactment of the Passion in an Anatolian village. As for "the findings of modern psychology," they have been applied by Pirandello in his plays, by Jean Cocteau in his play *Bacchus*, as well as by various other authors. Even Kazantzakis himself wrote a comedy in the pirandellesque mode, called *Othello Returns*, in which Othello's jealousy penetrates the heart of an actor who portrays Othello. So real is this emotion that the actor ends by strangling his wife, who is the actress playing Desdemona.

<sup>76</sup> See 400 Letters, pp. 617, 620.

<sup>77</sup> "I myself am surprised that I wrote it [the novel *Saint Francis*]; does this mean that there is a religious mystic in me? Because I was greatly moved while writing it." (Letter from Antibes, Dec. 6, 1953; 400 Letters, p. 660.)

<sup>78</sup> The notebook (glossary) bears the epigraph "Gong." The heading mentioned above appears on the two penultimate pages, and must be dated around 1940, since the final work listed in the catalogue of secondary works is *Julian the Apostate*.

<sup>79</sup> The Cretan Glance is an idea conceived by Kazantzakis while looking at the depictions of Minoan bull fights on the frescos at Knossos. Here, "...the Cretans transubstantiated horror, turning it into an exalted game in which man's virtue, in direct contact with mindless omnipotence [the Bull-God], received stimulation and conquered." (Greco, p. 585/486. The conception of the Cretan Glance was originally formulated by Kazantzakis in an article called "Ena scholio stin Odyseia" [*Nea Estia*, August 15, 1943, pp. 1033-4].)

<sup>80</sup> Greco, p. 587/487. It is worth emphasizing that Kazantzakis attained the sum of knowledge by means of poetic creativity—i.e. by immediate intuition of particulars—and not by means of abstract thought. In short, by an existential process.

<sup>81</sup> Greco, pp. 17-18/17.

<sup>82</sup> 400 Letters, p. 729.

# THE CHARACTERS IN *FREEDOM OR DEATH*: A KAZANTZAKEAN ANTHROPOLOGICAL SCALE \*

BY GEORGE MANOUSAKIS  
*translated by Marios Philippides*

The majority of characters in *Freedom or Death* exhibit less "purposeful direction" than those in any other work by Kazantzakis. The basic reason for this may be traced to the fact that the author derived his raw material from memory. Many characters in this novel actually existed, and the author met them when he was a child, and in his early youth. Furthermore, in later years he even heard tales about them.<sup>1</sup> Another reason is Kazantzakis' intention to remain close to this foundation in his creation of a most realistic and objective picture of Crete, and of Megalokastro in particular, at the close of the last century; indeed the plot of this novel is based on historical events.<sup>2</sup>

Kazantzakis' novelistic idiosyncracies could not, of course, admit a total dependence on historical reality and, consequently, both the heroes and the actual situation have been formed with the demands of *Freedom or Death* in mind, as the author seeks to establish their harmonious integration with the tale, the general atmosphere, and his own views on life.

In spite of all this, each secondary character, like a separate entity, in *Freedom or Death* has been allowed an unusually wide margin for movement and development, according to his personality. The author intrudes only in the protagonists, some of whom are either products of his imagination, as evidenced by their occasional incongruity, or are portrayals whose various elements derive from the author's memory or from his dominating creative genius. Kazantzakis has shaped such characters to his "philosophy;" often they have been enlarged and assume the dimensions of superhuman, mythical beings. He has assigned

\* Page numbers mentioned in the text are of the original Greek edition.

to them a function as living heralds of his views expressed in the *Saviors of God: Spiritual Exercises*. Even so, at times these characters manage to transcend the borders imposed on them by the author; thus they appear as ordinary, human inhabitants of Crete, seemingly unsubordinated to an ideology, especially when their portrayal stems from the author's memory; this is an indication of the breadth and intensity of their being.

The characters of *Freedom or Death* number in the dozens. They are all typical representatives of the society of Megalokastro, which, in 1889, was a mixture of bourgeoisie, with agrarian elements. Moreover, representatives of Cretan farmers and shepherds are also present, especially in the latter part of the book, when the action shifts to the rebellious inland regions of the island. Consequently, both the entire city and a significant segment of the countryside around Megalokastro play a part in this novel.

The variety of characters and the fictional wealth of individual adventures and incidents, which have been depicted by this author's extraordinarily inventive genius, are admirable. Some of the most positive elements are provided by the secondary characters and the countless comic or tragic details of their lives. The secondary characters in *Freedom or Death* compose a crowded multicolored canvas wherein each figure is drawn with sharp and rough brushstrokes, and with their pulsing liveliness. They make, despite all their often expressionistic disfigurements, the realistic background which delineates and reinforces the major epic figures.

The author's attitude toward this multitude of characters ranges from sympathy and pity to irony and sarcasm. The cruelty that this author displayed toward his human ant-like colonies in the *Odyssey: A Modern Sequel*, for instance, or in the majority of the secondary, incidental characters in *Zorba the Greek* is not present here, perhaps because most characters in *Freedom or Death* are not abstract products of the author's imagination but have as prototypes real people who occupy a certain place, big or small, in Kazantzakis' memory. Involved here, is a change of attitude, as the author has moved towards compassion for mankind, which can be observed in his later works. On many occasions in *Freedom or Death* we may discern his willingness to

tolerate and even forgive weakness; additionally, he commiserates with misfortune. There still are, of course, human beings and actions totally void of justification. Such cases elicit the author's pitiless irony and ridicule.

To begin with, the psychological range of the characters in *Freedom or Death* is divided into two types of human beings, as in all works by Kazantzakis: the "heroes" and the common, unheroic individuals. Often the difference is not clear. Characters belonging to the more populous category, the unheroic individual, may suddenly become heroic by performing some decisive deed and thus enter the first category. Conversely, it is possible for heroes to slide down to the level of the unheroic masses, because of a weakness. Each category is subdivided into smaller groups, as can be easily discerned. Consequently, *Freedom or Death* presents a complete Kazantzakean, anthropological scale; it begins with a *homunculus*, which is occasionally an almost "subhuman" category, and reaches the highest type in Kazantzakean anthropology, the individual who displays many features of the *Übermensch*.

Even the characters who are not vehicles for the author's intentions and views have been assigned an automatic position in this scale. With this in mind, we will proceed to examine the Cretan mankind in *Freedom or Death*.

\* \* \*

At the lowest level of the scale are cowardly creatures, anaemic shades, who creep through the city streets, making the least noise and occupying the smallest place possible. The author ridicules these characters mercilessly. They are the "living dead" who never act, for they fear that they will become involved in "the troubles" [p. 14]<sup>3</sup> of life: Ali Aga, Bertodulos, Signor Paraskevas — all are little men who use sweet words; they are well-behaved, without initiative; and they are sexless.

Additionally, there are the last, spiritless descendants of the great families: Kyr Demetros, always sleepy, Captain Pitsokolos' son, who exchanged his father's rifle for a fly-swatter, Archontoula, the snobbish spinster, and the usurer-dwarf, Kyr Charilaos,

"a goblin guarding gold" [p. 113], a crafty fellow who seeks joy in the misfortune of others.

Certain other weak characters move in their vicinity; they have been crushed by misfortune: Mr. Aristotelis, the pharmacist, an old bachelor, who cannot forget that his life has been a waste; Touloupanas, the baker, who silently lives through the tragedy of his son suffering from leprosy; Marcelle, the French wife of Kasapakis, the physician; she suffers from tuberculosis. All these unceasingly ruminate about misfortune. They are indifferent to the great events unfolding around them. Usually, they are not married and have no children; they look upon invalids with delight and derive a sick pleasure from the misfortunes of others. The torments of others relieve their own.

On the second step of the scale is Krasoyorghis, the half-educated physician Kasapakis, Marousia the Armenian, and Kyra Pinelopi. All are "rustics" [p. 273], "big eaters," "ill-washed," and "vigorous" [p. 51]. Such a lower human species, Zorba described as follows: "they turn food to fat and dung."<sup>4</sup> In the author's estimation, however, they stand higher than the former category; at least, they perform their biological functions. They fuse to form the thick, essentially undifferentiated masses of mankind, whose kidneys make up the third evolutionary step, just above those of Plants and Animals. "God," the Bergsonian "élan vital," which permeates the Kazantzakean universe, steps upon them before he takes yet another step towards the "difficult, awesome, and endless, uphill road."<sup>5</sup>

Next to them we must place handsome Diamantis, the extravagant reveller, and Papamanolis with "the insatiable pockets" [p. 76]. The latter also consists of the same thick mud. While Kazantzakis reserves for the others a certain ironic condescension, he treats Papamanolis without mercy. He cannot forgive him for having allowed a divine flame to be extinguished, now concerning himself only with his own belly; similarly, Kazantzakis refuses to forgive the monks in *Zorba, the Greek*, or Father Gregory in *The Greek Passion*. (In contrast, despite the caricature, he views with sympathy the old rabbi, who keeps company with the Old Testament and argues with God in his own house).

The next step is comprised of human beings who have a

common denominator, in spite of their differences: a spark of heroism is concealed within. Although they may not have the potential to perform a heroic deed, they participate in the war of liberation, if only with their spirited souls. They include old Mavroudes, the exploiter of the poor, who donates money to the revolutionary cause, even though he has not lost his love for accumulating wealth, and Mastrapas, the quiet "holy man" [p. 274], who takes up arms. Mourtzouphlos and Barbayiannis are more typical; the former is the laconic verger of Saint Menas, who keeps to himself, and the latter is the half-crazed salep-seller, an object of derision and a source of amusement for the Megalokastro dwellers. Both are old, crippled, and "clairvoyant"; yet, they also possess the spark of heroism within their hearts. Mourtzouphlos talks to his bells, sees visions of freedom, and paints the Passion of Crete on wood. Barbayiannis, "the only free man in Megalokastro" [p. 155], in his madness becomes the spokesman for the enslaved island, as he utters in the face of the Pasha the daring words that "sane" people would not.

Effendina is also crazy and "clairvoyant"; he is the Turkish *hodza*.<sup>6</sup> Naturally, there is nothing heroic about him, but, through his "divine madness," his fears, his ecstatic experiences, his comically presented struggle that is always tormenting him, between guilt caused by desire and ascetic idealism, his repentance, his humbling acts, and his self-degradation, he becomes another symbol of human struggle. Effendina is a caricature of the Kazantzakean saints, who include Manolios, Saint Francis, Christ, and all fighters participating in the ceaseless war of the spirit against the flesh. The crazy *hodza* is a comic-tragic fighter in "God's path of a thousand cliffs."<sup>7</sup> Defeated, with a demented mind, Effendina continues the struggle with the divine shadows.

The next group is rooted more firmly in the ground: the lyre players, the dancers, and the rhymers. They have not lost touch with the earth, although they are not slavishly attached to it. The spirit of Dionysus is within them and demolishes the boundaries of middle class reasoning; according to the well-known Kazantzakean position, it grants them freedom from the bonds of low life. For this reason, they stand higher than the former group. The others, the "sane" people, do not show respect for them but find them indispensable and really admire them. Their

art moves the "sane" when it accomplishes what others cannot, because they lack courage. Most individuals of this group are neither impressive nor brave men. Patasmos is described by the author as "lean and in close contact with the fairies" [p. 205]. Captain Dhaskalos is 'lame, withered, a leftover' " [p. 302]. Yiannaros, also known as Furoghatos, is beaten by his wife. But they are all capable of making "a withered tree . . . blossom," as a line in the *Odyssey* puts it.<sup>8</sup> Kayambis song "changes the appearance of the world" [p. 123]; "stones dance" [p. 89] when Venduzos plays his lyre; "the Cretan soil rejoices" [p. 90] when Furoghatos dances with his big feet. Old Kriaras, who has travelled much, a cowherd, rebel, peddler, lyre player, and womanizer, who has finally become a saint and a poet in his later years, keeps the memory of Arkadhi alive in his poems, bringing tears to the eyes of the enslaved. When the time comes for the manifestation of the Big Question, old Dhaskalos' lyre, "his real mouth" [p. 446], gives the answer that both and reason and speech were unable to express.

If we except old Kayambis and Captain Dhaskalos, the Turk-fighter, bravery is not one of the graces of these archaic "artists." Their weapons are the lyre, the *mantinada*, and the dance. Yet, their souls, once raised above the ground, live in relative freedom, and they can be inflamed by higher ideals, even if it means a denial of life for life's sake. Thus, newly-married Kayambis, with his sense of honor, and Venduzos, and Furoghatos, who are all unheroic, manage to attain somehow, and in a certain forced manner, the level of heroism and sacrifice.

Another group in *Freedom or Death* consists, without reservation, of brave individuals. Their bravery stems from an unconscious force which blindly pushes them toward danger and responsibile choice; but for this reason, they cannot be placed on a higher level of the scale where the true fighters of the Cretan revolutions are to be found. This group must be placed in this medical position: Fanourios, Captain Michalis' brother, "a shepherd of a man, wild-faced, and with heavy knees" [p. 184], who wrestles with a bull to find relief from the loneliness of the mountains and from his own strength; it is he who organizes the silent banquet at the side of Manousakas' corpse, his brother, which ends in a leap over the corpse. Then there is

Sifakas' household member, Konstantis, "half man, half goat" [p. 413], who slaughters fearsome Hussein, as if he were a hen, and who derives pleasure and laughter from the most horrible incidents. Next comes the black giant, Suleiman, the Pasha's bodyguard. All three are primitive creatures endowed with brutal strength, savage instincts, and rudimentary thought. Kazantzakis portrays their actions with exaggeration, for he is amused by their behavior which is often childish. Behind his laughter, however, one may discern the awe of an intellectual corroded within when he is faced with the raw simplicity and the physical strength that emanate from such human beings.

At any rate, in this range, between the heroic and the unheroic level, we must place the "intellectuals" of this novel. Whether they are theoreticians of the "glass-tower" type (Kyr Idomeneas), school masters (Tityros), or "archaeologists" in love with their ancestors (Hadzisavvas), they are all the target of the author's most pointed arrows. They are loners, sad, and, like "mice feeding on paper," live apart from the heat of life, in a world of Chimaeras comprised of pale ideas that possess "no single drop of blood." Their studies, their books, and their knowledge of foreign languages, instead of becoming a means of communication with others, set them further apart. Tityros reads about the events of 1821 and weeps; he recites patriotic speeches which move his audience; yet, he lives in constant fear and confusion. Kyr Idomeneas writes letters to powerful nations; he receives no answer and remains in mourning; he keeps a fast in honor of Constantine Paleologhos' death and wastes his time in useless compositions and endless "philosophical" discussions. When he is among human beings, he is ill at ease. If Hadzisavvas were able, he would stop life to bring to light the archaeological treasures of the Cretan soil with no further interruptions.

Even though Kazantzakis treats these scholars with irony, he does not conceal his sympathy for such individuals, "who have been led astray,"<sup>9</sup> since they are aspects of his own personality. Excepting old Hadzisavvas who has been irreparably damaged by time and sterile "scholarship," Kazantzakis assigns to the rest the possibility of "salvation." Idomenéas suffers a death that is ideal for the "fighter armed with his pen," decently and bravely in his "assigned station."<sup>10</sup> Tityros manages to accomplish much

more. From being a weak, terrified *homunculus*, the object of his pupils' derision and the plaything of his wife and his brother-in-law, he is transformed into a Righas or a Papaphlessas who inspires the villagers to rebel with his fiery speeches. He does not undergo merely an internal transformation. As if a miracle had occurred, his hunch disappears and he is no longer pale; the cowardly schoolmaster has become a fighter also in the camp of Eros. This transformation, as is indicated by the author, occurs because Tityros managed to conquer his fear so as to perform a savage, though manly, deed: he killed his tormenting oppressor. A Nietzschean interpretation of such a fundamental transformation cannot add credence to it in any way. As has been correctly remarked, the development of Tityros is unnatural and exaggerated; Tityros is one of the less successful characters in this novel.<sup>11</sup>

Near the intellectuals we must place the characters who possess balanced critical faculties and take rational decisions. Whether they represent the elite of the community or are pillars of the society, like the "sensible, measured, punctilious" [p. 303] old Christian Kambanaros or the wealthy Aga, Selim, "the most sensible Turkish mind" [p. 142], the turn of events usually overwhelms their agreeable, peaceloving disposition. If they are simple folk, like the practical Turkish physician Mustapha Baba, their voices are not heard, even though they point out the "hubris" of disparaging moderation, which is "God's way" [p. 193].

Diametrically opposed to the representatives of theoretical knowledge and common sense is the group which organizes the banquet at the cemetery. With the exception of Idomeneas, who was forced to attend, all are men who do not hesitate to toy with the most solemn matters and who can even laugh at the greatest fears. Kazantzakis, also toying with these characters, looks upon such incipient Zorbas with pride, envying, in the final analysis, their iconoclasm and blasphemy which knows no repentance. We have already met Venduzos; others (Captain Stefanis and Captain Polyxingis) will be treated later. Here we will only mention the lowest individual among them, Kolyvas, the grave-digger and "tomb robber." This *homunculus* is detested by the inhabitants of Megalókastro, as he reminds them of all

hateful things, but through his familiarity with death "he has caught wind of some great secrets" [p. 178]. Thus, it is not strange that, from a humble path of decay and the stench of the tomb, he has come to know certain "truths" that are accepted by the author: "he believed neither in God nor in the devil" and "he viewed, with his crossed eyes full of mucus, everything, displaying no respect, no fear, and no hope" [p. 178].

\* \* \*

Before we continue upwards in this scale, we will examine briefly the women in this novel. With the exception of Eminé *banum*, all women have secondary parts, often no more than marginal. Up to a point this lapse results from the epic features of *Freedom or Death*. As has been pointed out repeatedly, however, women, in general, play secondary roles in Kazantzakis' works, as they are strongly associated with the flesh, with biological functions, and with the special weaknesses of the female body. Consequently, women lack the essential power required for great accomplishments. Freedom derives from struggle, which for Kazantzakis, presupposes an utter denial of all pleasure and requires "inhuman loneliness." For this reason, "only a man can achieve total freedom of body and soul; a woman cannot."<sup>12</sup>

To a greater extent than in any other work by Kazantzakis, the women in *Freedom or Death* are incapable of fulfilling even their biological functions. Spinsters are unhappy, and childless wives abound, perhaps because they were imprinted as characteristic types in the author's memory.

The spinsters focus their attention on the lives of their fellow citizens; the Fukaropoulos, for instance, reserve bitter comments for all activities; others, like Kyra Chrysanthi, have deposited their frustrated dreams in the expectation of an extravagant funeral for themselves; some have directed their unfulfilled eroticism to an affection for their brothers. Kyra Chrysanthi and Vangelio find delight in their brothers' parties and conquests. To attract the attention of her brother, Captain Polyxenjis, Kyra Chrysanthi resorts to fainting, in the hope that she will receive caresses and a tender word. To avoid separation from her brother,

handsome Diamantis, Vangelio resists marriage to Tityros. Diamantis' death, which occurs later, makes her desperate and forces her to commit suicide. Equally dramatic is the case of Kosmas' sister who goes mad.

Even when Kazantzakis draws a satirical portrait of these unfortunate creatures who have not experienced men's embraces, he still displays pity for them. Similar are his sentiments for those women who were disappointed in their marriage expectations: Marcelle, neglected and ill, Kalinitsa, the wife of "fat" Krasoyorghis, who still dreams of taking walks escorted by a "slim, tall, young man" [p. 51]. Another example is Kyra Pine-lopi, who has never found satisfaction. Without a family or a life of their own, certain old servants have devoted all their affection to their masters: Eminé's Christian black servant, Nuri's nurse, and Kyr Idomeneas' Doxania.

It is strange that the character of the proud, wild virgin, such as Rala in the *Odyssey*,<sup>13</sup> is totally absent from *Freedom or Death*. Equally absent is the woman who is totally devoted to a cause and an ideal, which she expresses through her love for the man who represents this ideal. Typical examples of such women are Magdalini, Katerina, and Sister Klara. But in this novel all women are clearly earthly creatures, whose soul is "full of flesh."<sup>14</sup> Spiritual exaltations are alien to them, as their cares and problems are restricted to a sphere composed of love, marriage, and motherhood. Thus they are part of the majority of women in Kazantzakis' works, who discover that their purpose in life is to love and support their husbands, as well as to bear and rear children.

At any rate, the basic function of a woman, as Kazantzakis sees it in the *Saviors of God*, is to be, above all, a Womb that "serenely receives and nourishes the seed."<sup>15</sup> Her duty is to devote her "entire body, full of blood and milk"<sup>16</sup> to the rearing of the male offspring who will continue his father's work and realize the goals that the father was unable, or had not time, to accomplish. In this light, a woman emerges as a bearer of fellow warriors and "saviors of God;" she, too, participates in the ever-lasting struggle of the Primeval Spirit, but she does not realize it most of the time, for she is motivated by instinct.

For this reason, she cannot reach the high level, where the winds of freedom, not those of necessity, blow.

Many such unsuspecting assistants of God are encountered in *Freedom or Death*; they include newly-married Garoufalia who "struggles" with Kayambis ("this is how Crete's cradles will be filled with babies; this is how rifles will pass from father to son in an unbroken chain" [p. 47], the girl from Saint John, who bore Stratis' first born in nine months, and Barbayannena, who bears children without resting and without worrying about the identity of their fathers. Even women like Kyra Pinelopi, who have no children, never cease to dream of having a dozen sons and daughters. Among them is even Christinia, Manusakas' wife, who "has many children; she bore them in pairs until his courtyard was filled" [p. 69]. Now, with the passage of time, "she greatly complains to God" [p. 195] that she is unable to bring more descendants into this world. Christinia is the most rounded representation of the simple, earthly woman in *Freedom or Death*. A sweet trap of Eros in her youth, a comrade in her husband's everyday struggle, and a mother in "her clear and positive mind . . . she had realized the simple secret of life"—i.e., self-preservation and reproduction.<sup>17</sup> For this reason, when she is busy with her household chores, she talks to herself and gives instructions to God, as if she is addressing one of her neighbors: "Let me tell you a little secret that only we, women, know . . ." [p. 195].

Because of her nature, according to Kazantzakis, a woman cannot follow a man's steps easily, especially when she happens to be captain Michalis' wife. Thus, the wife of the central hero in this novel, Katerina, occupies a small position and does not rise above the level of the other women. She is the "spirited" daughter of a captain, who possesses "manly airs and graces appropriate to a son" [p. 36]. She fought in the rebellion of 1866; and in her life with the "lion" she was transformed into a sweet, god-fearing, merciful, and patient individual, the reflection of the author's mother.<sup>18</sup> She cannot be accurately characterized as the wife and comrade of Captain Michalis. She is only the laconic, willing, and patient housewife, the mother of his children. Without arguing, she does as he tells her. She accepts this situation as something quite natural, even though she may

nourish an occasional, secret complaint. At any rate, in Kazantzakis' works, a woman is always dominated absolutely and willingly by a strong man to whom she has become devoted. The same subordination, mixed with intense adoration, to Captain Michalis is exhibited by his daughter Rinio. She and Thodoris' fiancée are the only young girls in this novel.

Nohemi, the Jewish orphan, who "has housed the world's misfortunes within herself" [p. 407], is like a creature from another planet in Captain Michalis' Crete. Not only does she come from a geographical environment of different living conditions but her ideas, too, belong to another period. According to testimonies,<sup>19</sup> she has been fashioned after Rahel Lipstein-Minc, the Polish Jewish student, a poet and author of children's books, whom Kazantzakis met in Berlin in 1922. For this reason, she remains an alien, literally and figuratively, throughout this novel, even more, perhaps, than the author had intended. Equally alien is the chapter of her association in some European city with Kosmas, which is tender, emotional, and bitterly sensitive, a clear reflection of Kazantzakis' personal experience as he sees it after twenty-eight years. The atmosphere that envelops those two young individuals in the few scenes devoted to them never varies. To the roughness of nineteenth-century Crete, Nohemi brings the breath of refinement and nobility of soul of an educated European woman of the years between the two World Wars. Remembering his acquaintance with that delicate girl with the cosmopolitan views, Kosmas reflects: "She opened my mind and heart; she taught me to love alien races, which I used to hate; she showed me how to understand foreign ideas, which I used to resist; she made me feel that all men have the same roots" [p. 406]. Influenced by the uncertainty, the fear and the loneliness caused by her new surroundings, she reaches the point of believing in the presence of her dead father-in-law and even goes to church and prays to the Virgin. She, too, is unable to overcome the weakness of her sex.

The dominant woman in *Freedom or Death* is, of course, Eminé. She is full of desire and cruelty; she is an exotic creature in the middle of the disturbances at Megalokastro. Throughout the book she moves within the triangle of the three main heroes. Her accented femininity and Oriental languor contrast with the

rough virility, especially that of the Cretan captains; a lively opposition, always pursued by Kazantzakis, is thus created. The author brings her to Crete from Caucasus, a region which reminds him of Barbara Nikolayeva Tamanhiev.<sup>20</sup>

In the wide horizons of Circassia, Eminé grew up in the company of men; she is independent, proud, rapacious, and further exhibits the avenging qualities of the Circassians. Kazantzakis has endowed her with the charm of a femme fatale and depicts through her the erotic instinct in all its unabashed, primitive, and naked form, which transgresses social restrictions and morality. Her association with the three men creates among them and among their relationship a deep gulf which determines their future actions.

Eminé offers herself totally, with no reservations, and demands similar devotion. Limitless love can be replaced in her by an absolute hatred, contempt, and sarcasm, which are reserved for the man she considers no longer worthy. This woman embodies that desire which "acts like a natural force"<sup>21</sup> and pushes along not only her lovers but herself, too.

Eminé fulfills God's command in the *Saviors of God* to the letter: "Love, if you are a woman! Cruelly choose among all men the father of your children. It is not you who chooses, but the anarchic, unbreakable, merciless, male God within you."<sup>22</sup> So the Circassian woman makes decisions coldly and mercilessly. She locks Nuri out of her chamber when she perceives that he has been humiliated by Captain Michalis, and when the latter cannot be approached, she embraces Polyxingis. Even though she agrees to marry him and convert to Christianity, her passion, alternating with hatred, for Captain Michalis, the wild and powerful man, does not die.

Eminé is both "the immortal, cool water"<sup>23</sup> and the "earthly," "extremely sweet"<sup>24</sup> trap, which threatens to enslave man's urge to soar high. "Let the world sink, as long as my arms embrace this exciting body," Captain Polyxingis thinks when he is with her [p. 315]. The fighter must choose in the face of this irresistible feminine attraction: he must either surrender to her or remove himself from her spell by plunging a knife into her breast.

\* \* \*

Thrasaki, the child with a man's ambition, moves among the feet of the larger than life heroes of this novel, in the midst of the multi-colored, often ridiculous everyday existence and the irascible, unsmiling presence of his father.<sup>25</sup> He is one of the few children in Kazantzakis' works. Captain Michalis' son appears to exert himself constantly to reach the level of the grown men. He likes to be near his father, follows his movements, and admires him. In his father's shadow, Thrasaki becomes brave also and can face probable death without fear. He is a captain among the children of his age, over whom he has established control. At all times he maintains the pose and the air of a leader; he gives orders, he insults, he humiliates, and he terrorizes. His games are not restricted to pranks and practical jokes intended for his uncle, the school master, but extend to actions that are appropriate to street-gang members: he kidnaps, beats and mistreats Pervola (an expression of the yet unformed sexual instincts) and burns the house that belongs to the old rabbi.

The actions of Thrasaki and his friends, who always follow his lead, go beyond the level of simple, childish restlessness. Captain Michalis' son displays unnatural cruelty and possesses dark, merciless qualities. Because Kazantzakis wishes to place the young Cretan in the epic atmosphere of this novel, he assigns to Thrasaki actions alien to his age and to the period. Thrasaki and his "braves" are reminiscent of the "gangs" of young misfits in the contemporary big cities of America and Europe.

\* \* \*

Now we come to the higher strata in this Kazantzakean anthropological scale. These are individuals who obtain freedom by obeying a lofty passion; they are the fighters "in the first line of combat,"<sup>26</sup> the companions and saviors of God. Elevated passion in *Freedom or Death* manifests itself in national liberation. "God," the personification of the restless spirit that pushes man forward, according to the author, appears as a revolutionary hero in this novel; his closest associates are those who have dedicated their strength to the struggle for Crete.

Details of caricature are not lacking in the portrayal, as Kazantzakis amuses himself with the alternation of serious and comic tones. Almost constantly occur touches of the ordinary juxtaposed with heroic circumstances; special emphasis is on typical, human weaknesses. On the whole, however, the epic elements dominate, which assign to heroes their peculiar behavior. The higher a hero is placed, the more restricted is his caricature.

Certain clerics, to begin with, are epic characters in this novel: the metropolitan of Megalokastro, the Abbot of Christ the Lord, and, in the Turkish realm, the muezzin. All three are representatives of this period, when religion and nationality are co-identified. The religious leaders in the war against the "infidels" are also the secular leaders. Whether we are confronted by the unyielding, intolerant God of the Christians or by the God of the Muslims, God is not an abstract philosophical deity, but a specific fighter who controls and regulates actions and thought.

The Muezzin is the most fanatical, having the greatest confidence in his faith. The world that his eyes enjoy must belong to Allah, who speaks through him and demands the slaughter of the "icon worshippers," who felt strong enough to rebel. He represents ultimate monkish intolerance; he derives his inspiration from the Koran and incites the spirited Muslims against the Christians.

The Abbot is the most earthly of the three. He is a rough fighter, marked with scars from cannonball wounds and from the sword, who wears the garments of a monk. Even in his old age, he is able to hold his ground against three Turks: "'Killing men is an evil job, even if they are the infidel sons of Hagar,' he thought. 'It is not our fault... Free us, dear God, grant us some peace'" [p. 327].

The Metropolitan balances himself between heaven and earth: "His wide nostrils are filled with the world's scent; they never have their fill of it. This giant of a man was created by God to become a great lord, a prophet, a notorious womanizer, or a reveller; but Christ took his mind, when he said a few words to him; they seemed sweeter than honey. Christ gradually seduced him and he became a metropolitan" [p. 149]. He combines the realistic, diplomatic, and crafty qualities of a politician with the fervor and faith of a religious leader. His soul is di-

vided between God and Crete; yet, he is not faced with a dilemma, as God and Crete fuse and become a single entity, the cause to which he has devoted his life. He is a "fermenting soul," the type that Kazantzakis loved. Each year, during Holy Week, he suffers; he is being crucified with Christ. In the slaughter of Megalókastro, he feels that he has lost parts of himself. There is an unusual majesty in the scene when the Metropolitan, in his ceremonial robes, crosses the city strewn with corpses, alone on his way to see the Pasha to stop this misfortune, or to meet his own death, while the Turkish inhabitants, in awe, step out of his way to let him pass.

Death does not scare these three religious men; on the contrary, they seek it. The Muezzin dies in battle at the head of the Turkish column. The Abbot places the noose around his own neck, freely choosing to die to save his monastery. Although the Metropolitan wishes to sacrifice his life, he will not realize the dream of martyrdom which would be appropriate for a man so devoted to Christ and to his "flock."

The position of the Pasha of Megalokastro places him automatically within the class of the leaders, even though his age and personal characteristics demote him to the level of the unheroic masses. Like "a worthy Oriental," he loves "sleep, pastry, and languor" [p. 253]; additionally, he loves serenity and his life. For this reason, he is at a loss in the recurring rebellions of Crete; he is unable to maintain control over Christians and Muslims. His portrait, to be sure, comes close to a satirical exaggeration; yet, in his age and decline, he is the appropriate representative of an Empire about to collapse. He is aware of this double decline, admitting, "I can see that I'm old; Turkey is old, too; we are both about to go to hell" [p. 117]. He is too old and tired to react. After a short revival of "the time-old Turkish thirst for Greek blood" [p. 291], which is realized in the hour of slaughter, he recovers the agreeable and compromising composure of an administrative official involved with routine matters.

Nuri Bey also displays the symptoms of his nation's decline; he is the highest representative of the Turkish individuals in this novel. Like the Cretan captains, he is vigorous, brave, and proud, but his Oriental characteristics give him the air of a

calmer, softer, and more thoughtful man. Even though he delights in beauty, he lacks all inner force to support such qualities as manly steadfastness, cruel decisiveness, self-assurance, and faith in himself. Compared to Captain Michalis, "his acquired brother," *giaour* though he may be, Nuri is able to calm his anger and conceal his hatred. He shows tenderness to Eminé but exhibits weakness when he is in love. He is caught in a net of wounded selfishness, humiliated male honor, spurned love, and a promise to exact a dutiful revenge for his compatriots. Thus he reaches an impasse. The ideal pedestal, upon which friends and enemies (not to mention Nuri himself) have placed him, falls apart: "Why should one live, if one is not the best man in the land? To hell with it!" [p. 82]. The fall of "Turkey's wounded lion" retains the dignity of a proud, brave man's death, of whom Nietzsche says, "He does not want the pity of his worst enemies or that of those who love him deeply."<sup>17</sup> Deep down, however, he has been led to this fate by sensitivity and weakness.

Kosmas, Captain Michalis' nephew, would, under normal circumstances, have belonged to the circle of the intellectuals of Megalokastro, but the portrayal of Kosmas, Kosmas' own position in *Freedom or Death*, and his heroic death compel us to set him apart. This character is the most like the author; thus, no traces of comic ridicule are detected. Kazantzakis has endowed Kosmas with his own views, his personal reminiscences, memories, and sentiments. Kosmas' long wanderings over Europe recall events that were deeply embedded in the author's mind: the picture of hunger, social injustice, and absence of morality reflect Germany in 1922-23. Moreover, Kosmas' faith in deified Science, his affair with a young Jewish woman, his taste for old Chinese poetry, his wide intellect, and his mind open to every intellectual trend, all belong to Kazantzakis himself. Kosmas' reactions as he sees Megalokastro again and his reminiscences from childhood and early youth, which are accented by "conversations with friends, lasting all night long, about the great unanswerable questions such as whence?, whither?, and why?," [p. 405], are clearly the author's sentiments and remembrances. Kazantzakis even incorporates conversations and incidents from the German occupation, which he heard from native Cretans,

in the portrait of the repatriate Kosmas on his way to his grandfather's village.

Furthermore, this identification of Kazantzakis with Kosmas has deeper roots; the creator also transposes to his creation his own relationship with his father. As long as old Kostaros was alive, Kosmas felt "hatred, fear, and admiration" towards him [p. 397]. Elsewhere, he calls him a "dragon," and his mother "a great, saintly martyr" [p. 407]. When he returns to his family, he seats himself in the chair of the dead man to drive his presence away. Kosmas seems to fight an ever-lasting struggle with the paternal shade, which weighs down his soul like a nightmare, threatening his wife and unborn son. These same mixed feelings of admiration, fear, and hatred, Kazantzakis experienced for his father, as we know from reliable testimonies<sup>28</sup> and from his personal papers.<sup>29</sup> Like Captain Michalis, Kostaros is the incarnation of "the fearsome taboo of insurmountable, though ridiculous in the final analysis, invincibility,"<sup>30</sup> which for the author was Michael Kazantzakis.<sup>31</sup>

Kosmas, who has travelled much, "hanging in mid-air" [p. 473], rediscovers the bonds between himself and his generation and land. As a surrogate for the author, he accomplishes what the author often craved, especially during the years of the Occupation: the leap from the domain of ideas to that of action.<sup>32</sup> Captain Michalis' nephew pays the debt he owes to Crete when he dies on the same ground as his grandfather, father, and uncle, at his post during the battle; this is the only estimable station during a war of liberation.

By virtue of their societal status, the leaders of the peoples are placed high up on the scale; even higher than the intellectual hero, we find the Cretan captains in this novel by Kazantzakis. They are the archangels of war. They range in age from green youth (Thodhoris) to maturity in various degrees (Polyxingis, Captain Michalis, Manusakas), and even beyond to old age (Captain Elias, Katsirmas, and old Sifakas).

The brief episode concerning Thodhoris illustrates how one becomes a captain, the highest social position in those years; that episode also reveals the desired qualities which win general recognition and thus bestow both this honorary title and the fighting rank. Thodhoris, Captain Michalis' seventeen-year-old

nephew, does not heed his uncle's advice, after his father's death, that he should "stay put" [p. 232]. He already feels that he is a "mature man." . . . "He could go under the yoke with Roussos, their ox, and plow the fields; he could bring a woman down on her back in a field and fertilize her; he could even fight Hussein, Nuri's nephew, who had just proved himself brave in Petrokephalo; he could fight him with his body, bring him down, and put his knife to his throat" [p. 232]. Thus Thodhoris has physical strength, yet even mightier is the power of his soul, which is seeking an outlet. He is restless, irascible, and he yearns to avenge his father's death. He has a lofty sense of honor and longs to perform heroic deeds. These traits compel him to forsake common sense, emotional ties, and the elders' advice. Thus he abandons the care-free, fairly comfortable life and wants the adventures of a rebel. From that point on, release from parental guidance as from social conventions, and the constant dangers and the blood he is forced, or seeks to shed, transform the youth into a mature man. When he adds "heavy" words and "always well-balanced actions" [p. 255] to courage and bravery, he is immediately acclaimed a leader, even by older, more seasoned fighters.

Manusakas is a wealthy head of a household; he is Thodhoris' father and the brother of Captain Michalis. He has flocks, farmland, vineyards, and a dozen children. He enjoys a happy life and the goods he has accumulated during the respite between the two uprisings on the island. (It may be noted here that Manusakas is one of the purest and best portraits among all the characters in this work. The scene of his meeting with Christinia, the young widow who later becomes his wife, is one of the most successful in this novel.) Within him, however, lurks the unsubdued rebel, the warlord of 1866, "whose blood is boiling" [p. 232]. This sensible head of a household discovers an outlet for his frustration in the performance of "crazed" acts which irritate the Turks until the outbreak of the new rebellion. Nuri's invitation finds him willing to participate in a duel to the death. In this incident, Kazantzakis describes briefly yet powerfully one of the bloodiest and most violent scenes in this work. At any rate, death by a bullet or knife is appropriate for such restless individuals who can never settle into a "comfortable situation,"<sup>33</sup>

even though they may adapt to it for a short while.

Captain Polyxingis, one of the most significant characters in this novel, represents the essential "positions" of the author. Kazantzakis imbued this character with devotion to a great cause, the struggle for Crete, and with the denial of the world and the pleasures of the flesh. Kazantzakis delineated in Captain Polyxingis many qualities we also encounter in Captain Michalis: daring, bravery, contempt for death, pride, and will-power, all with Zorba's lust for life. Thus, this smiling, unassuming, reveling and lively captain is contrasted with the more portentous "dragon," as if they are living opposites.

Unlike Captain Michalis, Captain Polyxingis does not keep his distance from others. His "close friends," who share his jokes and amusements, are also his comrades-in-war, as well as his assistants or competitors in business. Women charm and attract him. For this reason, in contrast to most Kazantzakean heroes who possess women in a primitive and violent manner, Captain Polyxingis delights in the games of Eros, which he plays with experience and art, as in the episodes with Eminé *banum*.<sup>35</sup> He is healthy and strong; his ever-hungry senses always strive for satisfaction. He views the world in an erotic, playful way and fearlessly faces death.<sup>36</sup> He fears and detests only "the slow decay" of old age [p. 101]. He rebels against the notion that he cannot avoid the inevitable path of slow degeneration, even though he is a fighter in war and in Eros. Like all "lovers of the earth," he hungrily indulges in the joys of life so that he may experience as many as possible before he becomes old.

Kazantzakis has created Polyxingis as a step beyond the asceticism of Captain Michalis, as a composition in which passion for ideas blends with love of the flesh, a pleasing arrangement to the author. At the end of the book, however, he seems to admit that such a combination has failed; the womanizing, fun-loving captain has been tied closely to the notion of womanhood and, specifically, to one particular woman. Eminé's death crushes him, and he is rendered incapable of performing "the ultimate labors."

Similar is the case of old Sifakas. Kazantzakis already had a general conception of this character in 1929, as appears in one of his letters to Prevelakis;<sup>37</sup> Sifakas has been created with understanding and affection; his qualities are of simple, un-

sophisticated elements. He was conceived as a lively entity; critically viewed, Sifakas is one of the purest characters in this novel. He represents the true spirit of Crete, even more than does Captain Michalis, who has many artificial features.

Sifakas is like an eternal oak tree with many roots in the island, whose branches cover sons, grandsons, and great grandsons. "He braved storms, he felt pain and joy, he went to war, and he worked for a hundred years" [p. 356]. He thirstily drank his long life like a glass of cool water and is still thirsty. Now he is quiet in the wisdom and serenity that old age brings; he relishes his last years with all his heart which is "full, satiated, and well-established in his breast" [p. 185]. His destiny on earth has been fulfilled; for he has conquered death through his actions and a host of descendants. By now he is able to look upon human beings from an elevated vantage point, with immense kindness, understanding and mildness, as if he were a benevolent, earth-bound deity. Occasionally, he can transfer himself to another time to keep company with the comrades of his youth who have become shades; he can withdraw into silence, as he feels the difficulty of communicating with the younger generation; he converses only with God. Yet, he has not lost touch with reality, not even for a single moment. He is interested in all matters concerning the many branches of his family and he never ceases to follow Crete's struggle, in which he participates by opening his house to refugee women and children and by supplying provisions to the rebels. Personally, he is unable to contribute to the fighting because of his advanced age; ("What's become of me! . . . I can neither shoot nor get shot at. I don't wish it on anyone, my enemies included" [p. 252], he comments to his guests). So he fights by painting slogans about freedom on walls (the anachronism of this action is obvious and should, therefore, be considered a contrived incident).

To Sifakas' fatal fall from the ladder, Kazantzakis assigns the significance of a fighter who dies at his post; his death-roar lasts for days under the lemon tree of his courtyard. He is attended by his family, and his demise resembles that of a Patriarch in the Old Testament, as well as the struggle of Digenis Akritas with Charon. Captain Sifakas does not die in bed, like ordinary people, but on the ground, "flesh to flesh with the

earth" [p. 431], the source of his strength and perfection. Thus he maintains a constant bond with the earth whose fragrance fills his nostrils; all sorts of creatures rise up from the ground and creep upon his body. To the last minute, he grips life strongly. His departure for the great unknown is effortless and void of fear.

As has been observed,<sup>38</sup> the author intrudes at this point. The death of this hundred-year-old spirit of Crete creates "the horror of emptiness" in Kazantzakis once more and awakens those metaphysical questions that constantly tormented him. This is an appropriate occasion for yet another discussion of this large, inexhaustible topic. The author has given his Cretan oak tree the stamp of his "worm." Consequently, Sifakas, a simple, unwavering monolith, who has spent his life in total harmony with nature, human beings, and Gods, formulates with his last breath the question that properly belongs to the author and not to himself. He addresses the query to himself and to his comrades-in-arms of old: "Where do we come from? Whither are we going?" [p. 438]. What is man's purpose and duty upon the earth?

For many years, Kazantzakis sought an answer in diverse geographical latitudes at all times. Here, he appears to address this question to the inhabitants of his birthplace, in the scene of the unusual "banquet." He seems to expect an answer emanating from the experience of these people and this land. Without being conscious of it, however, he has dictated the answer earlier to the old captains. Thus, the response is but an echo of the author's own anxious voice; it is a monologue, in which the author has, in reality, divided his own questions and answers among different characters.

Captain Katsirmas' answer represents the well-known Kazantzakean position that human existence does not continue on a transcendental level: "Where do we come from, you ask? From the earth, Captain Sifakas! Whither are we going, To the earth, Captain Sifakas!" [p. 445]. Life is only an interval of light between the two fathomless states of darkness, one abyss before birth and the other after death, the Womb and the Tomb.<sup>39</sup>

"God," of course, controls and animates the universe. He is the dark, blind force, which, void of (human) reasoning and

pity, is "more a verb rather than a noun;" <sup>41</sup> it constantly strives within matter to preserve life and to promote it from the lower to the higher forms. For this reason, it is a cruel force, inhuman and indifferent to individuals. "It gives birth, fertilizes, and kills; at the same time it is love and death; again and again it gives birth and kills. . . ." <sup>42</sup>

Man must "find the great rhythm and follow it trustingly." <sup>43</sup> "Eat, if you are a wolf. Be eaten, if you are a lamb," Captain Katsimas says with coarse language. And he adds harshly: "If you ask about God, he is the Great Wolf; he eats lambs and wolves and does not spare even their bones" [p. 445].

Individuals are only an insignificant part of the Universe, a grain in the millstones of the reproductive and life-promoting force, a straw pushed forward by the Great, Powerful Spirit, "the embattled essence." <sup>44</sup> The human species is "a step . . . in the creative potentiality of the universe; it is, therefore, destined to be overwhelmed by an ever higher step." <sup>45</sup>

According to Kazantzakis, this is exactly the duty that distinguishes "the creature of a day," "weak," and made "out of dreams and mud," <sup>46</sup> and raises it to a higher level than that of his dumb ancestors, plants and animals. This is what makes of man a responsible co-worker of "God," who is in control of his destiny. Each man's duty consists of struggling in a chosen field. It is sufficient to realize that "whatever rushes upward and assists God on his way up is good; whatever moves downward and places obstacles in God's way upward is evil." <sup>47</sup> Thus man must enter the struggle which is the very essence of God.

What is the purpose of this life-long effort? "Do the earth and the starshine have a purpose? Why should we care? Don't ask, just fight!" <sup>48</sup> The benefit is in the preservation of human pride and dignity. "Let us work at the pumps day and night; let us not complain or wail. We must not shame ourselves, old Sifakas" [p. 443], states the old pirate in nautical terms. The struggle itself and the stretching of man's whole existence towards a goal lend fulness to his life and widen "his temporal association with higher elements." <sup>49</sup> There is only one immortality; "Our short-lived actions, which consciously follow the movement of the universe, do not die with us." <sup>50</sup>

The struggle frees the fighter; this is the highest reward and

the essential meaning of the struggle itself: "Captain Sifakas, we come from slavery and we walk toward freedom. We were born slaves, Captain Sifakas; yet we fight to achieve freedom throughout our lives. We Cretans can only achieve freedom by killing. For this reason, I, too, was killing Turks" [p. 442]. This is old Mandakas' defense; it provides justification for his life and for those of other people like him. In Crete of 1899 national freedom is identified with individual salvation. While Zorba was at a loss in the face of the contradiction presented by the *summum bonum*, which, like a flower, rises out of "the manure and stench" of human barbarism and war crimes,<sup>51</sup> the old warrior views it as something natural; he is not shaken by moral reservations and dilemmas. For Kazantzakis, it represents yet another aspect of the alchemy necessary to transform mud into spirit.

Thus the revolutionary struggle of Crete is assigned a metaphysical interpretation by the author and receives a place in the ever-lasting struggle of man to break the bonds of fear and necessity so as to spread his wings to the wind.

At any rate, the responses of the two old captains on the "great paradox that stirs man's life"<sup>52</sup> do not seem to satisfy dying Sifakas; in the final analysis, of course, they are not sufficient for the author either. Perhaps he suspects a contradiction: the man who detested the logical constructions of human reason finds refuge in another interpretation which is also connected with logic, in spite of his efforts to be rid of straight reasoning. To Captain Dhaskalos, who represents a deeper knowledge of the secret ("even though the question can be phrased . . . the answer cannot be expressed in words" [p. 446]), the author assigns the part of leading Sifakas out of this dead end. The music of the lyre does not provide an answer to the question but, nevertheless, appeals to emotion and opens mystical, irrational outlets, leaving the choice to the listener. The grandfather dies without solving the riddle. He succumbs, as his flame goes out, to the accompaniment of the music which "summoned, beseeched, and charmed darkly" [p. 448]; he dies in calm happiness. (The moment of his death is truly inspiring, expressed in the tender, soft Kazantzakean lyricism that occasionally startles the reader.)

As for the main characters of the novel, the four captains

mentioned earlier, Thodhoris, Manusakas, Polyxingis, and old Sifakas, are created in epic dimensions; yet they are firmly planted on the ground. They cannot be detached from Crete, not even when their actions touch upon the legendary — the duel between Manusakas and Nuri and the death roar of Sifakas. Beside them, we must place "the remnant of 1821," Captain Elias, characterized by common sense and daring, and next to him Captain Stefanis with his lack of fear, and free speech. Many times has he been shipwrecked, but he remains impatient in his wish to experience adventures and struggles again.<sup>53</sup>

By contrast, the three speakers who participate in the dialogue on metaphysics with Sifakas have been created by Kazantzakis as vehicles of his philosophical "positions." Manusakas, Katsirmas, and Captain Dhaskalos, especially the first two, are exaggerated, grotesque figures; they are one dimensional. Their improbable achievements, inhuman savagery, lack of hesitation and mercy, absence of guilt even in their old age and of regrets, not to mention lack of fear for the imminent end, all render them superhuman Titans; they resemble the war gods of a primitive mythology.<sup>54</sup>

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On the highest level of the scale built by the characters in *Freedom or Death*, stands the hero, after whom this work is entitled [in Greek: *Captain Michalis*]. The book begins and ends with him. Occasionally, the narrator seems to forget him in the presentation of the forest constructed by the stories and adventures of the secondary characters. When after many pages, the author returns to him, Captain Michalis' presence fills — one could argue — even those pages in which he was absent. Even when he merely walks by, as when, for instance, the Foukaropoulos through their closed door see him pass or his arrival is expected, he casts a heavy shadow upon the other characters and lessens their spirit.

Where did Kazantzakis find the elements for this portrait of Captain Michalis? The author has often stated that he is a fictional portrayal of his own father,<sup>55</sup> and their resemblance, on many points, has been noted by those who knew Michael Kazan-

tzakis.<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, this literary hero draws from echoes of the legends of bravery and strength dating back to the years of the Turkish occupation of Greece, legends which were still alive during more recent years in the mouths of old Cretans, as well as echoes from the typical, historical personages (especially Captain Michael Korakas) who were active in the various rebellions of this island.<sup>57</sup> To these must be added the fictional details furnished by the author's epic imagination. Naturally, there is a further substratum of ideas which Kazantzakis has poured into all his literary creations.

By such elements, the poet of the *Odyssey* made a conscious attempt to portray a symbolic character which incarnates both "the highest, fighting excellence of his race"<sup>58</sup> and the Cretan version of a higher, Kazantzaean character.

In this way a literary hero with extraordinary traits was created.

Captain Michalis' character is accurately described in the first nine lines of this book. We are presented with a prosopographical essay of an angered, wild beast, an infuriated boar-man. Throughout the novel, his facial expressions, his movements, and his appearance in general, betray his extraordinary position. It is as if this Cretan comes from a realm of giants who are super- and sub-human simultaneously. The verbs used by the author to suggest Captain Michalis' expressions are indicative: his eyes looked like a bull's, he cast an angry glance, he roared. Frequently he groans but does not speak. He enters Nuri's courtyard by forcing the door open; he abruptly, almost inimically, answers the polite words of his Turkish "acquired brother" and those of Polyxingis; Nuri and Polyxingis, of course, are on a lower level. His few words are "always dry and shaped by the axe" [p. 303].

His physical strength and endurance radiate a legendary aura. He breaks his drinking glass by spreading two fingers; in one instant, he unarms Suleiman, the black giant; he maintains a sleepless week of drinking and eating, without being overcome by fatigue or intoxication. He has eliminated every trace of terror. With fearless eyes he views both concrete opponents and natural phenomena, like the earthquake. The Turks fear him. Brave men who approach his house become cowards and turn

away. When he enters the Turkish coffee house, mounted, he is opposed by a reckless single man alone.

He never laughs or jokes and expects others to be serious, laconic and brave. He feels disgust for old Ali Agha, who cannot grow a beard, and for Títyros, his brother, prior to his transformation, as they are less than what a man should be. Similar are his feelings for his fellow fighter, Captain Polyxingis, as the latter cannot control his sexual urges, displays immodesty, and ends up as "feather-brains." On the other hand, Captain Michalis respects the virility, courage, and seriousness of Nuri Bey, in spite of their many differences. The Captain becomes calm when confronting the anger and resistance of others. He delights in discovering elements of his own uncompromising, unyielding attitude in others: "Manusakas spoke well, like a man; he resisted him well" [p. 72], and elsewhere: "As he listened to his [Polyxingis'] wild words, while he was assuming the attitude of a man, he perceived that his brotherly affection for this brave man was awakening once more . . ." [p. 214].

This wild man does not lack sensitivity. On the contrary, he is shaken by his brother's death—Nuri's wound moves him to intense pity. Furthermore, he has tenderness and love for his son, especially in times of danger. Yet all these feelings remain hidden and can only be discerned in certain controlled reactions: biting his finger when he is told of Manusakas' death; or bleeding after his long, mystical communication with the dead man; or even a simple handshake with Nuri, the man who killed his brother, and his sudden familiarity with Thrasaki. These are the only expressions he allows himself, and he excludes tears and sentimentality. (We should recall here that Adhákrytos—he without tears—and Aghelasti—Unsmiling—are the names of the two protagonists in the Nietzschean tale of Palamas' *Twelve Lays of the Gypsy*.)

Manly honor, a quality and ideal of heroic society which Captain Michalis possesses, determines his decisions and actions. Unlike Zorba, he has not surpassed it. "There is honor in counting your words," he tells Nuri. Similarly, he considers it honorable to conceal fear from others, to be firm against one's own passions, to protect the Christians in adversity, and to avenge the death of a brother. By contrast, when he falls victim to a

weakness and abandons his fighting post in the night, he loses his honor and also exposes himself to the contempt of his comrades-in-arms and of the people. But these instances add realism to the portrayal of Captain Michalis and assure us that he lived in a specific time and place.

Such an insult is doubly painful to proud man. Like a true Cretan and a Nietzschean "higher human being," he has developed his sense of pride to the utmost. In his brief conversation with Captain Elias, his reactions indicate a deep pain, the internal laceration of a humiliated lion. Pain becomes unbearable, as he knows that the old man is right. Yet, as we read in *Zarathustra*, "something else, higher than pride itself, grows at the very spot where pride has been wounded."<sup>60</sup> By his stubbornness and his cruelty to himself and those around him,— always true to his character — Captain Michalis moves toward death, his salvation.

One of the most problematic aspects of this captain of Megalokastro is his relation with women. Throughout the entire novel his lack of sexual desire for his wife could perhaps be attributed to many years of marriage and to his restless nature. But what interpretation can be given to certain other events? Captain Michalis seems to detest anything associated with sex. As soon as his daughter reaches adolescence, he forbids her to enter any room in which he happens to be. When Captain Stefanis begins a discussion about women, Captain Michalis interrupts him, "I don't like shameless talk" [p. 17]. When Eminé appears for the first time in the Bey's house, he keeps his eyes stubbornly lowered, his adolescent confusion mixed with embarrassment. Are we to attribute all this to the deep, chaste character of a man who cannot be approached easily? Throughout his life he seems to have "known" no other woman but Katerina. Yet, even in their conventional relationship we cannot detect, from him at least, the slightest sexual expression.

Thus, the violent passion that shakes him when he encounters Eminé can be explained as the passion of a mature man who has never previously fallen in love. Captain Michalis feels that he has lost his monolithic firmness, as persistant, all-powerful desire enters his heart. Internally, he is divided; he has become a tragic hero behind an imposing, epic façade. Throughout the remainder of the book, he fights a silent, cruel, and unending

struggle against his own passion. His fight with "the demon" [pp. 43, 45, 65-66], which often manifests itself as "shameless laughter" [pp. 65-66], recalls the ceaseless, agonizing contest of Thebais' ascetics with sinful flesh. He fights against that demon day and night by staying awake, or by drinking, or by wandering alone, or by flogging his soul with harsh words. In a moment of frenzy, he plunges a knife into his thigh, just as Tolstoy's Father Sergey cuts his finger with the axe.<sup>61</sup>

This inharmonious love threatens his manly honor; moreover, his passion for Eminé wages war against his other passion: his love for Crete, which is supreme, as far as he is concerned. Crete is an absolute value for him, almost a deity; to which he has devoted his life and thought. He talks to Crete, as if the island is alive; he addresses Crete, as if she is a tormented, unfortunate mother: "Unfortunate Mother, he whispered again, unfortunate Mother . . ." [p. 244], or a lover, whose beauty he admires: "How beautiful Crete is, he whispered, how beautiful! If only I were an eagle to look at her proudly from above" [p. 63]. Crete's sufferings bring tears to his eyes, the only tears he deigns to shed, only when he is alone. By wearing black and by growing a beard, he mourns for Crete's enslavement and humiliation. He declines to be godfather or best man, as long as Crete is in irons; he will laugh only when the day of freedom arrives.

Captain Michalis' passion for Crete encompasses something more than "patriotism." Crete embodies Kazantzakis' notion of a "man-devouring idea," a lofty cause which motivates Kazantzakean heroes to do battle.

From Captain Michalis' devotion to this Idea-Crete, Flesh-Eminé attempts to separate him. Such a conflict is inevitable; there can be no compromise in the pursuit of an absolute goal in which Captain Michalis is involved. Crete's victory is achieved after a long struggle, with many disappointments which cost him dearly. As he plunges the knife into the breast of the Circassian woman, a cry of pain escapes from his own lips — "he pulled back the knife with force in order to prevent a deadly blow" [p. 343]. In this unwilling cry is all the lamentation of flesh-made man for "the forbidden pleasures" that he has lost forever.

Is Captain Michalis a representative of the Cretan rebels, or is he a typical Kazantzakean hero, with Nietzschean traits, trans-

planted to the Cretan scene? We have seen many of his facets; some are invented, others are authentic. But what, in the final analysis, denies authenticity to Captain Michalis, the Cretan fighter, is his lack of spiritual solidarity with the people among whom he belongs. Captain Michalis does not derive from the simple, indestructible wealth of the people's spirit of this period, which was a union of empirical knowledge and mythical thought shaped by many centuries, kneaded by "emotional wisdom" and religious faith through the filter of ancient traditions. Captain Michalis thinks and acts like his creator.<sup>62</sup>

This Kazantzakean captain may cross himself and enter Saint Menas Church (after he has thrown out both priests and worshippers), but he has been detached, in his essentials, from his forefathers' faith: "... as he rushed... he shouted, 'All faithful ones!', but he himself had no faith." He may light lamps before portraits of the heroes of 1821 in his home, he may occasionally remember the martyrs in the rebellions of this island, and he may even dream that he rides his horse into Saint Sophia; yet he often creates the impression that he is fighting alone. The liberation of Crete is, of course, the desire and goal of all Cretans in varying degrees of intensity, but Captain Michalis feels differently. Although he fights along with others to realize that goal, he reserves its deepest significance for himself. He approaches the ideal in an almost mystical way and keeps it to himself, as if other men are not worthy to touch its innermost core.

Like all Kazantzakean heroes, Captain Michalis does not like companionship. From the beginning to the end of this novel, he moves on a different level, apart from other men. We could attribute his loneliness to his frustrated love for Eminé and to the accompanying inner struggle to keep his love secret, but this total isolation results more from his psychological make-up and his intellectual differentiation. With Nietzschean passion for the ideal that possesses him, he is unable to come to terms with his compatriots; they seem to him "too cheap, too clownish" [p. 122]. He lives or wants to live on a higher level than that of the wretched, everyday reality — "there, where strong, mighty winds blow."<sup>63</sup>

Thus, this Cretan captain has been created out of a mixture of elements that belong to Cretan fighters and to Kazantzakean

heroes; he is controlled more and more by the latter. The "intellectual ideas" dominate the "emotional ideas."<sup>64</sup>

Full of pride and stubbornness, surrounded by his "inhuman loneliness," Captain Michalis goes to his death, *which he needed, contemplated, and loved* in Rilke's words.<sup>65</sup>

But why must he attain the limits? Viewed critically by most characters in this novel, including the Metropolitan and Captain Polyxingis, by the religious and the military authorities of rebellious Crete, and by scholars and critics of Kazantzakis' work, Captain Michalis' death serves no purpose. It has no meaning at all, since the rebellion has been put down. But Captain Michalis does not see reality through his reason. "Reason dictates that we give up, too," he says to his seven remaining comrades, "but my heart, God bless it, does not let me" [p. 478]. This Cretan Captain, like a true embodiment of the anti-rational, Bergsonian and existentialist Kazantzakis, does not esteem logic. Above reason, which can "only grasp phenomena but never the essence,"<sup>66</sup> there is "intuition" or "heart." Only subjective truth can lead to the right path, "because it can be felt, like a living entity searching and shaping itself at will."<sup>67</sup> Moreover, "truth in itself has no value; only the passion for truth and the manner of hypostasis."<sup>68</sup>

By dying, Captain Michales makes amends for his faults. He punishes himself for the monastery that was burned because of him, and for Eminé, whom he has killed. He dies to save his dignity. His insistence on death surpasses the simple stubbornness and desire for atonement. "His heart is angered; he has no control over it" [p. 472], says his brother Tityros. The Metropolitan comments, "I believe there is a demon in him; it is not Crete" [p. 472]. Kosmas ponders, "He does not fear death; it's quite possible he wants it" [p. 472].

After he murders Eminé, Captain Michalis remains detached from everything which he believed had caused his struggle: Crete. In the words of Captain Polyxingis, who tries to change his mind, "Crete still needs you." Captain Michalis responds, "I don't any more!" [p. 415]. Essentially similar is his answer to his nephew Kosmas, just before the critical moment. Kosmas says that Crete sends him forth; Captain Michalis answers, "I am

Crete" [p. 479]. He has reached the point in which his struggle needs no goal. He, himself, has become his goal.

Captain Michalis is conquered by what Karl Jaspers has described as *the Affliction of the Night*: "The vertigo and desire for self-destruction within the world so that an end may be found in the fathomless abolition of every world." The affliction of the night is "a nostalgia for death," "the leap into the oxymoron," that condition in which "annihilation dominates a human being entirely." Life in this world, Reason, and creation in time lose all value and interest. Thus, man "is thrown into the timeless abyss of nothingness which pulls everything into its vortex."<sup>70</sup>

Intoxicated with an "inhuman joy" [p. 483], Captain Michalis fights and dies. It is "the life-giving exultation brought about by the dissolution of every world," according to Jaspers. It is "the irrational frenzy" [p. 482] of the *desperado*. "From the day that I lost all hope," he had earlier said to Captain Polyxingis; "I believe, by the ground on which I stand, that I am an immortal. Who can touch me now? What can he hold me from? What power can death have over me? Even if all of Turkey arrives to blockade me, I will not be disturbed. I think I am Arkadhi; my clothes, my hair, my inner organs, all are filled with gun-powder. When I perceive that there is no salvation, I will blow myself up in the air" [p. 385]. In the heat of the battle, a few minutes before the end, he cries out to Kosmas — in his face glows "a wild illumination" — "Never fear, nephew; there is no salvation . . ." [p. 483].

Like a true Kazantzakean hero, Captain Michalis passes beyond the stage of hope, the protective frame created, according to the author, by the feeling of safety and security among weak people. By tearing violently the limits of the Rule of the Day,<sup>71</sup> which conceals the truth, he dares to look at the abyss. That abyss, of course, does not have the clear metaphysical character of the Odyssean abyss. The captain's glance is not so keen as to reach the depths of Nothingness, where the mission of Odysseus and sometimes of Zorba penetrates. Yet Captain Michalis, too, has begun to perceive something.

At any rate, Captain Michalis' struggle takes place on a significantly high level, according to Kazantzakean measures. He begins as a simple, rough Cretan who has devoted his soul to

the liberation of his land and race; he participates in the chain of responsibility which he has inherited from his forefathers and passes it on to his descendants, especially his son; he goes beyond national boundaries and conquers the peak of Selena — for Kazantzakis and for Nietzsche, mountain peaks are the natural field for the training of the Spiritual Loners — where he conquers his own personal freedom. This freedom of soul is also achieved at the climax of the battle, at the moment when the existence of the fighter becomes as hot as fire, just before his inevitable death.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Cf. George A. Phanourakis, "Interpretative Commentary on *Freedom or Death*," *Kainouria Epokhi*, An issue dedicated to Nikos Kazantzakis, Fall 1958, pp. 184-189; and Helle Alexiou, *In Order to Become Great*, Dorikos Publishers, Athens, 1966, p. 12, pp. 19-22, 174-5, 333, et al.

<sup>2</sup> He wrote to Prevelakis: "I have immersed myself in *Freedom or Death*. I am struggling to create a picture of Herakleion as it was in my childhood" (letter 358/3-12-1949). And later: "lend me, if you happen to have, a history of Crete and of the Revolution in 1899" (letter 360/28-3-1950), in *Four Hundred Letters of Kazantzakis to Prevelakis*, editions Helen N. Kazantzakis, Athens, 1965, pp. 617, 621.

<sup>3</sup> Page numbers refer to the first edition of the novel: Nikos Kazantzakis, *Captain Michalis* [i.e., *Freedom or Death*], Makrides Publishers, Athens, 1953.

<sup>4</sup> Nikos Kazantzakis, *The Life and Deeds of Alexis Zorbas* [i.e., *Zorba the Greek*], 4th edition, Diphros, Athens, 1957, p. 90.

<sup>5</sup> Nikos Kazantzakis, *Askitiki: Salvatores Dei* [i.e., *The Saviors of God; Spiritual Exercises*], 2nd edition, Athens, 1952, p. 58.

<sup>6</sup> For the real person behind the portrayal of Effendina, cf. Alexiou, *op. cit.*, pp. 20-21. Also, cf. G. I. Marante (Kaffetzaki), *In the "castle," A Cretan Moral Tale*, part II; "A Forbidden Love," Athens, 1946, p. 72.

<sup>7</sup> Nikos Kazantzakis, *The Last Temptation of Christ*, Diphros, Athens, 1955, p. 466.

<sup>8</sup> *Odyssey* I, 11. 51-52.

<sup>9</sup> Above, n. 4, p. 129.

<sup>10</sup> At this point Collin Wilson asks a reasonable question: "How could he [Kazantzakis] doubt, even for a moment, that the behavior of 'the scholar' was basically more heroic than that of 'the wild beast,' Captain Michalis . . ." Cf. C. Wilson, "The Grandeur of Nikos Kazantzakis," translated by Merope Oikonomou, *Nea Hestia*, Christmas, 1971, p. 14.

<sup>11</sup> Yiannes Sphakianakis, "Nikos Kazantzakis and *Freedom or Death*," *Simeirina Grammata* 7 (April-May, 1955), reissued in *Kainouria Epokhe*, Winter 1958, pp. 226-7.

<sup>12</sup> Nikos Kazantzakis, *The Rock Garden*, Introduction and Translation by P. Prevelakis, Hestia Bookstore, Athens, 1960, p. 45.

<sup>13</sup> She is a character that is encountered often in the Cretan literature of the Venetian period (e.g., Panoria and Athousa in the pastoral *Gypares-Panoria*).

<sup>14</sup> *Odyssey* II, 377.

<sup>15</sup> *The Saviors of God*, p. 23.

<sup>16</sup> *The Saviors of God*, p. 88.

<sup>17</sup> George P. Stamatou, *Women in Kazantzakis' Life and Works*, Athens, 1975, p. 279.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. the chapter entitled "The Mother," in *Report to Greco*, pp. 40-49.

<sup>19</sup> We cite only *Four Hundred Letters*, pp. 13, 404, n. 3; and Stamatou, *op. cit.*, pp. 49-58. Stamatou includes many details from Helen Kazantzakis' *The Uncompromising*, in which Kazantzakis' notes for the years 1922 and 1923 are published.

<sup>20</sup> For details, cf. Nikos Kazantzakis, *Report to Greco*, Athens, 1961, pp. 514-6, and Stamatou, *op. cit.*, pp. 70-72.

<sup>21</sup> Stamatou, *op. cit.*, p. 149.

<sup>22</sup> *The Saviors of God*, p. 88.

<sup>23</sup> *Odyssey*, XXIII, 457.

<sup>24</sup> N. Kazantzakis, *Tertsines*, Athens, 1960, *Leonardo*, 11. 177-8.

<sup>25</sup> As Sphakianakis (above, note 11) observes, "the children in *Freedom or Death* have been portrayed in a standard, hasty, and improvised manner, as they lack children's qualities." Also, Demetres Raptopoulos, "The Characters in Kazantzakis' *The Saviors of God*," *Kainouria Epokhi*, Fall 1958, p. 347, points out that "he [Kazantzakis] failed to create a single true to life child in all his numerous books."

<sup>26</sup> N. Kazantzakis, *The Saviors of God*, Syman Editions (reprint of the first edition), Athens, 1958, p. 40.

<sup>27</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. Ares Diktaios, P. Kalafakes editions, Athens, 1958, p. 40.

<sup>28</sup> P. Prevelakis, *The Poet and the Poem of the Odyssey*, Hestia Bookstore, Athens, 1968, p. 283, n. 5; "Kazantzakis feared and admired his father, the 'wild man'." Also, cf. Alexiou p. 143; "It is as if I see him narrating, with pride, his father's accomplishments. He was full of smiles..."; and *ibid.*, p. 209; "No matter what is stated about the fear he felt for his father, it will not correspond to the actual situation. He considered his father's will the highest command."

<sup>29</sup> N. Kazantzakis, *Letters to Galateia*, Diphros, Athens, 1958, pp. 67-8: "I implore you: do go to the farm and visit old Laertes often; I'm sure you'll cheer him up. In his own way he is a very interesting man. You will feel affection for him, as he has enveloped himself in awful loneliness, like a Cyclops." Also, *ibid.*, p. 70: "Have a picture of yourself taken together with Lefteres, Alekos, etc... How I wish that my father could be included!" *Four Hundred Letters*, letter 361, April 1950, p. 623: "My childhood was full of wild winds, as my father, who exercised great influence over me, was not a human being; he was a wild beast..." *Report to Greco*, pp. 571-2: "I could never view my father with tenderness. I felt such fear that love, respect, and familiarity disappeared... When I returned to the small house by the shore after an absence of three days, I experienced an indescribable, impious relief... My guardian was gone; his unforgiving eye was no longer there. I was no longer a slave. I had been liberated: I was a freedman."

<sup>30</sup> Galateia Kazantzakis, *Men and Supermen*, Pyxidha Editions, Athens, 1957, p. 168.

<sup>31</sup> Among the parallelisms between Dostoyevski and Kazantzakis that Manolis Khalvatzakis (*Dostoyevski-Kazantzakis*, Alexandria, 1957, pp. 36-40) has detected oppression created by the father and wish for the father's death are included. These sentiments have been expressed by Dostoyevski in *Brothers Karamazov* and by Kazantzakis in *The Greek Passion, Freedom or Death*, and *Saint Francis*.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. P. Prevelakis, "Kazantzakis: A Draft of Inner Biography," in *Four Hundred Letters*, pp. Ixxiv-v.

<sup>33</sup> *The Saviors of God*, p. 31.

<sup>34</sup> How could Kazantzakis overlook the incongruity of the name with the character, whom he has described as having "playful eyes and lean bones; a handsome man" [p. 78]? "Polyxingis" suggests a comic, unheroic character.

<sup>35</sup> As I. M. Panayiotopoulos, "Nikos Kazantzakis" (*Nea Hestia*, Christmas 1959, p. 88), has observed, Kazantzaean heroes "do not play love games; they seize. Love games are a lymphatic condition, which is disregarded by Kazantzakis." Stamatiou, p. 256, notes: "Throughout his Kazantzaean work the systematic wooing and conquest of women is not extensive. Captain Polyxinges 'attempts to conquer' Eminé hanum for many months, as he has been afflicted with passion . . ."

<sup>36</sup> Kazantzakis has endowed this character with unmatched deeds so as to emphasize his familiarity with death; thus, he has already built his own tomb and from time to time he holds banquets with his "friends," who do not belong to the same type of person as he does: the scholar Kyr Idomeneas, Venduzos, and Kolyvas, the grave-digger.

<sup>37</sup> This character had been conceived as the grandfather in the novel *Kapetan Elia*, which had been written in French and was never published. Cf. *Four Hundred Letters*, letter 88, July 6, 1929, pp. 142-143.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Sphakianakis, p. 232. Also, Raptopoulos, pp. 346-7.

<sup>39</sup> As Nikephoros Vrettakos, *Nikos Kazantzakis: His Agony and His Work*, P. Sypsas — Chr. Siamantas Publishers, Athens, 1960, p. 573, writes: "He distributed his despair on many shoulders in order to find relief."

<sup>40</sup> *The Saviors of God*, pp. 9-10.

<sup>41</sup> James Heisig, "The Incarnation of Liberty: Nikos Kazantzakis' Vision," *Nea Hestia*, Christmas 1971, p. 164.

<sup>42</sup> *The Saviors of God*, pp. 65-66.

<sup>43</sup> *Zorba the Greek*, p. 277.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. above, note 26, p. 47.

<sup>45</sup> K. I. Despotopoulos, "Kazantzakis and His Work," Newspaper *Eleftheria*, Athens, February 24, 1959.

<sup>46</sup> *The Saviors of God*, p. 19.

<sup>47</sup> *The Saviors of God*, p. 72.

<sup>48</sup> *Letters to Galateia*, letter 45, January 22, 1922, p. 123.

<sup>49</sup> Jose S. Lasso de la Vega, "About Kazantzakis," *Nea Hestia*, Christmas 1971, p. 63.

<sup>50</sup> *The Saviors of God*, p. 64.

<sup>51</sup> *Zorba the Greek*, p. 38.

<sup>52</sup> James Heisig, p. 161.

<sup>53</sup> Kazantzakis' affection for sea captains is obvious. In *Freedom or Death* they are represented by Stefanis and Katsirmas; in *The Greek Passion* by Captain Fourtounas; in *Christofer Columbus* by Alonso; in *Kouros* by the Captain, et al. They all preserve Odyssean characteristics, as they are restless elements of the sea and unfulfilled souls that cannot grow roots in the soil where "virtue, easy life, and comfortable gods" (*Odyssey*, XXIII, 823) can be found. All are brave, virile, and display no fear of death; thus they resemble the land captains and,

at the same time, surpass them in the knowledge of Kazantzakean "truth."

<sup>54</sup> Critics have reacted negatively to the figures of Katsirmas and of Mandakas with his bottle without handles, as well as to certain scenes and incidents in this novel (Captain Michalis' banquets in his basement, Polyxingis' banquet with his friends in his tomb, and the leap over the corpse of Manusakas). Yiannes Zervos, (*Notes on Nikos Kazantzakis' Works*, Athens, 1957, p. 32) accuses the author of "falsifying the Cretan element," of "being utterly disrespectful"; Vrettakos pp. 687-8, claims that Kazantzakis "stamped the Cretan race with his own dark qualities, which go contrary to their Hellenic qualities and their native genius." Sphakianakis, pp. 232-3, comments: "One can see... that heroism and bravery often walk together with unprecedent savagery and, moreover, with a ghastly necrophilia; thus the elements of the Cretan character have been altered, as they have been assigned a bloodthirsty and perverted quality." In addition, the "pure and balanced" Cretans in Prevelakis' novels should be contrasted with the Cretans portrayed by Kazantzakis.

<sup>55</sup> Four Hundred Letters, letter 357, October 26, 1949, p. 616: "I want to begin a novel about my father..." Renaud de Jouvenel, "Nikos Kazantzakis." *Nea Hestia*, November 1, 1962, p. 1575 (a letter by Kazantzakis to the author): "I am now writing another book; its background is Crete; the hero is my father, the Cretan dragon." Manoles Yialourakis, "Kazantzakis Told Me...", *Kainouria Epokhi*, Fall 1958, p. 159: "Captain Michalis is a heroic figure, like my father...."

<sup>56</sup> Alexiou, p. 19: "The author relates many incidents in *Freedom or Death* which had been inspired by his father." Also, Phanourakis, p. 190: "The ideal Cretan who is represented as the hero in this novel has been endowed with his father's name and with some of his characteristics."

<sup>57</sup> Cf. his portrayal in *Freedom or Death* that resembles the hero of the novel closely, and Prevelakis' *Pandermi Kriti*, 2nd edition, Hestia Bookstore, pp. 30-32.

<sup>58</sup> Em. Kh[ourmouzios], "The Novel of Crete, *Freedom or Death* by N. Kazantzakis, Newspaper *Kathimerini*, Athens, December 10, 1953.

<sup>59</sup> The scenes of the "banquet" in the basement are the greatest weakness in this novel. Not only is there exaggeration, as to Captain Michalis, beyond the limits of natural endurance, which could be excused as a consequence of the general trends toward extremes in this novel and its hero, but these scenes also include "fictitious" and improbable elements. Captain Michalis' behavior, his abrupt orders and his whip, which are appropriate to a bloodthirsty aga in the days of the janissaries or to a cruel lord of the first phase in Europe's Middle Ages, are totally inappropriate to a Cretan captain. There is cause to wonder how a natural protector of the enslaved Greeks could treat his fellow citizens and members of the same faith who are his neighbors, in such a humiliating way. In addition, how could brave men, such as Kayambis from Sphakia, whom the pasha himself fears and takes great care not to insult, as well as individuals like Venduzos and Furogatos, accept such humiliation without protest. Would the treatment of the *hodza*, even though he is crazy, at the hands of a Christian escape the anger of the Turks in this period of religious and national fanaticism? I am unable to comprehend how Captain Michalis, who is angered when human beings are degraded, consents to eat and drink with such "puppets," whom he despises and detests.

<sup>60</sup> Above, note 24, p. 120.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Khalvatzakis, p. 30.

<sup>62</sup> P. Prevelakis, p. 1x: "Captain Michalis has been presented more like a desperado than a national hero. Heroism reveals purpose in life and is not a rebellion against fate." Vrettakos, p. 684: "Captain Michalis is an extraordinary

Captain; he is the Cretan hero. He is the representative of Crete, as he has been created in Kazantzakis' conscience.... He expresses himself in an unusual manner for an unsophisticated, popular hero, whose starting point is his faith in God and his love for his homeland."

<sup>63</sup> Nietzsche, p. 45.

<sup>64</sup> Prevelakis, p. 1x.

<sup>65</sup> R. M. Rilke, "The Clock. The Book of Poetry and Death," from *Selections from Rilke's Poetical Works*, rendered in Greek by Ares Diktaios, Kadmos Editions, Athens, 1957, p. 82.

<sup>66</sup> Collin Wilson, "Nikos Kazantzakis," *Nea Hestia*, November 1, 1962, p. 1588; "He [Kazantzakis] never seems to ask whether this slaughter was necessary or whether these heroes are only childish, hot-tempered individuals.... At the end, however, when Captain Michalis and his companions are simply allowed to be slaughtered, as they are too proud to give themselves up, we feel that something serious is absent in Kazantzakis, because he does not feel how vain this action is." Petros Spandonidis believes that Captain Michalis and Manolios are "sacrificed" rather melodramatically "for the creation of an impression, not for the greatest need of a forced march dictated by reality." "Nikos Kazantzakis, Anxiety's Son," *Kainouria Epokhi*, Fall 1960, p. 140.

<sup>67</sup> *The Saviors of God*, p. 13.

<sup>68</sup> Roland Cailliois, "Existential Philosophy," in *Panorama of Contemporary Ideas*, under the direction of Gaetan Picon. Greek Translation and notes by Kostas P. Kallighas, vol. 1, D. Voyatzes Editions, Athens, 1958, p. 129.

<sup>69</sup> Emmanuel Mounier, *Introduction to Existentialism*, Appendix: Introduction to Existentialism by Jean Wahl. Greek Translation, Introduction, and notes by Christos Malevitsis, Dodone Editions, Athens, [1970], p. 200.

<sup>70</sup> Karl Jaspers, "The Antinomy of Day and Night," a section in *Philosophie*, III, ed. J. Springer, Berlin, 1973, n. 68, pp. 171-7.

<sup>71</sup> Apostolos Sahinis, *Prose Writers of Our Times*, Hestia Bookstore, Athens, [1967], p. 44: "Kazantzakis does not separate life from death; he identifies them. Salvation and actual liberation for a human being are found in the exemplary death of a hero or a martyr."

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# ASCENT, THE INTERPRETIVE FIGURE OF BEING IN NIKOS KAZANTZAKIS

BY KOSTAS MIHAILIDIS

*translated by Edward Phinney*

Kazantzakis' *Report to Greco* is a philosophical autobiography. Through an autobiographical form of considerable breadth and depth, the author investigates life and existence. His inquiry is less a systematic unfolding of ideas within a certain kind of format than a personal confession. In such a confession, a dramatic contest with persons, places and ideas impels the author to compete with them one by one so that he may reach ultimately the farthest limit, the struggle — as he calls it — with God Himself. Experience becomes theory; theory, embodied by movement, journey, adventure, becomes again life and yields insight into reality. Meditation, vision, description, dialogue, dramatic narrative, all serve the same purpose, which is very close to a personal testimony about an endless struggle of life and work together.

2. What, however, is the philosophic raft of Kazantzakis' life? What are the main vertebrae of his life, which appear regularly in the thematic structure of his work and return periodically like leitmotifs of a musical composition? In the earliest lines of his *Report* he writes, "Only for me, not anyone else, does my personal life have any, even quite relative meaning. I acknowledge only one value in it: its struggle to climb step by step and to reach the highest point to which energy and persistence can take it: the summit, which I arbitrarily named the "Cretan Glace" [*Report to Greco*, 6th ed. Athens, p. 15].

*Ascent*, this term, fundamental to ancient philosophical thought, which can be traced originally to Parmenides, constitutes for Kazantzakis a basic figure by which he interprets reality. For if human life, great nature with all the boundless variety of its creation, and God Himself, too, have a meaning and message for us, it is in this *ascent*. Still, what does *ascent* mean? The

tradition of Parmenides and later of Plato tells us about a journey toward higher things. In the first instance, this journey is a long coherence of being, from the delusion of sensations to the contemplation of truth. In the second instance, it is a movement from the images of things to their essence, or ideas, and beyond these to the fountainhead of all ideas, the universal good.

In both instances, the ascent is achieved with effort and struggle, leading to a transformation which renders life more genuine and more real. Plotinus, going beyond his predecessors, describes an ascent which has, as its goal, a union, or ecstatic deification. When Kazantzakis speaks of ascent, he stands indisputably in the mainstream of this same tradition. Nevertheless, like a true poet, he applies more than one meaning to the symbol of ascent, or — as he calls it — the upward climb, *aniphoros*. We may perhaps distinguish four primary shades of meaning in this symbol:

A) The upward climb is the approach to the height of duty, which liberates the soul. In terms of Christian symbology, it is Golgotha-Crucifixion-Resurrection. The ascent in this instance is an existential exercise, a personal contest [p. 15].

B) The ascent is the progress of cosmic evolution, which leads to transubstantiation of ape into man and of man into God [p. 28]. It is love of creation, which is nourished by recollection of the divine. "A grain of wheat," says Kazantzakis, "a worm, an ant remembers its divine origin and wants to climb step by step to touch God" [p. 556].

C) These two meanings apparently merge into a third, which comes close to embracing the first two. It is as if cosmic evolution became a personal duty: "All the silkworm must become silk, all the flesh must become spirit; sweeter agony than this does not exist, nor more pressing duty; neither does there exist a work more in agreement with the laws which reign in the workroom of God" [p. 578].

D) God, despite the meanings of the second or perhaps the third example, is not the goal of the ascent because He, too, ascends with us, advances while "searching, running risks, struggling." God is being built, and each person gives his own little pebble of blood both to reinforce Him and, in turn, to be reinforced by Him. In this struggle, duty brings everyone to-

gether, hand in hand, and we all make our ascent together.<sup>1</sup>

3. Reviewing the four types of ascent which Kazantzakis recognizes, we come up against a striking difference, which sets his ascent apart from that of ancient tradition. There is lacking in Kazantzakis a prior-based ontological hierarchy, or ranking system. Certainly there exists struggle for passage from the lower to the higher, from the flesh to the spirit, but this higher nature is not a given, but rather a process. God, the universe with all its creation and, especially, mankind, all battle in order to rise. The ascent of Kazantzakis brings us nearer to the theory of creative evolution of his teacher, Bergson, to the *élan vital*, which as life-giving impulse ceaselessly drives forward, molding new shapes. Bergson observes characteristically, "Existence for a conscious being consists of this: of being transformed; of being transformed in order to mature; of maturing in order to create itself without limits." God Himself is God inside creation as its indwelling life. He is a God made manifest, an act of liberation. This Bergsonism of Kazantzakis was strengthened by study of both Nietzsche and, by extension, of Schopenhauer, who — as is well known — influenced Bergson himself; for the *élan vital* of the latter is incomprehensible without prior understanding of Schopenhauer's Will to Life.

Kazantzakis himself refers to the Will when he comments on the meeting of Nietzsche with Schopenhauer. "One will alone exists," he says, "blind, without beginning and end, without goal, indifferent, not absurd, illogical, monstrous" [p. 385]. However, the position of Kazantzakis himself, when he attempts to define this principle, comes much closer to the Hegelian thesis. Kazantzakis speaks about this Will, using the term *Unseen*, and explains that by it he does not mean some priestly God, neither a metaphysical consciousness nor an absolute entity of any kind. Instead, Kazantzakis has in mind a mystical Force, which employs human beings and, before them, animals, plants and basic matter like carriers or beasts of burden. This Force is ever rushing onward as if it had a goal and were following a set path [p. 483]. Elsewhere, Kazantzakis views this Force as an unendingly expressed rhythm [p. 507], which asserts itself like a Warrior, building up to freedom out of plants into animals and out of these into mankind.

We here recognize characteristics of the Hegelian interpretation of history, as if it were a traversal of the cosmic spirit in which "states, nations and individuals" were nothing more than "unconscious tools and limbs," the cunning of higher reason which sacrifices and casts aside individuals and, ultimately, freedom itself as a self-realization of the entire life of the spirit. For this reason I shall not agree with the interpretation which seeks to identify the essence of God — as Kazantzakis conceives it — with the force of the human soul that wants to transcend its limitations.<sup>2</sup> God is the soul of man, which longs to transcend itself; at the same time He is the mystic Force which penetrates everything. The principle is absolute rather than subjective.

4. The symbol of ascent, however, is not exhausted by the influences we have noted. The ascent is a personal symbol; therefore, we ought to pursue it as testimony of the author of the *Report* himself. Consequently, we return to our starting point: the author's acknowledgment that struggle leads to a peak. From the beginning, however, this peak experience is arbitrarily called by Kazantzakis a *Cretan Glance*.

Kazantzakis attempts to shed light on the term, *Cretan Glance*. Inspired by man's game with the bull, as it is shown on the wall paintings of Knossos, the *Cretan Glance* is one which looks into the abyss without hope and without fear [p. 586]. The Cretans, he says, transubstantiated their horror by wrestling with the bull and made it high game.

The ascent, then, leads to the peak, or rather to the edge, the edge to the crag, and the crag to the balancing point above the abyss. Characteristic is the image of the flying fish — it, too, taken from Knossos — which flies outside of its element, the sea, even if only for a moment or a lightning-flash. This moment is eternity. The leap of the sacred Cretan fish is symbol of the Warrior, of one who does not surrender, of the soul who struggles to transcend necessity and to breathe freedom [p. 547]. Kazantzakis, the wayfarer, starts out from his native soil of Crete and returns to it to find and set forth his message — or as he calls it — the essence of life. Thus, he interprets in a personal way the traces of a civilization like the Minoan.<sup>3</sup>

What is the meaning, however, in philosophical terms, of

this game with God, this facing of the abyss without fear and hope, this leap into freedom?

The game is a symbol which Herakleitos already used: "Eternity is a child playing at checkers; the kingdom of a child" [fr. B 52]. Eternity, universal time, is a child who plays with small pawns; it is the royal game of an infant. Nietzsche, too, uses game as symbol to show the poetic interaction of reality. Kazantzakis, however, with his *Cretan Glance* is not assaying an interpretation of the cosmic process: rather, he is indicating the proud stance of man against his fate. Could this proud stance, nevertheless, be the ecstatic threshold toward creation of the cosmos, an affirmation — as Nietzsche meant it — of the affinity which man playing has with the aboriginal event of creation?

5. The *Cretan Glance* is a facing, without fear and without hope, of the abyss. The abyss, then, is that which extends beyond the peak. In philosophical terms, however, the abyss is not only the boundless, but also the illogical. It is that which identifies being with non-being. The abyss is at the same time inconceivable, indeterminate and ineffable.<sup>4</sup> Opposing the abyss, stands the Cretan, or mankind without fear and without hope. Doubtlessly, we have here to do with an ascent which leads to transcendence. For by facing the abyss we not only transcend the solid ground of the cosmos but also transcend the polarity of our attitude in face of it, fear mixed with hope: fear, which could diminish our existence, and hope, which could exaggerate our expectations. The two emotions would lead to self-deception and to slavery.

Beyond fear and hope is freedom. This is the leap of the flying fish. Transcendence is shown here as an ecstasy, a surpassing of ourselves, a leap outward. Kazantzakis calls the leap fatal [p. 547], because this movement indicates death of nature [of fish or of man], outdistancing boundaries, or transubstantiation into something else. This leap is a transcendence of necessity and breath of freedom.

Thus, Kazantzakis brings us back, with this transcendent and ecstatic leap, to the tradition of the mystics.

Plotinus in his *Enneads* [6.9.11] speaks about the ecstasy and opening out of the soul. Later, the Byzantine Symeon,

called the New Theologian [A.D. 949-1022], refers to a similar state when, encountering the divine light he mentions a interfusion with this light: "I remained alone united only with the light."

In more recent years, the existentialist philosopher, Søren Kierkegaard, attempted an analogous leap toward the abyss, the leap of faith. This leap surpasses reason and becomes in a way paradoxical. The leap of Kierkegaard, however, is a leap toward God. By contrast, the Cretan leap of Kazantzakis is balanced within the abyss. It is a transcendence not only of the universe, but also of God Himself. For God, too, struggles within the universe in His effort to ascend, and we struggle together with Him.

The *Cretan Glance* does not appear to be a mystical deification or unification. Certainly Kazantzakis speaks about madness, which distinguishes those who want to break their human limitations, or the limits of logic [p. 599]. Madness, however, does not signal the twilight of the soul's consciousness. Like Odysseus, he who reaches the edge of the precipice, looks into the abyss without hope and without fear, standing upright on the edge of the precipice [p. 586]. Karl Jaspers describes an analogous existential passage toward the transcendent, which is completed with a final leap. This leap liberates existence, which thus reaches the highest degree of its wakefulness. This transcendence bestows on existence its truth and gives to the moment its eternity. Much earlier, however, Nietzsche, the Great Martyr — as Kazantzakis calls him in his *Report* — used the symbol of the peak and the abyss. Nietzsche is the wayfarer who climbs his solitary path, the path of greatness. Within his resolution, Peak and Abyss become one [*Also Sprach Zarathustra*, Teil 3: "Der Wanderer"]. Nietzsche, too, therefore, journeys toward danger, toward the precipice.

6. While we are attempting to understand the ascent as the central point of Kazantzakis' lifeview, we should not be satisfied with analyzing a philosophical principle. We must also perceive the dramatic texture which results from the fact that the *Report* is not a piece of speculation, but a testimony which comes from Kazantzakis' encounter with many places and faces. Thus, the ascent becomes for Kazantzakis a personal experience, and this

experience opens in various directions, clearly takes on many appearances or, as he himself says, wears many masks. "There were four decisive steps," he explains, "in my upward climb. Each one bears a sacred name: Christ, Buddha, Lenin and Odysseus" [p. 16].

The first step is Christ. Christ, the old Warrior, faces danger and takes man's turn so as to save him. He is a symbol of man's Passion and Resurrection and of his ascent and struggle within the prison of flesh and spirit. He is Love, which pervades the existence of St. Francis, God's *poverello*. This Christ, of course, is not engraved with the forms of orthodox dogma, but he is still a great step in Kazantzakis' ascent, which Kazantzakis does not ever appear to surpass completely.

The second step is Buddha. From him, Kazantzakis learns to deny the vanity of desire, to transcend the meshes of the universe and the cycle of birth and death. From him, Kazantzakis learns to say, I do not want anything; I am free from God and temptation, from hope and fear. I have been delivered from deliverance.

Beyond Christ, there must be Buddha. For Buddha symbolizes transcendence not only of the world and — together with the latter — resurrection, or redemption, but also transcendence of this redemption, too. Buddha is ultimate freedom.

The third step, Lenin, is a new — as he tells us — mask of man's desperation and hope. With Lenin, Kazantzakis appears to return to the action which is realized within human boundaries. Lenin incarnates the new God, Epaphos,\* who wants to touch the soil and man, who loves Earth and wants to knead her in his image and likeness. The All-of-Us — this feeling that we are all one — is a force which triumphs over death, is labor's struggle which impels toward higher things.

The capping-tile and final gradient in Kazantzakis' ascent appears to be Odysseus. Christ, Buddha and Lenin were stations — as Kazantzakis says — on the way to the Cry, which Kazantzakis hunted all his life: the Cry of what is to come. This Cry slowly took shape and rebounded into the light: it was the face of his great travel-companion, Odysseus. Odysseus takes pleasure in

\* Personified Contact, or Touch. In ancient mythology, Epaphos was born to Io, who had mysteriously conceived him from the touch of Zeus.

all the faces of death and wrestles with them, one by one. He is a shrewd mind. He couples prudence with divine madness. He stands upright on the vessel of Greece and does not release the helm. Odysseus is the wayfarer. He knows that Ithaca does not exist, that there exist only sea and a small boat, similar to the body of man, and its captain, the Mind. Odysseus is the symbol of higher man who attains self-awareness and realizes that his journey is not a goal, but rather a journey comprised only of effort. He sows and begets his own facsimile of the universe. He fights God. He changes his mind frequently. He listens to the whispers of his heart. As the universal wayfarer, Odysseus reminds us to a degree of the free spirit of Nietzsche, who unmasks ideals, is liberated from their tyranny and, by rising above them, rises above himself. He becomes draftsman for his life, originator of the cosmic maya and a wayfarer.

The Odysseus of Kazantzakis, nevertheless, is someone who exceeds the Nietzschean spirit. He is the incarnation of the very essence of life, entirely human, national and personal, and he is put forward as an archetype [p. 587]. Odysseus is the eternal traveler who leaves behind him the good things of this world, all its oppositions, and reaches the limits of the precipice, that is, the transcendent, outdistancing fear and hope so as to advance farther — farther even than freedom. This farther and farther advance is his message: the eternal quest.

Inside Odysseus the other three illustrative steps in Kazantzakis' ascent are both condensed and transcended. The great Sirens — as Kazantzakis calls them — Christ, Buddha and Lenin, charmed him all his life, and he struggled to escape from them without denying them, to mix their ill-matched voices into a harmonious song. Could Odysseus be the harmony which Kazantzakis was seeking? Kazantzakis himself answers that Odysseus is the model, the mold, who is sculpted so that tomorrow's man may be poured from it. Odysseus is the One, or Archetype, in the process of creation. We should pause at the lines which accompany the last testimony of Odysseus: Death and birth, bain and sweetness, escape and return, separation and encounter are all one.

The unity of phenomena is the confidence which Odysseus shares with us at the moment of his transcendence. This unity

is much more than a balance of opposing forces like the harmony of Herakleitos. It is an identity of differences which rises above the identity itself. As he tells us in his epilogue, Good and Evil are one. This One, moreover, does not exist.<sup>5</sup>

7. The *Report to Greco* is an ascent which continually touches the limits of humanity — or, as Jaspers would say — the liminal states.<sup>6</sup>

Man, while approaching these conditions, approaches the abyss. Within the abyss, opposites do not simply coincide; even such coincidence is likewise taken away. We approach the mysterious place, where the One — as Plotinus says — fades and escapes us, and we suspect that it is really nothing.<sup>7</sup> Now we may understand the Cretan exhortation of the Grandfather, "Go where you can't!"

In this report on the transcendental ascent, the third soul, a bow in the hands of God, says in its prayer, "Stretch me, Lord, even if I break!"

The soul is, as both the beginning and the end, fire. This fire, moreover, is the Virgin Mother, who bears her immortal son, light [p. 614]. Here again Kazantzakis, inspired by the art of El Greco, is speaking the language of philosophical symbolism and, beyond it, the language of the mystics. We also know from tradition about the Herakleitean ever-living fire, which the Stoics adopted later — the sun as symbol of the Platonic idea of the Good, and the all-consuming God-Fire of the Old Testament.

Later, also in Plotinus is the unqualified light of the One, which gives mind the faculty to be. Light appears as symbol of the divine both in the mysticism of the Byzantine Symeon, the New Theologian, and in the mysticism of the German Meister Eckhart.<sup>8</sup> Kazantzakis' inclination toward mysticism must also have Bergsonian roots, when we consider how much Bergson was concerned with the mystics.<sup>9</sup> Kazantzakis, in his fourth letter to Papastefanou [See note 1], clearly sheds light on the mystical journey which terminates in union, or unity. He writes in his letter, "When I live out this entire journey, there comes the great Moment of Union. The lover who exerts himself, struggling to come, comes, and he becomes a Bridegroom: this is the moment of complete union with God. The ecstasy is divided into two: ecstasy as fire and ecstasy as light."

8. If the ascent of Kazantzakis to the highest point leads toward a transcendent Other which can only be communicated by mystical symbols, then the same ascent as a journey can be seen in three images:

- A) the image of the grub which becomes a butterfly;
- B) the image of the flying fish which leaps out from the water; and
- C) the image of the silkworm which produces silk within its entrails.

In the first instance, the ascent is a transubstantiation: in the second, an ecstatic transcendence; in the third, a creation. The struggle of life which mounts up is, therefore, a movement from one level to another, a qualitative change of place, a seed which dies so that it might be reborn in new form. As ecstasy, it is self-transcendence and, as such, a victory over necessity and an act of freedom. Finally, the design is like an act of generation which takes flesh and bones and becomes reality. It is the potential which is transformed into substance through the creative act. Thus the meaning of the ascent is refracted into several meanings. Even the interpretive figure of the ascent is stretched, like the bow of the soul, in defiance of natural law. The struggle has meaning. In the end, however, it is beyond every meaning. The component parts of the universe are eternal, and yet the road of ascent leads beyond them. God is the highest power and simultaneously a mask of the inexpressible. (This Force does not have a face; we give its face to it.) Man is the center of the humanization of being, and yet this articulation is itself the mysterious force which mounts upward and crushes man, its former agent. The cosmos is the infinite locality of the wayfarer who, consequently, cannot accept the boundaries of his fatherland. The wayfarer Kazantzakis, however, leaves Crete and returns to it. His worldwide view of life is seen through his *Cretan Glance*.

The opposites converge and in the end are transcended. The Good and the Evil are One, a One, however — and this is the great mystery — which does not exist.

The ascent, the upward climb, which all nature follows and

which man, above all, has taken upon himself as a duty — this ascent does not have a beginning and an end. The location of the peak is always changing. The peak has a secret, and the secret is struggle. The struggle for the peak is the competition between opposites which occurs every moment, a contest which, nevertheless, leads to harmony, to making opposites identical and to rising above them. Ecstasy, or — seen in another way — transubstantiation, is the very stuff of life. Perfect examples of this ecstasy are the lives of persons who are possessed by divine — as Kazantzakis calls it — madness: the lives of saints, of heroes and fighters, the life of El Greco who was fired with the flame of duty. The fire which becomes light is transformed into creativity. Anything that is potential is converted into actuality by action.

9. The ascent, as concept, is not only an existential, but also a cosmological and, still much deeper, an ontological figure. Being, or substance, is that which mounts upward, struggles as well as splits into opposites and then, changing its properties, standing (stepping) out of itself rises above them toward the something Other. Nevertheless, this substance, as it becomes a human presence, takes on existentialist characteristics, which I may risk comparing with specific themes in the philosophy of the existentialists, especially of Karl Jaspers.

First of all, the *leap* toward the transcendent is well known, as we mentioned, from the work of Kierkegaard. This leap occurs, however, also in Jaspers. Existence moves toward the transcendent, the one that rises above all limits, above all oppositions of objects and even above reality, stable though this be. Existence, therefore, is potential being, an impulse toward self-transcendence and an approach to eternity.

From the viewpoint of the absolute, the oppositions in Jaspers, as well as in Kazantzakis, converge, although the mind cannot grasp their identity. Being and non-being, potentiality and actuality, time and eternity, rule of night and rule of day — all converge.

This ecstatic transcendence, which the mind cannot comprehend, presents itself within enigmatic — as Jaspers call them — *riddle-images*. Could not the grub which becomes a butterfly, the

silkworm which produces silk, and the flying fish all be such riddles? Could these not hint at the inexpressible?

Another parallel phenomenon is the merger of ecstatic transcendental states with agony and freedom. As soon as existence comes face to face with its limits, with conflict, ignorance and death, it stands before the abyss (*Abgrund*) and overflows — says Jaspers — with anxiety and terror. This anxiety, however, is man's road to self-awareness which in turn leads to freedom. Transcendence of anxiety, fear and hope is also for Kazantzakis freedom, and this freedom blossoms upon a condition of extremity, an endpoint, or — as Kazantzakis identifies it — a precipice. I should compare here a text of Jaspers who condenses the experience of the ascent in a manner which resembles the interpretive figure of Kazantzakis. "Truth," says Jaspers, "is always on the way, always in motion and never becomes final in its wonderful crystallizations. The submissive life seeks everywhere the certainty of the finite and wants to attach itself to the security of that which controls and endures. Authentic life takes risks. It is a life of sublimity with high stakes and extreme danger. The truth of existence, therefore, comes at the moment of decision, yes or no, when life is stretched to the breaking point. Here it must find its fulfillment or sink into the abyss" (*Von der Wahrheit* 'On Truth'). I am not in a position to supply the missing link between Kazantzakis and Jaspers. The parallels, however, imply common sources such as Bergson and Nietzsche.

10. If we attempt to summarize the philosophic framework of Kazantzakis as it is seen from the interpretive figure of ascent, we should be able to say that Being, or — as he calls it — substance (*ousia*), is basically a trans-substance, an ever dynamic act of self-transcendence or transubstantiation. This transubstantiation occurs at all ontological levels and above all, to be sure, within the human soul, where it has primary place. Thus substance is best revealed in human guise. A prior ontological ordering, or hierarchy, does not exist. The adventure of substance is to keep searching on an upward gradient. Substance is not being; it is becoming. As soon as it changes its properties, it departs from its nature. Man lives apocalyptically this, his ecstatic self-transcendence. However, only the man who breaks through his limitations, who is possessed by divine madness, can

live in this ecstatic state. Self-transcendence is a condition of extremity in which the oppositions of life are contracted into a unity and are then outgrown. This transcendence, or leap beyond the limit, is not, however, as some have said, a heroic nihilism. The heroic man does not, with his final leap, encounter nothingness. He encounters, instead, the inexpressible which removes both oppositions and their unity. This can only be communicated in the riddling language of the mystics. Transcendence is transubstantiation into light. Beyond the light, however, extends the place where the bow of the soul, as soon as it is over-extended, snaps for a moment so brief that it cannot be differentiated from the duration of eternity.

The ascent is not a journey without meaning. Kazantzakis' ascent differs from the struggle of Camus' hero, Sisyphus. The ascent of Kazantzakis has a meaning, and its meaning is transubstantiation. This transubstantiation, like ecstatic transcendence, is also true freedom. Freedom, as Kazantzakis conceives it, nevertheless, is not exclusively a state of consciousness. Nor is this freedom — as the existentialist philosophers of our time would have it — an ecstatic, extemporizing existence. Rather, the freedom of Kazantzakis has the character of a hypostatized substance. All being changes totally, rises — it becomes. Freedom remains substance. Beyond the final transcendence is light. Beyond light there extends, not nothingness, but Silence.<sup>10</sup>

#### N O T E S

<sup>1</sup> For light on this passage, see the revealing Dekalogue of the first letter of Kazantzakis to Emmanuel Papastefanou (K. Mitsotakis, *O Kazantzakis Miletia ton Theo* 'Kazantzakis Speaks about God,' Minoas, pp. 58-59).

<sup>2</sup> Chr. Giannaras, *Skapáni 'Spade'*, 9, p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> I. Th. Kakridis, *Kainourgia Epokhi*, Fall 1959.

<sup>4</sup> It should be mentioned here that the great German mystic, Jacob Böhme, called transcendent deity *Ungrund*, i.e., abyss. Following the *via negationis* of Plotinus, Böhme removed from the transcendent every positive characteristic: it is neither place nor time, neither good nor evil. It is an eternal nothing.

<sup>5</sup> Kazantzakis, in his *Spiritual Exercises* differentiates the steps: Ego, Nation, Human World, Vision, and Action for realization of Truth which is simultaneously Existence.

<sup>6</sup> We find this idea also in the *Spiritual Exercises*, p. 95.

<sup>7</sup> Plotinus, *Enneads* 6.9.3: "It slips away and fears that it is nothing."

<sup>8</sup> Alois Dempf, *Meister Eckhart: Predigt 34*, Freiburg 1960, p. 154.

<sup>9</sup> Bergson, *Les Deux Sources de la Morale et de la Religion*.

<sup>10</sup> See the fourth letter to Papastefanou, above, note 1, pp. 76-77.

# *from THE SAVIORS OF GOD: SPIRITUAL EXERCISES\**

BY NIKOS KAZANTZAKIS  
*translated by Kimon Friar*

## I. PROLOGUE

We come from a dark abyss, we end in a dark abyss, and we call the luminous interval life. ★ As soon as we are born the return begins, at once the setting forth and the coming back; we die in every moment. Because of this many have cried out: The goal of life is death! ★ But as soon as we are born we begin the struggle to create, to compose, to turn matter into life; we are born in every moment. Because of this many have cried out: The goal of ephemeral life is immortality! ★ In the temporary living organism these two streams collide: (a) the ascent toward composition, toward life, toward immortality; (b) the descent toward decomposition, toward matter, toward death. ★ Both streams well up from the depths of primordial essence. Life startles us at first; it seems somewhat beyond the law, somewhat contrary to nature, somewhat like a transitory counteraction to the dark eternal fountains; but deeper down we feel that Life is itself without beginning, an indestructible force of the Universe. ★ Otherwise, from where did that superhuman strength come which hurls us from the unborn to the born and gives us—plants, animals, men—courage for the struggle? Both opposing forces are holy. ★ It is our duty, therefore, to grasp that vision which can embrace and harmonize these two monstrous, timeless, and indestructible forces, and with this vision to modulate our thinking and our action.

## II. THE VISION

You heard the Cry and set forth. From battle to battle you passed through all the war service of militant man.

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2. You fought within the small tent of your body, but behold, the battle arena seemed too narrow, you felt stifled and rushed out to escape.

3. You pitched your camp on your race, you brimmed with hands and hearts as with your blood you first revived the dread ancestors and then set forth with the dead, the living, and the unborn to give battle.

4. Suddenly all races moved with you, the holy army of man was arranged for battle behind you, and all earth resounded like a military encampment.

5. You climbed to a high peak from which the plan of battle branched out amid the coils of your brain, and all opposing expeditions united in the secret encampment of your heart.

6. Behind you the plants and animals were organized like supply troops for the front-line, battling armies of man.

7. Now entire Earth clings to you, becomes flesh of your flesh, and cries out of chaos.

8. How can I besiege this dread vision with words? I stoop over chaos and listen. Someone is groaning and climbing up a secret, dangerous slope.

9. He struggles and agonizes stubbornly to ascend. But he finds a contrary force that impedes him: Someone is hurriedly climbing down a secret and easy downward slope.

10. Within the descending sluggish stream, the Spirit is dismembered and whirled about, and for a moment—the duration of every life—the two opposing desires are balanced.

11. This is how bodies are born, how the world is created, how among living things the two antithetical powers find equilibrium.

12. For a moment the One ascending is entwined by a beloved body—his own body—and is retarded in his climbing. But quickly, with love, with death, he escapes it, and then continues to plod on.

13. He tramples on inorganic matter, he shapes the plant and fills it. He encamps in it with his whole being. By "his whole being" is meant together with the longing and the power to escape.

14. He emerges a little, breathes with difficulty, chokes. He abandons to the plants as much heaviness, as much stupor and

immobility as he can, and thus disburdened leaps, with all his being again, further and higher still, creating the animals and encamping in their loins.

15. Again, "with his whole being" is meant together with the longing and the power to escape.

16. The bodies breathe, feed, store up strength, and then in an erotic moment are shattered, are spent and drained utterly, that they may bequeath their spirit to their sons. What spirit? The drive upwards!

17. He purifies himself slowly by struggling within their bodies, then abandons to the animals as much passion, as much slavishness, as much impotence and darkness as he can.

18. Once more he rises slightly, a bit lighter, and rushes to escape. It is this drive toward freedom, this strife with matter, which slowly creates the head of man.

19. We feel with terror now that he is again struggling to escape beyond us, to cast us off with plants and animals, and to leap further. The moment has come—O great joy and bitterness!—when we, the vanquished, must also be cast away among the reserve troops.

20. Behind the stream of my mind and body, behind the stream of my race and all mankind, behind the stream of plants and animals, I watch with trembling the Invisible treading on all things visible, and ascending.

21. Behind his heavy and blood-splattered feet I hear all living things being trampled on and crushed.

22. His face is without laughter, dark and silent, beyond joy and sorrow, beyond hope.

23. I tremble. Are *you* my God? Your body is steeped in memory. Like one locked up in dungeons for many years, you have adorned your arms and chest with strange trees and hairy dragons, with gory adventures, with cries and chronologies.

24. Lord, my Lord, you growl like a wild beast! Your feet are covered with blood and mire, your hands are covered with blood and mire, your jaws are heavy millstones that grind slowly.

25. You clutch at trees and animals, you tread on man, you shout. You climb up the endless black precipice of death, and you tremble.

26. Where are you going? Pain increases, light and darkness

increase. You weep, you hook onto me, you feed on my blood, you grow huge and strong, and then you kick at my heart. I press you to my breast, and I fear you and pity you.

27. It is as though we had buried Someone we thought dead, and now hear him calling in the night for help. Heaving and panting, he raises the gravestone of our soul and body higher and still higher, breathing more freely every moment.

28. Every word, every deed, every thought is the heavy gravestone he is forever trying to lift. And my own body and all the visible world, all heaven and earth, are the gravestone which God is struggling to heave upwards.

29. Trees shout, animals and stars: "We are doomed!" Every living creature flings two huge hands as high as the heavens to seek help!

30. With his knees doubled up under his chin, with his hands spread toward the light, with the soles of his feet turned toward his back, God huddles in a knot in every cell of flesh.

31. When I break a fruit open, this is how every seed is revealed to me. When I speak to men, this is what I discern in their thick and muddy brains.

32. God struggles in every thing, his hands flung upward toward the light. What light? Beyond and above everything!

33. Pain is not the only essence of our God, nor is hope in a future life or a life on this earth, neither joy nor victory. Every religion that holds up to worship one of these primordial aspects of God, narrows our hearts and our minds.

34. The essence of our God is *struggle*. Pain, joy, and hope unfold and labor within this struggle, world without end.

35. It is this ascension, the battle with the descending counter-current, which brings pain to birth. But pain is not the absolute monarch. Every victory, every momentary balance on the ascent fills with joy every living thing that breathes, grows, loves, and gives birth.

36. But from every joy and pain a hope leaps out eternally to escape this pain and to widen joy.

37. And again the ascent begins—which is pain—and joy is reborn and new hope springs up once more. The circle never closes. It is not a circle, but a spiral which ascends eternally, ever widening, enfolding and unfolding the triune struggle.

38. What is the purpose of this struggle? This is what the wretched self-seeking mind of man is always asking, forgetting that the Great Spirit does not toil within the bounds of human time, place, or causality.

39. The Great Spirit is superior to these human questionings. It teems with many rich and wandering drives which to our shallow minds seem contradictory: but in the essence of divinity they fraternize and struggle together, faithful comrades-in-arms.

40. The primordial Spirit branches out, overflows, struggles, fails, succeeds, trains itself. It is the Rose of the Winds.

41. Whether we want to or not, we also sail on and voyage, consciously or unconsciously, amid divine endeavors. Indeed, even our march has eternal elements, without beginning or end, assisting God and sharing his perils.

42. Which is that one force amid all of God's forces which man is able to grasp? Only this: We discern a *crimson line* on this earth, a red, bloodsplattered line which ascends, struggling from matter to plants, from plants to animals, from animals to man.

43. This indestructible prehuman rhythm is the only visible journey of the Invisible on this earth. Plants, animals, and men are the steps which God creates on which to tread and to mount upwards.

44. Difficult, dreadful, unending ascension! Shall God conquer or be conquered in this onslaught? Does victory exist? Does defeat exist? Our bodies shall rot and turn to dust, but what will become of Him who for a moment passed beyond the body?

45. Yet these are all lesser concerns, for all hopes and despairs vanish in the voracious, funneling whirlwind of God. God laughs, wails, kills, sets us on fire, and then leaves us in the middle of the way, charred embers.

46. And I rejoice to feel between my temples, in the flicker of an eyelid, the beginning and the end of the world.

47. I condense into a lightning moment the seeding, sprouting, blossoming, fructifying, and the disappearance of every tree, animal, man, star, and god.

48. All Earth is a seed planted in the coils of my mind.

Whatever struggles for numberless years to unfold and fructify in the dark womb of matter bursts in my head like a small and silent lightning flash.

49. Ah! let us gaze intently on this lightning flash, let us hold it for a moment, let us arrange it into human speech.

50. Let us transfix this momentary eternity which encloses everything, past and future, but we must not lose, in the immobility of language, any of its gigantic erotic whirling.

51. Every word is an Ark of the Covenant about which we dance and shudder, divining God to be its dreadful inhabitant.

52. You shall never be able to establish in words that you live in ecstasy. But struggle unceasingly to establish it in words. Battle with myths, with comparisons, with allegories, with rare and common words, with exclamations and rhymes, to embody it in flesh, to transfix it!

53. God, the Great Ecstatic, works in the same way. He speaks and struggles to speak in every way he can, with seas and with fires, with colors, with wings, with horns, with claws, with constellations and butterflies, that he may establish his ecstasy.

54. Like every other living thing, I also am in the center of the Cosmic whirlpool. I am the eye of monstrous rivers where everything dances about me as the circle continually narrows with greater vehemence till the heavens and earth plunge into the red pit of my heart.

55. Then God confronts me with terror and love—for I am his only hope—and he says: "This Ecstatic, who gives birth to all things, who rejoices in them all and yet destroys them, this Ecstatic is my Son!"

### III. THE ACTION: *The Relationship Between God and Man*

The ultimate most holy form of theory is action.

2. Not to look on passively while the spark leaps from generation to generation, but to leap and to burn with it!

3. Action is the widest gate of deliverance. It alone can answer the questionings of the heart. Amid the labyrinthine complexities of the mind it finds the shorter route. No, it does not

"find,"—it creates its way, hewing to right and left through resistances of logic and matter.

4. Why did you struggle behind phenomena to track down the Invisible? What was the purpose of all your warlike, your erotic march through flesh, race, man, plants, and animals? Why the mystic marriage beyond these labors, the perfect embracement, the bacchic and raging contact in darkness and in light?

5. That you might reach the point from which you began—the ephemeral, palpitating, mysterious point of your existence—with new eyes, with new ears, with a new sense of taste, smell, touch, with new brains.

6. Our profound human duty is not to interpret or to cast light on the rhythm of God's march, but to adjust, as much as we can, the rhythm of our small and fleeting life to his.

7. Only thus may we mortals succeed in achieving something immortal, because then we collaborate with One who is Deathless.

8. Only thus may we conquer mortal sin, the concentration on details, the narrowness of our brains; only thus may we transsubstantiate into freedom the slavery of earthen matter given us to mold.

9. Amid all these things, beyond all these things, every man and nation, every plant and animal, every god and demon charges upwards like an army inflamed by an incomprehensible, unconquerable Spirit.

10. We struggle to make this Spirit visible, to give it a face, to encase it in words, in allegories and thoughts and incantations, that it may not escape us.

11. But it cannot be contained in the twenty-six letters of an alphabet which we string out in rows; we know that all these words, these allegories, these thoughts and these incantations are, once more, but a new mask with which to conceal the Abyss.

12. Yet only in this manner, by confining immensity, may we labor within the newly incised circle of humanity.

13. What do we mean by "labor"? To fill up this circle with desires, with anxieties, and with deeds; to spread out and reach frontiers until, no longer able to contain us, they crack and collapse. By working thus with appearances, we widen and increase the essence.

14. For this reason our return to appearances, after our contact with essence, possesses an incalculable worth.

15. We have seen the highest circle of spiraling powers. We have named this circle God. We might have given it any other name we wished: Abyss, Mystery, Absolute Darkness, Absolute Light, Matter, Spirit, Ultimate Hope, Ultimate Despair, Silence.

16. But we have named it God because only this name, for primordial reasons, can stir our hearts profoundly. And this deeply felt emotion is indispensable if we are to touch, body with body, the dread essence beyond logic.

17. Within this gigantic circle of divinity we are in duty bound to separate and perceive clearly the small, burning arc of our epoch.

18. On this barely perceptible flaming curve, feeling the onrush of the entire circle profoundly and mystically, we travel in harmony with the Universe, we gain impetus and dash into battle.

19. Thus, by consciously following the onrush of the Universe, our ephemeral action does not die with us.

20. It does not become lost in a mystical and passive contemplation of the entire circle; it does not scorn holy, humble, and daily necessity.

21. Within its narrow and blood-drenched ditch it stoops and labors steadfastly, conquering easily both space and time within a small point of space and time—for this point follows the divine onrush of the entire circle.

22. I do not care what face other ages and other peoples have given to the enormous, faceless essence. They have crammed it with human virtues, with rewards and punishments, with certainties. They have given a face to their hopes and fears, they have submitted their anarchy to a rhythm, they have found a higher justification by which to live and labor. They have fulfilled their duty.

23. But today we have gone beyond these needs; we have shattered this particular mask of the Abyss; our God no longer fits under the old features.

24. Our hearts have overbrimmed with new agonies, with new luster and silence. The mystery has grown savage, and God has grown greater. The dark powers ascend, for they have also

grown greater, and the entire human island quakes.

25. Let us stoop down to our hearts and confront the Abyss valiantly. Let us try to mold once more, with our flesh and blood, the new, contemporary face of God.

26. For our God is not an abstract thought, a logical necessity, a high and harmonious structure made of deductions and speculations.

27. He is not an immaculate, neutral, odorless, distilled product of our brains, neither male nor female.

28. He is both man and woman, mortal and immortal, dung and spirit. He gives birth, fecundates, slaughters—death and eros in one—and then he begets and slays once more, dancing spacious beyond the boundaries of a logic which cannot contain the antimonies.

29. My God is not Almighty. He struggles, for he is in peril every moment; he trembles and stumbles in every living thing, and he cries out. He is defeated incessantly, but rises again, full of blood and earth, to throw himself into battle once more.

30. He is full of wounds, his eyes are filled with fear and stubbornness, his jawbones and temples are splintered. But he does not surrender, he ascends; he ascends with his feet, with his hands, biting his lips, undaunted.

31. My God is not All-holy. He is full of cruelty and savage justice, and he chooses the best mercilessly. He is without compassion; he does not trouble himself about men or animals; nor does he care for virtues and ideas. He loves all these for a moment, then smashes them, eternally, and passes on.

32. He is a power that contains all things, that begets all things. He begets them, loves them, and destroys them. And if we say: "Our God is an erotic wind and shatters all bodies that he may drive on," and if we remember that eros always works through blood and tears, destroying every individual without mercy—then we shall approach his dread face a little closer.

33. My God is not All-knowing. His brain is a tangled skin of light and darkness which he strives to unravel in the labyrinth of the flesh.

34. He stumbles and fumbles. He gropes to the right, and turns back; swings to the left, and sniffs the air. He struggles above chaos in anguish. Crawling, straining, groping for un-

numbered centuries, he feels the muddy coils of his brain being slowly suffused with light.

35. On the surface of his heavy, pitch-black head he begins with an indescribable struggle to create eyes by which to see, ears by which to hear.

36. My God struggles on without certainty. Will he conquer? Will he be conquered? Nothing in the Universe is certain; he flings himself into uncertainty; he gambles all his destiny at every moment.

37. He clings to warm bodies; he has no other bulwark. He shouts for help; he proclaims a mobilization throughout the Universe.

38. It is our duty, on hearing his Cry, to run under his flag, to fight by his side, to be lost or to be saved with him.

39. God is imperiled. He is not almighty, that we may cross our hands waiting for certain victory. He is not all-holy, that we may wait trustingly for him to pity and to save us.

40. Within the province of our ephemeral flesh all of God is imperiled. He cannot be saved unless we save him with our own struggles; nor can we be saved unless he is saved.

41. We are one. From the blind worm in the depths of the ocean to the endless arena of the Galaxy, only one person struggles and is imperiled—You. And within your small and earthen breast only one thing struggles and is imperiled—the Universe.

42. We must understand well that we do not proceed from one unity of God to the same unity of God again. We do not proceed from one chaos to another chaos, neither from one light to another light, nor from one darkness to another darkness. What would be the value of our life then? What would be the value of all life?

43. But we set out from an almighty chaos, from a thick abyss of light and darkness tangled. And we struggle—plants, animals, men, ideas—in this momentary passage of individual life, to put in order the Chaos within us, to cleanse the abyss, to work upon as much darkness as we can within our bodies, and to transmute it into light.

44. We do not struggle for ourselves, nor for our race, not even for humanity.

45. We do not struggle for Earth, nor for ideas. All these are the precious yet provisional stairs of our ascending God, and they crumble away as soon as he steps upon them in his ascent.

46. In the smallest lightning flash of our lives, we feel all of God treading upon us, and suddenly we understand; if all of us desire it intensely, if we organize all the visible and invisible powers of earth and fling them upwards, if we all battle together like fellow combatants eternally vigilant—then the Universe might possibly be saved.

47. It is not God who will save us—it is we who will save God, by battling, by creating, by transmuting matter into spirit.

48. But all our struggle may go lost. If we tire, if we grow faint of spirit, if we fall into panic, then the entire Universe becomes imperiled.

49. Life is a crusade in the service of God. Whether we wished to or not, we set out as crusaders to free—not the Holy Sepulchre—but that God buried in matter and in our souls.

50. Every body, every soul is a Holy Sepulchre. Every seed of grain is a Holy Sepulchre; let us free it! The brain is a Holy Sepulchre, God sprawls within it and battles with death; let us run to his assistance!

51. God gives the signal for battle, and I, too, rush to the attack, trembling.

52. Whether I struggle behind as a deserter, or battle valiantly, I know that I shall always fall in battle. But on the first occasion my death would be sterile, for with the destruction of my body, my soul would also be lost and scattered to the winds.

53. On the second occasion, I would descend into earth like a fruit brimming with seed. Though my breath abandon my body to rot, it would organize new bodies and continue the battle.

54. My prayer is not the whimpering of a beggar nor a confession of love. Nor is it the trivial reckoning of a small tradesman: give me and I shall give you.

55. My prayer is the report of a soldier to his general: this is what I did today, this is how I fought to save the entire battle in my own sector, these are the obstacles I found, this is how I plan to fight tomorrow.

56. My God and I are horsemen galloping in the burning

sun or under drizzling rain. Pale, starving, but unsubdued, we ride and converse.

57. "Leader!" I cry. He turns his face toward me, and I shudder to confront his anguish.

58. Our love for each other is rough and ready, we sit at the same table, we drink the same wine in this low tavern of life.

59. As we clink our glasses, swords clash and resound, loves and hates spring up. We get drunk, visions of slaughter ascend before our eyes, cities crumble and fall in our brains, and though we are both wounded and screaming with pain, we plunder a huge Palace.

#### IV. THE SILENCE

The soul of man is a flame, a bird of fire that leaps from bough to bough, from head to head, and that shouts: "I cannot stand still, I cannot be consumed, no one can quench me!"

2. All at once the Universe becomes a tree of fire. Amidst the smoke and the flames, reposing on the peak of conflagration, immaculate, cool, and serene, I hold that final fruit of fire, the Light.

3. From this lofty summit I look on the crimson line which ascends—a tremulous, blood-stained phosphorescence that drags itself like a lovesick insect through the raincool coils of my brain.

4. The ego, race, mankind, earth, theory, action, and God are all phantasms made of loam and brain, good for those simple hearts that live in fear, good for those flatulent souls who imagine they are pregnant.

5. Where do we come from? Where are we going? What is the meaning of this life? That is what every heart is shouting, what every head is asking as it beats on chaos.

6. And a fire within me leaps up to answer: "Fire will surely come one day to purify the earth. Fire will surely come one day to obliterate the earth. This is the Second Coming."

7. "The soul is a flaming tongue that licks and struggles to set the black bulk of the world on fire. One day the entire Universe will become a single conflagration."

8. "Fire is the first and final mask of my God. We dance and weep between two enormous pyres."

9. Our thought and our bodies flash and glitter with reflected light. Between the two pyres I stand serenely, my brain unshaken amid the vertigo and I say:

10. "Time is most short and space most narrow between these two pyres, the rhythm of this life is most sluggish, and I have no time, nor a place to dance in. I cannot wait."

11. Then all at once the rhythm of the earth becomes a vertigo, time disappears, the moment whirls, becomes eternity, and every point in space—insect or star or idea—turns into dance.

12. It was a jail, and the jail was smashed; the dreadful powers within it were freed, and that point of space no longer exists!

13. This ultimate stage of our spiritual exercise is called Silence. Not because its contents are the ultimate, inexpressible despair or the ultimate, inexpressible joy and hope. Nor because it is the ultimate knowledge which does not condescend to speak, or the ultimate ignorance which cannot.

14. Silence means: Every person, after completing his service in all labors, reaches finally the highest summit of endeavor, beyond every labor where he no longer struggles or shouts, where he ripens fully in silence with the entire Universe, indestructibly, eternally.

15. There he merges with the Abyss and nestles within it like the seed of man in the womb of woman.

16. The Abyss is now his wife; he plows her, he opens and devours her vitals, he transmutes her blood, he laughs and weeps, he ascends and descends with her, and he never leaves her.

17. How can you reach the womb of the Abyss to make it fruitful? This cannot be expressed, cannot be narrowed into words, cannot be subjected to laws; every man is completely free and has his own special liberation.

18. No form of instruction exists, no Savior exists to open up the road. No road exists to be opened.

19. Every person, ascending above and beyond his own head, escapes from his small brain, so crammed with perplexities.

20. Within profound Silence, erect, fearless, in pain and in

play, ascending ceaselessly from peak to peak, knowing that the height has no ending, sing this proud and magical incantation as you hang over the Abyss:

1. I believe in one God, defender of the borders, of double descent, militant, suffering, of mighty but not of omnipotent powers, a warrior at the furthest frontiers, commander-in-chief of all the luminous powers, the visible and the invisible.

2 I believe in the innumerable, the ephemeral masks which God has assumed throughout the centuries, and behind his ceaseless flux I discern an indestructible unity.

3. I believe in his sleepless and violent struggle which tames and fructifies the earth as the life-giving fountain of plants, animals, and men.

4. I believe in man's heart, that earthen threshing-floor where, night and day, the defender of the borders fights with death.

5. O Lord, you shout: "Help me! Help me!" You shout, O Lord, and I hear you.

6. Within me all forefathers and all descendants, all races and all earth hear your cry with joy and terror.

7. Blessed be all those who hear and rush to free you, Lord, and who say: "Only you and I exist."

8. Blessed be all those who free you and become united with you, Lord, and who say: You and I are one."

9. And thrice blessed be those who bear on their shoulders and do not buckle under this great, sublime, and terrifying secret:

That even this ONE does not exist!

# THE FOLK-BALLADS OF CRETE: A SURVEY

BY ELIZABETH CONSTANTINIDES

The island of Crete, old in civilization and rich in traditions, has always been fertile ground for Greek folk-poetry. Modern ways, however, and more recently modern technology with its radio and television have invaded even the remoter parts of the island, so that sources of folk song have already dried up and the repertoires of local singers are now greatly diminished. Fortunately, an excellent collection of Cretan folk-songs was made in the nineteenth century by Antonios Jeannaraki, a distinguished philologist of Cretan birth who traveled about his native island, recording the songs as he heard them directly from the lips of about twenty-five singers and musicians. In this century, another native son, Aristides Kriaris, also published a large collection of songs containing many from the Jeannaraki text but including more historical narratives, variants, and some previously unpublished songs. Both collectors took care to preserve the local Cretan idioms.<sup>1</sup>

Even though any classification of Greek folk-songs into separate categories is problematical, scholars have tried a variety of ways. Jeannaraki, for example, divides most Cretan songs under two main headings as to the occasion when they were sung: 1) *tsi tavlas*, "of the table," i.e. sung at a feast of some sort; 2) *tsi xefandosis*, "of the wedding festival," i.e. relating to the processions and other festivities of a wedding. The first category includes, among many other types of song, the longer narratives recounting attested historical events such as revolts, raids, sieges, battles, plagues, and the like. Narratives of another type, which are closer to romance than history, are included under the categories of both *tavlas* and *xefandosis*. (The distinction between romance and history is not always clear nor sometimes even relevant in folk-tradition.) The word now commonly used by Greek folklorists for the fictional narrative is *paraloyi*, a term originally applied by the inhabitants of nineteenth-century Attica

and popularized as a literary term by Nikolaos Politis, the great Greek folklorist. The nearest English equivalent is "ballad"; it is these Cretan ballads that we shall now consider.

Like an English ballad, the Greek *paraloyi* centers on a simple, crucial episode, tells a story tersely and dramatically, through bare dialogue, without comment from the narrator. Like most poetry that is orally transmitted, these narratives are characterized by "formulaic patterns," such as stock descriptions and incremental repetition. Their meter is mainly the fifteen-syllable verse known as the *politikos*, which is common to all Greek lands since Byzantine times. In Crete the *politikos* is either unrhymed or in rhymed couplets. The melodies of these songs are simple, whether sung unaccompanied or to the accompaniment of the traditional Cretan instrument, the *lyra*, a three-stringed fiddle, which is held upright when played, and the *laouto*, or lute.

The range of subjects in the Cretan ballads is on the whole limited. In many instances, Cretan songs are variants of those found in other parts of Greece or even throughout the Balkans, such as the story of the dead brother who rises from the tomb to bring back his sister to their mother, or the sacrificial killing of the masterbuilder's wife during the construction of a bridge. In other instances, as in the ballad of the beautiful Sousa (J 140; K 303),<sup>2</sup> the origin of the story is Crete itself, whence it spread to other areas. To date, about eighty different versions of this ballad have been recorded, primarily from Crete and the islands of the Aegean. A number of songs generally considered to have originated in the Byzantine period, the so-called Aritic songs, describe incidents from the lives of warrior-heroes. A sizable group of songs, some of which are also very old, are descriptions of encounters with Charos, the spirit of Death, and of the dismal lot of the souls in the Underworld (presented in pagan terms). Some songs relate to the life of the sea: for example, the death of sailors far from home, accounts of storms and drownings at sea. Others are intended as humorous character sketches, such as the bad housewife who wastes her husband's substance, or the audacious servant who wants to marry his mistress. Far and away, the largest group of Cretan ballads treats the theme of love, in which the variety of motifs is espe-

cially great. These motifs are not only widespread in Greece but occur in folk material throughout the world.

Many aspects of the general theme of love are developed in the Cretan ballads. The topic of winning a bride appears in the motifs of the abduction of women, the groom's preference for the *koumbára* (bridesmaid) instead of his bride, and the performance of a swimming feat for the hand of a maiden. On the subject of conjugal relations, are ballads of wives who are faithful to husbands long absent or who are put to difficult tasks; of wives who are not faithful; of husbands considered lost who return just in time to prevent the remarriage of their wives. There are ballads of seductions of maidens, of chastity preserved, of hard-hearted lovers of both sexes, of abandoned women, and of lovers' suicides. Under the category of obstacles to love, there are stories about lovers of different religions; under the category of family dishonor avenged, are stories of the killing of a wayward girl by a member of her family.<sup>3</sup>

In this group of songs, the most common motifs are those of the faithful wife and the return and recognition of the husband. The basic story is that the wife (in one instance the *inamorata*) remains faithful to the man, that the man returns and is not at first recognized, but when both are convinced — he of her fidelity, she of his identity — they are reunited. Within this framework are variations in minor motifs.<sup>4</sup> In some versions (e.g., J 300; K 277 and J 127; K 238), the woman will not open the door to the stranger unless the proper signs of recognition are given: he volunteers his knowledge of her garden, of the golden lamp in her room, but she finds neither of these proofs persuasive. Only when he tells her of a mark on an intimate part of her body does she open the door. In another version (J 261; K 296), the husband gives the wife instructions that she must not leave the house for thirty years. She duly obeys, thus surpassing in patience even the illustrious Penelope. After thirty years have elapsed, she goes out to the well, where the returning husband as a stranger meets her and asks for water. He then proceeds to tell her of her husband's death. As she is wiping her tears, she takes a good look at the stranger and realizes that he is her husband. One ballad (J 289; cf. K 300) emphasizes not so much the scene of recognition as the trials endured by the long-suffering

wife during her husband's absence. At his instructions, she has been assigned to a harsh life away from home, tending sheep. When the husband returns, he finds her at her task, but he hardly recognizes her for her sunburnt skin! Perhaps the most interesting combination of motifs is in the ballad (J 300; K 277) which tells of the husband's return, test, recognition, and welcome, but ends with a description of the husband as cold and sleeping a heavy sleep:

"Cold, very cold you seem to me, unlike my love,  
How heavy, o how heavy is your sleep, young man."

In fact, Charos, Death himself, has lain beside her, having come, of course, to claim her:

No sooner had she said these words than daybreak came. She turned and saw that it was Death lay sleeping there.

The recognition motif in general recurs frequently in the ballads, just as in ancient myth: a mother recognizes her daughter by the embroidery the girl sews (J 272; K 376); a sister recognizes her brother by a birth-mark (K 230); or, in another variant, a brother recognizes his sister by a story she tells of their parents (J 268).

In contrast to the tales of faithful wives, are a number of Cretan ballads that tell of unfaithful wives. In one ballad (J 267; cf. K 329), the wife falls in love with her brother-in-law. She suggests that he pick a quarrel with her husband and thus find an excuse to kill him. The brother-in-law, however, kills the treacherous wife instead:

"If I lose a brother, a second brother I'll never have.  
If I lose a brother's wife, a second brother's wife  
I'll have."

And then he drew his dagger from its silver sheath;  
He raised it high and plunged it in her heart.

Surprisingly enough, this is the only instance when the unfaithful

wife is punished so drastically. The adulteresses of other ballads escape scot-free, or with a mere beating at the hands of the husband: one (J 270; K 340) even flaunts her infidelity in her husband's face:

"And I produced a son to keep me company,  
Like it or not, you cuckold, like it or not, you dunce,  
Pull in your horns and rock the baby."

The ballad of Sousa (or Sousanna) combines the motifs of forbidden love and the avenging of dishonor. The setting of the ballad's story — the city of Heraklion — and the many variants recorded in Crete, as well as the pattern of its dispersion, all point to its Cretan origin. We also have good evidence that it was first composed between 1669 and 1679 — during the early days of the Turkish occupation.<sup>5</sup> The heroine Sousa falls in love with a Turkish lad. When her brother returns from abroad and finds her with her lover, he stabs her in the breast. Her father takes her to the doctor, but in vain — she dies, and her lover commits suicide on her grave. (J 140; K 303). In another song of illicit love and vengeance (J 286; cf. K 372), the wayward heroine is beaten to the point of death by twelve brothers, eighteen cousins, her mother, and her father — a priest, no less! As the girl lies dying, her parents mourn for her, but ironically only she complains against the injustice of her death. The cruelty depicted in this ballad is exceptional among the Cretan songs. A more laudable example of brotherly concern is the ballad of Tzanakis (J 14; K 16), who kills a Turk when the latter attempts to abduct his sister forcibly. One of the most interesting instances of the union of a Turk and a Greek woman is the ballad of the priest's daughter: the Turks who attack Rethymno carry off the daughter of a priest, take her as a prisoner to Constantinople, where she becomes the wife of the "King" or Pasha. The Cretan scholar M. I. Manousakas says that behind this story lie real persons and events: the enslavement of a small girl named Evmenia Vergitsi during the Turkish invasion of 1646, her forced adoption of Islam and her subsequent rise to power as the favorite wife of Sultan Mohammed IV who ruled in 1648-1687.<sup>6</sup>

The abduction of a woman — a subject of Greek poetry since

the Trojan War — has literary parallels throughout world literature. In Crete, however, the "stealing," as it is called, of the girl, whether she is willing or not, still occurs. In the ballad of Lenio (J 245; K 298), whatever may be the universality of the motif, the details are strictly Cretan. Lenio (a variant of Helen) is from Episkopi, a large village of the lowlands to the west of Rethymno. She is accosted at the well by a man of Sphakia. (The Sphakians are known for their fierce pride and hot temper.) Lenio is too shy to speak to the Sphakian, whereupon he asks her father, a priest, for her hand. The priest curtly refuses him. As would be expected from a man of Sphakia, he returns with a group of armed men and announces that he will take Lenio willy-nilly:

"Open up, reverend, your son-in-law has come,  
With all his kin, to take away the lady Lenio,  
Like it or not!" "Away with you," the answer came,  
Else you'll feel my fire, which will blast your heart!"  
The angry men of Sphakia draw forth their loaded arms  
To take away the lady Lenio, white as a dove.  
Five and forty rounds they fire into the door,  
And begin their search within and without.

They rouse her roughly out of bed and prepare to carry her off. The girl weeps — unlike her famous namesake from ancient Sparta — and with a premonition that she will die on the journey, bids her mother a sad farewell. A week later comes a message that Lenio is dying: her mother goes to her, raises a lament for her, and curses her abductor.

I, myself, have heard accounts of abductions by Cretans in recent years, which parallel closely the details in this ballad: the unwillingness of the woman, the appearance at night of armed men (often relatives of the abductor), the riddling of the door with bullets as a piece of bravado as well as a threat, and the sad outcome. In one instance that was described to me, the young woman, though eventually rescued by her own people, died not long after, and many said that her death was brought on by the shock of her abduction. Some readers may remember the scandal caused some thirty years ago when a brother of a Cretan member

of the Greek Parliament named Kefaloyiannis abducted the daughter of another Parliamentarian. The local authorities frown on such doings and mete out due punishment — if, that is, they can catch the malefactors — but I have never heard a Cretan villager speak of such abductions as we in this country would speak of kidnapping or rape. The assumption is that even if the girl is initially unwilling, after she is duly married to her abductor, things will work themselves out. These ballads, after all, reflect a more primitive and more heroic society. Another group of ballads is marked by the powerful presence of the supernatural. Crete also provides versions of two ballads which are widespread among Greeks and the Balkan peoples, namely the songs known popularly as "The Bridge of Arta" and "The Dead Brother." The former, entitled in the Cretan version "The Wife of the Masterbuilder," (J 271; K 374) tells the story as follows: a bridge is being built over the black river. A bird tells the builders that if a human being is not built into the foundation the bridge will not stand. The human must not be maimed in any way and cannot be a wayfarer — indeed, must be the beautiful wife of the masterbuilder. The masterbuilder, overcome with sorrow, goes home and weeps. When his wife asks him what is troubling him, he replies that his ring has fallen into the foundation. The wife volunteers to retrieve it for him and adorns herself for the task:

She puts on all her finery from morn till eve,  
From eve till morn till following midday bright.  
The sun shines from her forehead, the moon from her breast,  
And her beautiful brow is black as the wing of the crow.

She arrives at the bridge and goes down to look for the ring. Thereupon, her husband and the other workmen bury her alive.

This ballad is a clear account of human sacrifice. Such a ritual in Greek society has been extinct for many centuries. Even in ancient Greece, it was rarely practiced during the classical period and was generally considered abhorrent, as is attested, to cite only one example, by the later version of the Iphigenia story. Though there has been no record of human sacrifice in Greece during more recent times, a strong belief still survives

in many areas that the local spirit of a place must be appeased by some sort of living sacrifice for the encroachment made on his territory, and that the local spirit is thereby induced to be a protector or guardian of the structure. The sacrifice of an animal is considered sufficient, but in some instances the shadow or some personal possession of a man must be built into the foundations, the man then being assured of an imminent death.<sup>7</sup> The bird in this ballad who gives the command for the sacrifice of the masterbuilder's wife is in other versions called the spirit — the *stibio* — of the bridge, originally most likely the spirit of the water, or the river god. A bird in Greek folk-song, as in ancient belief, is often a messenger from the world of divine beings. In Crete, the incident which this ballad describes, was considered to have taken place in the middle of the last century, during the construction of a bridge over a torrent near Canea, where the local inhabitants said that a dragon would creep over the bridge at night and destroy what had been built during the day. In this Cretan version of the ballad, particular emphasis is placed on the shining beauty and ornaments of the victim — a "blameless" or "perfect" sacrifice, as the ancients termed it, a necessary offering to placate the demanding water-dragon.

Similar local water-spirits, though clearly more malevolent since they demand not one but many lives, inhabit wells. In more than one Greek ballad, such spirits who draw young men to their deaths, sometimes appear as beautiful maidens weeping for the loss of a ring — again the motif of the lost ring. But when the young man climbs down into the well to fetch the ring, he learns too late that he has been sent to his death by a dragon (J 72; cf. K 320).

Another ballad widely known throughout Greece tells the story of the dead brother. In the Cretan version (J 293; K 221), a mother with nine sons and one daughter, Aretousa, is persuaded by the youngest son, Costandis, to allow Aretousa to be married far away in Salonika. Costandis promises that he will bring his sister back if her mother ever needs her. Time passes; all nine brothers die. The mother stands over Costandis' grave and curses him for depriving her of her daughter. Costandis rises from the grave, transforms the tomb into a horse, and rides off to fetch his sister. She, unaware that Costandis is a dead man,

agrees to ride back with him. On the way, she is unsettled by a talking bird who says that a dead man is riding with a beautiful girl. The rider vanishes when he reaches the cemetery, but Are-tousa reaches her mother's house and proving her identity, is joyfully admitted. But in the next moment both mother and daughter die.

The dead brother in this song is not a ghost but a dead body revivified — a revenant, what the Greeks call *vrykólavas*, in Cretan dialect *katahanás*. In this instance, the revenant returns because his mother cursed him and, as we know from another version of the ballad, has prayed that his body would not dissolve in the grave. Even as late as the nineteenth century, belief in the awesome power of *katahanádes*, always considered malevolent, was widespread among Cretan peasants. An abbot of a monastery in Sphakia describes the fear of the population for these revenants, who, as he says, are considered to be dead bodies possessed by an evil spirit. They run about wildly by night, causing panic and death to those they meet and can only be put to rest by the offices of a priest. J. C. Lawson has collected, from many regions of Greece, a number of hair-raising accounts of how in the not-too-distant past, supposedly undissolved bodies were treated — exhumed, hacked to bits, and cremated.<sup>8</sup>

Belief in revenants is recorded throughout world literature. The ballad "Lenore," by the German poet Bürger in 1773—highly important in the history of European Romanticism—was based on folk traditions of the author's native land. He describes just such a rider, risen from the grave, carrying off a beautiful maiden — a lover returning to claim his betrothed. Folk tradition in many lands preserves similar stories of preternatural horsemen who bring death or destruction. In Hebrew mythology, Death comes astride a pale horse in the Apocalypse. Similarly, in Greece Charos or Death, is often represented as a rider who piles his victims across his mount; a comic version in American folklore is the tale of Ichabod Crane (as related by Washington Irving), who thought he saw the legendary horseman of Sleepy Hollow in old New York State. The *katahanás* of Crete is every bit as fearful as any of these preternatural riders.

In summary, then, the chief characteristics of the Cretan ballad are as follows. The majority are tales of love; in this

respect, they resemble the songs of the Dodecanese.<sup>9</sup> The ballads of Lenio and Sousa are certainly examples of local provenance, although their themes are universal. Other ballads found in Crete with only a limited diffusion in the nearby islands or the Peloponnese, are, as S. Baud Bovy shows, probably also of Cretan origin. Such is the ballad of the girl unjustifiably beaten to death by her family. Crete seems to have been a center of creativity for folk poetry during the period of the Venetian occupation (13th to mid-17th century) just as it was for high literature. Scholars who have studied these songs see the influence of Venetian mores and Western romances and drama in many of them. Not surprising is that the same cultural milieu which produced the literary masterpieces *Erotokritos* and *Erofili* should have also produced, on the more popular level, the many ballads on the theme of love. Relatively few ballads can be dated with any certainty as products of the 18th and 19th centuries.<sup>10</sup> Local beliefs and customs are reflected even in those ballads that originated elsewhere or that derived from earlier times. The popular culture of Crete is undoubtedly amply represented in the abundant treasure of the Cretan folk-song.

## N O T E S

<sup>1</sup> See Anton Jeannaraki, *Kretas Volkslieder* (Wiesbaden: Martin Sändig, 1967, reprinted from the Leipzig edition of 1876); and Aristidis Kriaris, *Pleres Sylloge Kretikon Demotikon Asmaton* (Athens: Frantzeskakis & Kaïtatzis, 1920), a much enlarged edition of an earlier collection. Of the two, Jeannaraki is obviously the more scholarly and reliable. There are a number of smaller collections of Cretan folk-songs such as those of Sofia Papadaki for the region of Sitia and of Irini Spandonidi for the area of Sphakia. Additional material, of course, is being published continually and many unpublished songs are found in the folklore archives of the Academy of Athens. The most detailed discussion in English of the origins and dating of Cretan folk-songs and their relation to similar Greek and non-Greek material is found in Gareth Morgan's study, "Cretan Poetry: Sources and Inspiration; ch. 1, 'The Folksongs,'" *Kretika Chronica*, vol. 14 (1960), pp. 7-68.

<sup>2</sup> For the reader who may wish to consult the two large collections mentioned above, in this and similar notations I refer to Jeannaraki (J) and Kriaris (K). The references to Jeannaraki are *song listings*, to Kriaris, *page numbers*.

<sup>3</sup>The following contain examples of these motifs:

faithful wives: J 300 (K 277); J 261 (K 296); J 119 (K 216)

unfaithful wives: J 270 (K 340); J 267 (K 329); J 103 (K 287)

seduction of maiden: J 13 (K 13); J 286 (cf. K 372)

chastity preserved: J 294 (K 270)

hard-hearted lover: J 129 (K 240); J 131 (K 210)

abandoned woman: J 296 (cf. K 246); J 262 (cf. K 256)

lover's suicide: J 131 (K 210); J 140 (K 303)

obstacle of religion: J 132 (K 250)

For a listing of folk-motifs world-wide, see Stith Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature*, 6 vols. Needless to say, motifs common to folk-literature are also found in the high literature of many nations.

<sup>4</sup>S. Baud-Bovy, *La Chanson Populaire Grecque du Dodecanèse* (Paris, 1936), pp. 227-228, discusses these motifs.

<sup>5</sup>For a detailed discussion of the ballad of Sousa, see E. I. Doulgerakis, "To Kretikon Demodes Asma tes Sousannas," *Kretika Chronika*, vol. 9 (1955), pp. 335-376.

<sup>6</sup>M. I. Manousakas, "He Rethemniotissa Soultana Evmenia Bergitse," *Kretika Chronika*, vol. 5 (1951), pp. 349-384.

<sup>7</sup>Many a modern Greek peasant still believes (or, at least, until recently still believed) in a great variety of supernatural beings, as attested in the work of J. C. Lawson, *Modern Greek Folklore and Ancient Greek Tradition*. Lawson mentions this and many other specific examples of belief in *stibia* and *katahanádes* (cited below). The Cretan example I mentioned of the *stibió* at the bridge is N. Politis, *Melete epi tou Biou Neoteron Hellenon*, p. 141.

<sup>8</sup>*Op. cit.* (note 7).

<sup>9</sup>See Baud-Bovy, *op. cit.* (note 4), pp. 303-304.

<sup>10</sup>See Morgan, *op. cit.* (note 1), pp. 34 ff.

## ELLI ALEXIOU: An Informal Portrait

BY DEBORAH TANNEN

How did a woman born in Crete in 1894 become an outstanding figure in Greek letters, the author of some 100 stories, 6 novels, and countless articles, plays, studies, translations, and memoirs? Today, at 84, Eli Alexiou is the center of left-leaning literary activity in Athens. Her Thursday evening salons attract aspiring and established participants in all the arts. She divorced her writer husband, Vaso Daskalakis; she set off at the age of 51 to study in Paris. Then, instead of returning to Greece, she lived for thirteen years in the Eastern bloc countries, supervising school for Greek children there after the bitter Greek Civil War. I was excited at the prospect of meeting this woman, as I approached the building where she lives in Athens.

I was surprised to see the name, ELLI ALEXIOU, printed neatly under the plastic nameplate by the bell. I had expected the secrecy of American celebrities; Alexiou must be inundated by curious admirers, full of questions about herself, her work, her sister Galateia, her brother-in-law Nikos Kazantzakis. The door was already buzzing as a voice came fuzzily through the speaker: "Push it!"

I had an image of old Greek women who are heavy and wrinkled, who wear formless black dresses and black stockings. The woman who opened the door for me fit that image. Short and rotund, she moved with difficulty under the burden of barrel-like weight around her middle. Her eyes were red under thick glasses, and her face whiskered. I extended my hand to greet her, but she did not unclasp hers. Instead, she led to a sitting room, calling, "Mrs. Alexiou. . . ."

In a moment Elli Alexiou comes across the room to greet me; her soft cheeks puffing out in a smile show a neat row of small teeth slanting slightly inward. She is heavy, too, under the ill-fitting black skirt and fraying dark grey sweater, but the

weight seems not to burden her at all. She takes my hand and draws me to her study.

In the small room, piled with books and papers, are several desks and surrounding shelves. Letters and cards are strewn about, from London, from Moscow. On the walls are framed, handwritten manuscripts and letters, and some paintings. Many are portraits of Alexiou, where I look for a glimpse of the young Alexiou. All show the same face, the same short pony-tail tied with a ribbon at the top of her head and separated into three parts pinned down; only the hair framing her face was thicker and browner then.

Alexiou brings me a cup of hot milk with sugar. In response to my questions, she enunciates carefully, deferring to my foreigner's Greek, but she is quick to move on once she has understood my question. Clasping her hands and drawing up her shoulders decisively, she says, "Yes, good," impatient to launch her response.

Alexiou hates to waste time. During my second interview, she places a pan of beans on her lap ("*koukia*," she explains, "from Crete") and shells them as we talk. She complains a certain chore "ate up" her whole day! On one occasion I woke her by calling at 9:30 a.m.; she cut short my apology: "It's late! My goodness! I MUST get up!" On another occasion, she dismisses with a wave of her hand a critic's assertion that the fame of the Alexiou family as writers has been overshadowed by Kazantzakis: "*Dhe variese*," meaning something like, "Isn't there too much to do without fussing about THAT?"

On my last visit before my return to the States I bring a plant as a gift. This time I meet the granddaughter of the real-life Zorba, the daughter of the old woman who had let me in on my first visit. Alexiou explains to her niece that this is a bulb which blooms only once. As they hover about the flower, the niece warns, "Don't keep it in your room when you sleep, Aunt."

"You're right," says Alexiou. "The radiator isn't good for it."

"Not for the plant, for you!" the younger woman tells her, with the conviction that comes of having heard the warning repeated all her life. "It's heavy."

"Ach," scoffs Alexiou, her eyes twinkling in my direction.

Alexiou must have heard the same warnings, growing up on the island of Crete when the population was still half Turkish. Where did she learn to question accepted truths? What thought could the Greeks have had for women's rights when the nation was so recently liberated from centuries of Turkish rule? Alexiou's father, who gave up a medical career to become a writer and publisher, used to make fun of Elli's older sister Galateia, calling her "George Sand" because she was always scribbling. But Galateia wrote anyway, encouraged by the young man she later secretly married, Nikos Kazantzakis. And her youngest sister Elli wrote, too. I try politely to ask about these matters.

But Alexiou is not interested in talking about herself. "My life didn't present anything earth-shaking that would be worth stressing particularly. And those things that are usually characterized as significant, like my divorce from Daskalakis, or my 17-year self-imposed exile or the successive deaths of my loved ones during my absence, which separated for so many years four siblings that loved each other so much—and I lost them one after another, without finding myself near them at the last moments—all this is sad and cost me days and nights of great sorrow, but all is basically part of the natural course of life. Of course, expatriotism and its consequences are tragic circumstances suffered everywhere, and to an infinitely more tragic degree in the countries dependent on the criminal Anglo-American hypocrisy and distortion. Consider Indonesia, Korea, Vietnam . . . our suffering is nothing compared to the extermination of these heroic peoples."

Again and again, I want to discuss the personal, but Alexiou turns the discussion to the political. On one visit I left with her four questions that reflected my interests: (1) How did she manage to become a writer in a society that expected women to be only wives and mothers? (2) Did she experience any conflict with her husband because of her writing? (3) Did she find conditions for women different in the Communist countries? (4) Did she find the condition of women in Greece changed when she returned?

On my next visit I saw that she had typed out four pages for me, which she read aloud. She had dispensed with my ques-

tions in one page: (1 and 2) No, she had encountered no obstacles to her writing career; (3) in the socialist countries, sex plays no role; (4) woman's place in Greece is better now but not good. Then she launched into lyrical praise of the countries where she had lived, in contrast with what she found on returning to Greece. She read a fifth question: "What position do you take on the Solzhenitsyn issue?" She added, "Well, you didn't ask me, but it's very important."

The capitalist press, she says, has seized on the Solzhenitsyn issue for lack of more concrete criticism to heap on the Soviet Union, there being no Watergate nor street crime there. Solzhenitsyn doesn't appreciate the accomplishments of the Communist system which made a "Superpower" of a country that was "the scapegoat of Europe" only fifty years ago. "Solzhenitsyn only knows how to talk about his little books," she says. "The poor fellow doesn't see beyond his own nose."

Alexiou has posed and answered sixth and seventh questions, too, about the perfidious foreign influence in Greece: "Whiskey, coca-cola, chewing gum and pizza have supplanted our famous wines, our pure lemon and orange drinks from fresh fruit, the aromatic *masticha* from Chios." She also complains about the materialistic values she abhors in Greece: "He's found a good wife," people say; "she has two apartment houses aside from her villa in Lagonissi."

Alexiou's words are harsh, but no bitterness is in her voice as no heaviness is in her step. She "was shaken," she says, by only one incident in her life: her arrest and incarceration on charges related to her activities during the Civil War. The government of Carmanlis had fallen, and its successor had amassed a "swelling file, full of acts that I had perpetrated" and "statements I had made," all fabricated by who-knows-what infernal types, of "treasonous activities I had carried out." One prosecution witness, a policeman swearing about some statements Alexiou had purportedly made in Bulgaria, testified that he had heard a woman's voice, and his superior had said to him, "Do you hear that voice? It's Elli Alexiou's."

After producing witnesses and evidence proving that she had not even been in Greece during that time, she was acquitted. However, she says, "There has remained with me an impression

of the jungle. That we live in a jungle and that our lives and honor are in the hands of unscrupulous monsters. Since they didn't hesitate to fabricate such groundless lies about me, whose life and convictions were always in the spotlight and known to everybody, I perceived how they sent many thousands of patriots of the resistance to the firing squad."

The only other time a note of cynicism colors her speech is when Alexiou tells of having sold her jewelry because she and her husband were having financial troubles. "I've always loved jewelry," she says. "It's a human weakness. I got it from my mother. Even now, I never go out without rings on my fingers." She holds out her hands, now bare, as if they were ringed. She does not regret having sold the jewelry, she says, except that she went alone, without telling anyone, and received less than they were worth. "And Daskalakis didn't appreciate it," she says. "Men never do. They only value what they can see and touch and show, so they can say, 'This was a gift from Alexiou.'" She illustrates her meaning by moving a small statue towards me, pressing it firmly against the table to make her point about its solidity.

This tone does not prevail when she answers whether her husband resented her writing. "Quite the contrary," she says, surprising me, as usual. "I owe everything to him. Even the fact that I write. He insisted, he *ordered* that I write down a story I had told him, threatening that he wouldn't return home if I didn't write it. That was my first story. That's how I started." As to the same question about Kazantzakis and Galateia, Alexiou asserts that Kazantzakis admired and encouraged his wife's writing. It was Galateia who disdained his. "She didn't respect him so much as a writer," her sister tells me. "She called him only a great scholar and student, determined in his work, dedicated to his work. But his work is not inspired by real situations. While life is full of heroes, he chases heroes of the past: Buddha, Moses, Constantine Paleologos. She said to him, 'Life is overflowing with heroism and heroic elements. You—what are you doing? Make up your own heroes! You find them ready-made—like Christ!'"

Elli, however, does not agree with her sister's judgment. "Writers are varied," she says, "and there are various kinds of

inspiration. Even Shakespeare used old stories. You can take an old story, if you're this kind of writer—I'm not—and put modern ideas in it. Because ideas are repeated in different form: want of tenderness, enmity, determination, callousness, egoism, jealousy. But we're going to consider them in a modern way."

"I manage a story like a house," she says, using the Greek verb for "manage" that also means "to keep house." The stories come from her life experience, "organized as required." The early stories and novels are based on her years, teaching children in Crete and Athens. It is hard to believe that this smiling, lively woman is, indeed, the author of the piercingly sad stories I have read. If in our discussions she was reticent about her personal struggles, preferring to talk about political struggles, her stories are intensely personal, portraying the private agonies of everyday heroes—especially children. Her early collection of stories about school children in Crete is called *Hard Struggles for a Small Life*. Even if she declines to characterize it that way, Elli Alexiou's has been a hard struggle and no small life.

## THEY WERE ALL TO BE PITIED: A Short Story

BY ELLI ALEXIOU

*translated by Deborah Tannen*

Our driver's daughter, Elpida, a little girl with a heart condition, sometimes managed to sneak in to play with me: the daughter of the ones who climbed into the carriage, leaving Elpida, weak and sickly, to stare at us from below.

I was very mean then. I was always doing spiteful things. I remember them: I even remember my words, but second-hand, as my nanny told them to me over and over, and I listened with relish because she made them sound like fairy tales: "And the good little girl went up the kitchen stairs and threw kisses to the maids. . . ."

I wasn't throwing kisses. Na, na, na—that's what I did from the stairs.

Where the stairs led I do not know. But as soon as the maids sat down to eat lunch, I sat on the landing and waited. Before starting, they crossed themselves and said something about God.

"Na, na, na to God!"

"God forgive us, God forgive us," said my nanny, and leaving the table, she knelt and crossed herself, and then sat down, changing the conversation. "Sit down, my darling. Pull your little skirt down."

Na, na! I pulled my skirt way up.

My nanny loved me very much. Look how affectionately she's embracing me in the photograph. My parents would have loved me, too, but they were just children themselves and had been forced to get married.

"What do you think I do all day in this cage?" Mama said to Papa. "I look for an opening somewhere, so I can escape."

"Don't worry, I do the same thing. . . ."

They also had me.

"Kiss me," Mama said to me, "so Papa will see us and be jealous."

"Mama is jealous," Papa said to me, "because you love me more."

They brought me toys—sometimes Papa, sometimes Mama. "See what I brought you? Now do you love me more?"

But I did not care about the toys at all. They did not interest me. From the window I saw children in the street, holding dolls, kissing them, talking to them. I knew they were fake. I envied the children who held real kittens, live puppies. But these were not permitted in our house. So the only thing I enjoyed was bothering people, kicking, and saying bad words, so there would be a fuss in the house.

In the afternoon bells rang. The maids, who were holding thread and mending their aprons, immediately pinned the thread to the cloth and hid the sewing in the drawer. I could not understand what the bells had to do with the thread. Why did the maids get so scared and run to hide it in the drawer in such a hurry? At the same time Nanny took the censer and filled the whole room with incense. Then, before leaving it with the icons where it belonged in the company of the saints, she took down an icon, sometimes a woman, sometimes a man, sometimes a horseman, sometimes a figure holding books or holding the Infant . . . so as not to always take down the same one, I said to myself, and make the others jealous. She brought it close to her lips and crossed herself.

"Why are you crossing yourself, Nanny?"

"You do it, too, my darling. Tomorrow is the feast of Saint Barbara, who saves people with her blessing. Cross yourself, my precious, and kiss it." She brought the icon close to my lips.

"Na, na, Saint Barbara!" I spit and cursed at the icon as she started in:

"Dear Christ and Holy Mother and blessed saints. . . . Please forgive us!" And she crossed herself twice and knelt and begged forgiveness while I laughed and made fun of her.

I did not play with toys because I did not know how—the tiny furniture and serving sets. I ripped the dolls open to see what they had in their bellies. I wondered a lot about my own belly, where the lollipops and chocolate went and what happened to them. I liked the tiny glittering eyes of the rabbits; I collected them in a box.

"And now how will the rabbit see?"

"But they aren't eyes; they're beads."

One day Mama brought me a toy rabbit that jumped by itself. She cried when she gave it to me; its fur was wet from her tears. That afternoon Papa brought me a little bear.

"See what a pretty bear?"

"It's not pretty. Its ears are too small!" I took a pair of scissors and cut them off.

"Darling, why are you cutting its ears off?"

"Because they're too little. If they were big I wouldn't cut them off."

"But that's how bears are. They have little ears."

"Na, then let them not have any!"

Mama and Papa did not talk to each other any more. Nanny said Mama did not go to sleep; she just stayed up all night in the dining room. And she cried all the time. I told her she should not cry; she should laugh. She stared at me and started again. She kissed me and covered me with tears. She wanted to go to her mother but my grandmother would not allow her.

My aunt Hermione used to come, if my grandmother did not, and would keep her company.

"Who ever heard of marrying us, without asking us if we loved each other?"

"What do you think love is? That's how the best and most aristocratic marriages are made. What do children know about people? But the parents inquire; they investigate. Each of you is an only child, with a lot of property. What did you want, to break up your property?"

"What best marriages?"

"Kings, my dear, all marry that way."

"And shall I never love?"

"You will love your husband . . . in time. Don't be in a hurry."

"What do you mean, in time? Since I haven't started to love him by now, I'd better go back to my mother. . . ."

One cold and rainy evening, as the maids were preparing sweets because the next day would be Papa's nameday, and my grandmother had sent us a cake as big as the table, Mama put on her black fur and left us. She wept and cried aloud as she

was kissing me, Nanny said, but I was sleeping deeply and did not wake up.

"I'm going, Nanny, and as I told you, as soon as she wakes up, bring her to me . . . and every morning, as soon as he leaves, take her and bring her to me."

"Sit down, my lady, my lovely little lady; be patient, wait at least until dawn," Nanny pleaded with her, and she cried, too. "Wait for the rain to stop, for the cold to pass."

"If you only knew how cold it is here, what winter! Here in my heart. I feel the frost of the house."

"Let's pray together."

"Since I left my mother, I haven't felt warmth."

The loneliness in the house deepened. Nanny never took me to Mama. One afternoon of those first days of our loneliness when Papa came home, I had hidden behind the door as I did every afternoon, to scare him. I would shout, "Boo!" and he would put a doll in my hands. This time the doll seemed almost alive. It was a big smiling little girl dressed in lace and ruffles. He had ordered it from Germany. Its eyes opened and closed, and if I tipped it forward and straightened it up, it cried, "Mama." I wanted to be its mother, because it did not have one either. Its hands held a gold harp. I wound up the key in the back under the little vest, and the tiny delicate fingers moved up and down along the harp; a sweet song, Shubert's "Little Rose," filled the room. Days passed; I grew accustomed to the doll's company. At night I took it with me, and Nanny made it say "Mama" one or two times as she covered me. I would say goodnight to it and go to sleep.

One afternoon the driver's daughter, Elpida, came to our house. During those days Nanny let her come. My name was Elpida, too, but my mother called me *Eda* and my father called me *Elpis*, so as not to confuse us. Elpida saw the doll and was beside herself. I made it call me "Mama" and play the harp. She was bewildered. Something must have happened to her weak heart, because her bony little face turned completely white. With a trembling hand she reached to caress the doll's cheek. What got into me then. . . . What got into me!

"You like it, don't you? You like it, eh?" I asked her roughly.

"I like it. I like it very much," she whispered timidly.

"It's pretty, isn't it? It's pretty?" I asked more roughly.

"Very pretty . . . , " and her purple lips trembled.

"Eh, na, na, since you like it! Na, na, na, since it's pretty!" I threw the doll down, and as Shubert played, I jumped on it, stamping and kicking. I pulled its gold curls, its blue and gold silk lace.

Elpida let out a strange, strained, inhuman noise and flung herself over the doll. Frightened, I ran to Nanny. They came and took Elpida in their arms. They took her to the driver's house at the edge of the garden, but she was dead. She had died as she lay on top of the doll.

When they took Elpida away, I started to cry, too. I picked up the doll and held her in my arms. I turned her on her stomach and straightened her up; I wanted her to call me "Mama," but she did not make a sound. Again I tipped and straightened her. Nothing. Her voice was gone. The next day I tried again. The first night Nanny had said to me, "Go on, sleep now. By tomorrow she will have recovered. She will have forgotten." But the doll never spoke again. Never again did she call me "Mama." She played "Little Rose" on the harp, but I did not want to hear it.

Some sixty years have passed. They have all died: Papa, Mama, Aunt Hermione. . . . They'll be giving their gifts to the good-natured daughter of the driver in the other world. I'm an old woman, too, always lonely and helpless. No one has ever called me "Mama." Many nights, sleepless nights, my mind returns to those buried, grief-stricken years.

They were all to be pitied: Papa, Mama, Nanny, Elpida. I often cry for them, but even more for myself.

## REVIEW OF BOOKS

YANNIS RITSOS, *Eighteen Short Songs of the Bitter Motherland*, translated from the Greek by Amy Mims, with illustrations by the poet, edited with an Introduction by Theofanis G. Stavrou. Minneapolis: The North Central Publishing Company, 1974.

For this first of a series of well-edited, attractively-printed, illustrated and bound little volumes, those interested in modern Greek intellect should be thankful to the judgment, scholarship and taste of Professor Stavrou of the University of Minnesota. Yannis Ritsos is an excellent choice to initiate the series. This volume contains a bilingual presentation of eighteen short, jewel-like poems of Ritsos; none exceeds the two couplets of fifteen-syllable rhyming iambic verse, much in the style of the popular klephtic songs, songs of freedom whose language, tone and manner they creatively echo. Unfailing is the poet's own masterful skill; his original, powerful, suggestive phrasing and imagery which say much in laconic, astonishing beauty. According to the Introduction, the volume includes several poems written in the islands of Lesvos and Samos where Ritsos was exiled and put in isolation by the military junta which ruled Greece in the late sixties and early seventies.

The spirit that inspires these poems is of an undiminished faith in *Romiosyne*, a heroic attitude, enduring yet resisting all the pain

of war and social injustice, a faith in the beauty of life and in man's right for freedom as life's highest blessing. The Introduction tells much about Ritsos' stormy life and temperament, about his sufferings and his poetic accomplishments that have won him wide recognition and popularity in his country and abroad. Louis Aragon has called Ritsos "the greatest living poet of our time."

As deeply ingrained as these poems are in the imagistic and musical power of their original language, to attempt to translate them is to attempt the impossible. Their lyric quality and epigrammatic compactness require a first-rate poet's skill to transfer in terms of approximate equivalents, if at all. Amy Mims is unquestionably faithful in her literal translations—indeed, not much more than literally faithful, but that is already a considerable accomplishment.



KIMON FRIAR, *The Spiritual Odyssey of Nikos Kazantzakis: A Talk*, edited with an introduction by Theofanis G. Stavrou. Minneapolis: The North Central Publishing Company, 1979.

This is the second volume in the series edited by Professor Stavrou, centering on Modern Greek writers. It contains "the First Annual Public Lecture in Modern Greek Studies" as delivered by Kimon

Friar at the University of Minnesota in May 1978, on the occasion of the first celebration of Greek letters in that university. Also celebrated in that gathering was the dedication to the O. Meredith Wilson Library of the late Basil Laourdas' Modern Greek book collection.

The publishers are certainly privileged to present the talk which Mr. Friar delivered for years and with tremendous success all through Greece and in several American universities and to audiences throughout the country. It contains the quintessence of Friar's intimate friendship and creative cooperation with Kazantzakis, which produced the masterful English translation of *The Odyssey: A Modern Sequel* as well as of other works of Kazantzakis. As monumental as the translation of that *Odyssey* has been, equally monumental is this talk that has helped to raise the comparatively unknown poet, Kazantzakis, to world-wide recognition. That translation also established Friar as the supreme interpreter and foremost authority on Kazantzakis.

The talk, as delivered at Minnesota and printed in this volume, has all the improvements and thoughtful enrichments out of its several deliveries and the author's further ponderings on its essence. Valuable attachments to the talk are the additional materials that the editor thought wise to include: letters of appreciation Friar received from Kazantzakis in the years of the titanic translatory undertaking, as well as a good selection of comments made by critics on Friar's masterful accomplishment.

NIKOS KAZANTZAKIS, *The Suffering God: Selected Letters to Galateia and to Papastefanou*, as translated by Philip Ramp and Katerina Anghelaki Rooke, and introduced by Katerina Anghelaki Rooke. New Rochelle: Caratzas Bros., 1979.

These letters were written from 1920 to 1924, highly critical years for Greece, when that country experienced the tragic catastrophe of its communities in Asia Minor (1922). In those years, Kazantzakis himself had left his country to sojourn in Vienna and then in Berlin at a time when Europe as a whole, but more particularly Germany, after World War I, was in great economic, social and political crisis, and was going through great fermentation and upheaval under the impact of rising Marxism and of the Russian Revolution.

Much embittered by the political and intellectual situation in his country, Kazantzakis was then to leave behind him not only his fatherland but also his early, Greek-minded, nationally and traditionally, aristocratically-oriented creativity. He attributed the suffering he observed to backwardness, injustice and exploitation. Believing in the promise of the new spirit then developing, he became, for a while at least, an enthusiastic recipient of the communist message.

His letters to his old friend in America, the Reverend Papastefanou, and to his first wife, Galateia, residing in Greece, are full of bitterness against the evils extant and practised in both his country and where he was; those letters are also

full of excitement about the promise he felt rising in the turmoil and the growing change. His long concern for Buddha was supplanted by an interest in Lenin. However, Kazantzakis' deeper and never-ending concern for God—whose nature he never ceased trying to discover—still persisted. So, too, did his individualism and its Nietzschean version of the Superman which kept him from fully committing himself to the mass mentality characteristic of communism and the voluminous bureaucracy he found later during his travels through Russia.

The striking product of the change in Kazantzakis was the *Salvatores Dei* (*Saviors of God*) written in Berlin, that was to provide the philosophical foundation and framework for his *Odyssey*, the first draft of which he wrote soon after his return to Greece.

Some statements in these letters are highly offensive as to matters in Greece. Several of his fellow-countrymen would have preferred not to associate such feelings with him as a Greek author. They are justifiable only in the light of the sharp crisis, disorientation and alienation he was then going through. The introduction to these letters shows that the writer, Anghe-laki Rooke, one of Kazantzakis' god-children, was as familiar with the writer's mind as with the conditions and wider forces which influenced him. Interesting and considerably convincing is her emphasis on what she deems to be existentialism in Kazantzakis' intellectual crisis and his new commitments during that period. She speaks knowledgeably about that matter.

TAKIS SINOPoulos, *Landscape of Death: Selected Poems* of, as translated from the Greek and introduced by Kimon Friar. Columbus: Ohio State University press, 1977.

If the Second World War, the Nazi occupation and the Civil War, as experienced by Greece, left a lasting and painful stamp on the soul of the Greek poets, on no other poet was that stamp more painful or more permanent than on Takis Sinopoulos. "On no other poet," as Friar states in his Introduction, "did this involvement leave such a profound, indelible and incurable wound." Sinopoulos is one of the outstanding Greek poets whose youth was poisoned and wasted in a decade of warfare, deprivation, horror, agony, chaos and despair. In the eleven collections of his verse, from 1951 to 1976, he does not deviate from that decade's impact; he resides permanently in a "Landscape of Death" as described in the first poem of his first collection. Friar notes: "[it is a] ravaged land of black cypress trees, inhabited by the 'wandering dead,' where the sea has turned to stone; where the sun and its light are not beneficent and luminous . . . where in an endless silence all time seems to have stopped; where everything has been 'petrified / in a deadly immobility,' yet broken by a shout to the dead that reverberates in almost all his poems, but to which no answer is possible or even expected; where among the living dead there is no possibility of communication between men or even between lovers."

After the initial influence of T.

S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, translated by Seferis, and subsequently the influence of Seferis himself, Sinopoulos—despite his inclination to experiment technically and his capacity to transform his verse in mode, tone and manner—has found, so far, no escape, earthly or metaphysical, from his macabre, haunting despair. His only solace is poetry itself. The act of poetic creation, however, does not extend beyond it, does not react on life which, in his view, continues to be full of stifling negations.

The poems in this volume—the originals with Friar's amazingly successful translations—show the poet almost in his entirety. The translations, the brilliant Introduction and the Appendix (which traces the events and interprets the meaning of the poet's leit-motifs like *Memory*, *Night* and *Darkness*, *the Dead*, *Loneliness*, *Silence* and others), reflect Friar's deep affection and high regard for Sinopoulos. This volume is one of Friar's finest accomplishments as translator and critic.

The edition itself (the printing, setting, cover, jacket), is impressive and fully merits the price, \$25.

X

YANNIS RITSOS, *Scripture Of The Blind*, translated from the Greek with an Introduction by Kimon Friar and Kostas Myrsiades. Columbus: Ohio University Press, 1979.

This is a sister volume in several respects to the preceding text, devoted to the poetry of Yannis Ritsos. Friar and Myrsiades col-

laborated to present a perceptive, lively Introduction and a well-chosen sampling of Ritsos' "laconic, condensed and epigrammatic" poems, which he wrote out of "temperamental necessity," perhaps to contrast with his longer, discursive works in which, as the translators remark, "he may ramble to loquacious length, to simplify, to merge past and present, to digress, to divulge in mood and musical movement." These shorter poems are "sharp, cryptic, concrete, symbolic, almost surrealistic in their juxtaposition of seemingly unrelated objects and events."

The selection is from Ritsos' homonymous collection *Scripture of The Blind*, written in October and November, 1972, in Athens where he lived under police surveillance after his return from the island of Samos where he was exiled by the Junta of the Colonels. Obviously fascinated by the suggestive charm and skill of these poems, the translators disentangle their often puzzling meanings in light of the poet's individual technique and ideology as well as the circumstances that inspired them, providing ample explanation of various "objects," the human figures and types, which recur as symbols.

Both the translation and the commentary are delightful. Their imaginative insight beyond Ritsos' apparently simple externals, reveals elements in his poetry that reflect the contemporary adventure of the Greek world.

X

*I Neoelleniki Kritiki Ya Ton Pan-*

*deli Prevelaki: Afieroma Sta Evdhomintabrona Tou.* Athina: Tetradhia "Efthinis," No. 9, 1979.

This volume gives a splendid view of a significant author's accomplishments throughout the years as reflected in the eyes of colleagues and critics, who vary in temperament, outlook and interests. In this ninth "Notebook" of *Efthini* magazine, entitled *The Neoebellene Criticism on Pandelis Prevelakis: Dedicated to Him On His Seventieth Birthday*, thirty-two fellow-writers and critics, dead and living—among them Constantine Tsatsos, the former President of the Greek Republic, the novelists Stratis Myrivilis and I. M. Panayotopoulos, and the philosopher E. M. Papoutsos—comment on individual works of Prevelakis or survey and evaluate his career generally.

Admired and honored as Prevelakis has been in his country and abroad for being one of the most integral intellectual and creative figures in contemporary Greece, this "Notebook" is valuable even for those who are familiar with Prevelakis. More so, this survey is a first-rate introduction to his character and his works for those who have not known him well—to their disadvantage—particularly younger readers and writers.

Certainly not a modernist but a masterful and original interpreter of an age-old tradition, a defender of culture and its undying values as drawn from his Greek and, particularly, his native Crete's ancient and recent experience, Prevelakis is acutely aware of the spiritual crisis in the modern world. He offers to

Greece and to the world at large, all that the individual conscience can draw from a priceless inheritance so as to overcome contemporary crises. As Prevelakis reminds us, there are eternal values, powers in the soul that never perish if one has the desire, the concern and the will to re-affirm them and keep them alive.

The superb style of Prevelakis enhances everything he writes—essays, poetry, chronicles, novels and plays. *The Chronicle of A Town*, the trilogy of *The Cretan*, *The Sun of Death*, *The Head of The Medusa*, *The Bread of The Angels*, and his recent epic, *The New Erokritos*, are outstanding landmarks in Modern Greek literature.

We must also note here that the second volume of Emmanuel Kasdaglis' *Contribution to The Bibliography of Pandelis Prevelakis, 1967-1977*, came out in 1979, published by the Ekhdoseis Ton Philon.

## X

**STRATIS HAVIARAS, *When The Tree Sings*** (a novel). New York: Simon & Schuster, 1979.

Based on his childhood experience which Haviaras recreates imaginatively, this first novel (if, indeed, it is a novel), is a genuine delight. The five poetry collections that preceded it (four volumes of which were in Greek), proved his creative gifts and considerable promise. This novel integrates and develops themes of his poetry, but what is unprecedented is his mastery of the English language. The short chapter-episodes, with their

self-contained poetic individuality, their imaginative yet realistic texture, and the power of recurring symbols, place this work in a unique genre between poetry and prose.

The fragmented action occurs during the German occupation of Greece. Through the eyes that perceive and the soul that records, the innocence of childhood and early youth, is transformed into experience. Painful initiation is the central theme. Fear, deprivation and death turn the battle of survival into a play of ingenuity based on the need to endure and through subtlety to overcome cruelty and darkness. Another alternative is to escape into the dream world or into the loving arms of a saintly grandmother or another close relative. There is an inherent need to transcend it all through an angelic yet demonic innocence that touches gently, with a growing almost instinctive awareness, upon even the most human elements.



REGINA PAGOULATOU, *Pyrrhichios* (Poems), a bilingual edition containing the English translation of Apostolos Athanassakis and the drawings of George Fokas. New York: Pella Publishing Company, 1979.

This fifth collection contains short poems of an epigrammatic nature, of "analects," mostly from two to eight lines, which frequently start with a Biblical quotation and comments, developed or paralleled by personal or other experiences. In mood and content, these short pieces are the brief confessions of

a sufferer who reflects ironically about the surrounding reality. Any definition of poetry would need to be widened to encompass this collection. Its chief virtue is a laconic compactness and a piercing sharpness of some of its statements. The poet likes contrasts: "Far from water / salt is salt / Next to you / I melt." (*Substance*); and "Drops of water / wear the stone away / Your words drip into me / resurrect me" (*Indestructibility*). These passages are typical of her work.

A. D.



KOSTAS TSIROPOULOS. *I Angels*. Athens. Ton Filon, 1977. 56 pages.

The artist Yannis Tsarouhis is well-known for his realistic portrayal of nude males to whom, however, he often attaches wings in an attempt to sentimentalize or idealize his attraction to the male body. Casual models, picked up in the street or in bars, are thus wafted into a realm of beauty beyond corruption and sin. Tsiroopoulos's new book of poetry, *The Angels*, finds its starting and also its focal point in such a painting by Tsarouhis, either made or simply selected for the occasion.

The symbol of the angel is used in all twenty-two poems of this collection, beginning with the first, 'Of Lovers,' where, after a Dantesque description of bodies writhing in pleasure and pain, angels are said to emerge out of the petrified time inside the bodies, 'to recreate the bodies' and 'plant in the humbled flesh the illusion of

erotic glory'. Angels are shown from various angles and in a variety of indoor and outdoor settings in a persistent mood that blends sensuality with metaphysics:

Splendid instruments  
of corruption  
objects liturgical of death  
in a world of dark soil.

Tonight is  
the mystical purification  
of angels  
torn are the earthly bellies  
the hook rends, with a  
strident sound,  
the repugnant sack  
and through the  
irreparable opening  
look, the body of the soul  
rows — a winged fish —  
towards the thunderbolts.  
*(Of the Tavern')*

It is a poetry where words appear to stumble upon another, thick with impressions, rich in undertones and often apocalyptic. But it remains — for this reviewer at least — ambiguous. Is the intention of Tsiropoulos to signal in these verses a suppressed sexuality, reject homosexual attraction on religious grounds and seek, in contrast to Tsarouhis's sentimentalization of carnal knowledge between males (which we also find in Cavafis and Dhikteos), a metaphysical redemption for it? Is the delirious, both anguished and ecstatic, lyricism of these poems, the outcome of an inner struggle with the flesh — the prayers of let us say a Saint Anthony revisiting his temptations in order to exorcize them? The religious existentialism that

inspires most of Tsiropoulos's fiction, poetry and essays, seems to support that interpretation. Yet, in both Tsarouhis the painter and Tsiropoulos the poet there is the extra dimension of aesthetics. Could one accept in art what he may reject in actual life? And do we have in *The Angels* a change of attitude together with the emotional or spiritual resistance that goes with it, a phase in the development of the poet, where the senses take the upper hand in their struggle with metaphysics, as for example in this poem?

On this glorious seashore  
they come upon one another  
the sea the flesh the  
feverish sun  
the limbs — an excited bow —  
wine-must strikes them  
with groans  
and erect on this  
horizontal world  
angels blossom visible  
from all sides  
these are more naked  
with lilies on the eyelids  
agapanthi on the bosoms  
irises and ivy  
angels with big swords  
raised high  
and the entire light shudders.  
*(Of the Sea')*

X

NIKOS KARAKOSTAS *I Smerna*.  
Athens: Kedros, 1978. 272  
pages.

"I took the road of return but thought that, if I walked straight, I would end up in the sea. To reach home I must pass by the

restaurant, turn left, skirt the school and plunge into the alleys of K. [initial of a Greek beach town]. Difficult for a straight road to exist. What shall become of lakes and mountains?". The brief passage from the second part of the novel has an air of spontaneous humor about it, but it also suggests, metaphorically, the ambiguity in the young narrator's relationship with his environment. The sea represents the great unknown of death, which the man had courted in his initial attempt to drown — it is in fact his failure to die that has prompted him to tell his story — and on which the lifeless body of the woman he loved eventually floats.

L. wakes up in a hospital bed after his bungled attempt at suicide to face not a coffin (to which a nightmare he had was leading) but the hospital trolley with a bowl of soup on it. He recovers sufficiently to describe, in mordant tones, his school life with its bigotry and double standards as well as the circumstances of his first sexual experience at a house of ill repute, where a brazier was used to spur on the inexperienced youngsters through their rite of passage to adulthood. The intelligent but nerveless adolescent feels alienated from his society but goes mechanically through the motions of a life, which others consider desirable for him. In a boardingschool, where he is placed next, his mind becomes "a cellar filled with old clothes and furniture, rugs and old-fashioned photos, with its door shut with a lock guarding its dusty objects from the evidence of a life

gone, the secret which locked them in rot".

Part Two of *I Smerna* is dominated by the presence of Louisa, a lively but strange girl with morbid tendencies: she considers herself engaged to a dead man, whose picture she has seen in a cemetery, and periodically visits his grave. The charming but also baffling personality of Louisa (is she meant to be a female double for the hero L.? I wonder) relieves but also deepens the man's anxieties. She is as elusive as life, distant and also bitingly close. When Louisa dies, after she and L. make love in the cemetery, he goes through a period of amnesia, after which the memory of the dead woman comes back to pursue him like a fury. At the end of the story, L. starts getting used to the limbo situation, in which he finds himself, a world somewhere between day and night, a penumbra that may be heralding a sunrise or, possibly, a sunset.

The "cancerous" relationship of L. with the world is also intimated by the title of the novel: *smerna* is a snakelike fish with a smooth slimy skin and sharp teeth that will often tear the net, in which she is caught. On the other hand, the front cover illustration of the book — a drawing that combines a triumphant cross, that is a cross with the Easter wreath of flowers, and an anchor inside leafy branches of ivy (decorative, symbolic motifs from Greek folk art) — points to what is, though weak, the only source of sustenance for the young man: his contact with the simple folks and the popular traditions of his land.

This narrative in the first person, in a somewhat diary form, is marred, to a degree, by cliches, especially in those parts that describe the hero's school life, some imaginary scenes at the tribunal of Saint Peter, the cemetery scenes and some trite social criticisms. There is also an unevenness of style between the more loose, first part and the tighter, second part, as though these were written with a time lag between them. Yet, *I Smerna* has gradually won my attention with its essential sincerity and flashes of tragic awareness. The narrator has gone through various dark tunnels in his search for identity and is ready, one feels, for some kind of rebirth. He struggles with his personal and racial memory: "I do not want to jump into eternity", he says, "I am afraid. I do not want to see behind me those thousands of ancestors, Cretans, Pelagians, Achaeans, Dorians, Phoenicians, Persians, Egyptians, Venetians, Romans, Turks. I do not want to see my grandfather ruining with his plough the virginity of the earth. I am afraid. I do not want to go to the cemetery". But he does go to the cemetery and the penumbra of the final scene may well be the harbinger of a sunrise.



LYDIA AVLONITI, *Ena Livadhi Dhiatontes* [A Field of shooting Stars]. Montreal. Privately printed, 1977. 48 pages.

The title of this collection of poems would be suitable to any book of poetry, as more or less all poems are fleeting impressions that

race through the senses and the mind, as shooting stars are wont to do through space, and fade away but also leave behind something of their brightness. This is in fact the fourth book by the writer (who was born in Greece but has been a resident of Montreal for many years now) in a period of almost forty years; for, Avloniti first printed her work in 1940.

A poet should not be judged on what he or she does not intend to be, and I think that one should resist the temptation of putting Avloniti's verses aside as mere rehandlings of things already said more splendidly by others. It is true that in the three units which make this selection (each unit is introduced by a romantic or pantheistic drawing by P. Ghravalos) we detect a certain lack of courage: the poet will not venture, in terms of theme, symbolism or diction, out of the comfortable pew of traditional poetry, the poetry of the trees, the flowers and the stars. But that is her resolution, and in the style which she chooses, Avloniti writes, I think, well. There is genuine feeling in her verses and essential respect for the Greek language.



YANNIS IFANTIS, *Manthraspenta*. Thessaloniki: Tram, 1977. 80 pages.

A note informs us that the word of the title is a magic word, a term found in the nomenclature of ancient Persian religion and (so the Persians believed) capable, if uttered at the right time, to restore

the order of the universe. Poetry is a type of exorcism, a means of putting the chaos of the world into some order; the title is, therefore, well chosen. There is also a photo of the poet, inscribed with more magical words which, according to the Orphics, the soul of the dead was supposed to spell out at her arrival in the underworld: "I am a child of earth and of starry heaven." Mysticism is one of the most obvious features of Ifantis' poetry, a product of a strong and rich imagination. One guesses here the presence of an inborn talent, shaped and polished by a close study of written sources, especially the works associated with the Pound-Eliot-Seferis school of poetry. But there is also a Saint-John Perse epic quality in the verses of Ifantis:

There comes my voice  
wind of the infinite.  
There comes my voice  
loaded with the male  
pollen of stars; it comes  
in the flower of your mind.

Ifantis has the capacity of metaphorizing from the particular to the general and vice-versa, as in the poem where he describes the gradual, but also orgasmic, dissolution in the water of an orangeade tablet, or when he apostrophizes a personified oil-stove. The little poem "I look all around here":

On time for my date  
I look all around here  
the things which decided  
many centuries ago  
to see themselves  
through my eyes

is an apt comment on the concept of interchangeability between subject and object, which underlies Ifantis' work and indeed all poetry.



ARIS YAVRIS, *Piimata* [Poems].  
Athens. Privately printed, 1978.  
40 pages.

This is the first appearance in print of Yavris, who is a graduate in literature from the University of Ioannina but now lives in Athens. It is a book printed clearly with the poems framed in red rectangles. There is also a rough sketch of some sort on p. 11, and some of the poems are numbered in Greek characters, in red, as in Greek church books.

In the first part, my attention is caught by the third piece:

I will collect all the leaves  
and fold them into eight  
so that they may exude  
their fragrance.

In the series "Exercise in Poetics," the man who talks is ostensibly a member of a family of non-Greek actors who perform on Greek lands, and behind masks, dramas like the *Bacchae* of Euripides. But I guess that this is an oblique way of commenting about more recent developments in Greek history that reinforce its essentially dramatic character — tragedy is still enacted on stage or in reality on Greek lands. The dichotomy between acting and the deeper world of the characters in a drama, is graphically projected in the other groups of poems; lines uttered

alternately by Odysseus and the so-called "fragmenter" or stage-director.

Irony and a sense of drama are the main strains of Yavris' poetry, whose expression will eventually become denser than it is in this, his first book.



ALIKI YATRAKOU-FOSSI, *Ektos Skhedhiou*. Piimata (1977-78). Athens: Prosperos, 1978. 64 pages.

The restlessness in these verses may reflect, in part, the shifts in the poet's life who was born in Sparta, continued life in Athens during and after the war, and is now anchored in Paris, France. But it may also be the outcome of a deeper anguish:

The poem starts in my belly  
kicks inside my chest  
presses hard through my throat  
pushes my temples apart  
and comes out.

Trembling, my hands  
feel its pulse  
still more agitated, my eyes  
watch it go.

*"The Thimiko"*

The title *Ektos Skhedhiou* points to the "unplanned" or ephemeral nature of these poems, or perhaps of poetry in general. Fossi seems to have an ambivalent attitude towards poetry. Writing, she knows, relieves her anxiety momentarily, but do poems play some greater or more enduring part? Be as it may, many of these brief and nervous poems draw our attention with

their sharpness: "When the cold dulls the window-panes/the view becomes/a blank page./Inside I keep watch/like a cross on a cape." or "These two who are embracing each other/are one/and another."



LOUKAS THEODHORAKOPOULOS,  
*Anadromi* [Retrospection]. Pii-mata. Athens: Kastaniotis, 1978. 48 pages.

The book includes poems lifted from previous publications (printed before 1967) and others, apparently unpublished (at least in book form) from the '70s. The poetry is both "private" and "public." The personal poet likens his inner irrational self to a well operating in secrecy and to a faulty clock; in sexual matters, he feels dependent like ivy and he appreciates the bushes which are humble enough to understand his ecstasy and the pain of love. Some poems from 1972, however, seem to bear a political reference and condemn, in concealed terms, the then military government in Greece, while the poem "The Announcers" draws its inspiration from the November 17th uprising at the Athens Polytechnic Institute. There are other pieces of lyrical prose, introspective elaborations of memories and episodes in the poet's life and an ironic poem about some established Greek poet who produces his work with the facility of a "gold-bearing bird." But Theodhorakopoulos is primarily a "private" poet and his voice sounds most authentic when it spells out the pains and raptures caused him by his lover:

In times of drought  
the small animals of the desert  
hide their dizzy heads  
in the shadow of their  
neighbor  
waiting for the cool  
of the evening.

You are my neighbor  
and my shadow  
the cool of the evening.

"The Cool of the Evening"

X

MIHALIS GANAS, *Akathistos Dhipnos* [Stand-up Supper]. Athens: Kimena, 1978. 48 pages.

The notion of *xenitia* ("Being away from home"), in its double reference, that is to actual expatriation as well as to the feeling of alienation which a man or a woman may develop within the confines of his own land, is a recurrent one in modern Greek poetry. Ganas is the poet in exile in his own country. He feels hounded by time across the paths of social corruption, betrayed by older poets on whose "saddle" he used to ride, annoyed by the umbrellas of the bourgeoisie, those "flying garbs of mourning," while he sees his familiar cups, saucers and ash-trays fly to heaven where they drop with a clatter. On the other hand, going away, he says, is like throwing a stone that returns to strike you on the head. And yet the distinction between inside and outside Greece is no longer valid:

The country flees  
on the side of motionless trains  
riddled by cameras.

It is a discontented poetry as is most poetry of the young. Yet, Ganas' first book (nicely printed by Kimena [Texts]), is as impressive as it can be. The poet's dry humor, the new and sharp metaphors which stab you like daggers, the rich allusions to old and new realities (the title itself of the book conjures up visions of both Christ's *Last Supper* and the Byzantine "Stand-up Hymn," a series of praises for the Virgin), the animated but also controlled pace of the poems, all these suggest a young writer who knows how to select and mould his experiences into solid language.

X

YORGHOS HRONAS, *Ta Mavra Ta-kounia* [The Black Shoe-heels]. Thessaloniki. Eghnatia, 1979.

Elsewhere (*Books Abroad*, 48, 4 (1974), 830), I have pointed out what, I think, is the main characteristic of the poetry of Hronas: amorality. The poet does not trust in anything other than his senses; the main stimulus in his life is sex, the agonies and the ecstasies that come from the pursuit of carnal pleasure, his own pursuit or of those like him, men and women who run after eros or are perhaps hounded by it, who dread old age and who do not believe in an after-life, those whom we commonly call Epicureans. Hronas' new book is also oriented towards the underworld of sex. In fact, most of the poems sound like *verbatim* reports by prostitutes or transvestites of their experiences; snapshots of their insecure and

complicated, yet also simple and strangely humane lives. The illustrations, collages made of photos of young men superimposed on news-print from Italian papers apparently reporting on Pasolini's murder in a field outside Rome, further sharpen the impressions created by the poems, some of which evoke the poetry of Dinos Christianopoulos:

Gone are the strolls at the ports  
the quickies, the hurried  
kisses behind sheet-metal  
inside sheds by the baths  
Small rooms, big rooms,  
auxiliary spaces and chairs  
keep the loves safe  
Cast-aside and silly now.

(p. 65)

Hronas is audacious in his blend of various elements, in his deliberately prosaic language that hearkens back to Cavafy, in the collages he makes to illustrate his books and in his love of the sensational. Much of this may be a conscious or unconscious imitation of movies, but whatever its sources, Hronas's poetry holds a precarious balance, between sincerity and notoriety that comes from sensationalism.

X

ANDHREAS KOLIVAS, *Petrina Phil-Eteria Ghrammaton ke Tehnon, Etería Ghrammáton ke Tehnón*, 1979. 48 pages.

This appears to be the first display in print of Kolivas' poetry, which combines simplicity of utterance with humanistic concerns.

Thematically, many of the poems draw their inspiration from the world of the seaman or the factory worker, a world that militates against the poet's dreams of beauty and unalloyed love. The poet experiences moments of weakness and feels challenged by a child's innocent look. The indifference of the woman he loves hurts him. He has moments of despair and loneliness, but he is also emboldened by a deeper resistance to corruption and an expectation of better things to come:

I succeeded in burying  
myself alone  
in a mouse-nest of a  
sunless street  
with a heap of dirty papers  
and the photo of a meadow  
on the wall

In my soul  
I hear the city's heart  
throb with anguish  
I shudder and wait . . .  
Maybe tomorrow . . .

X

YORGOS MARKOPOULOS, *I Piro-tehnouryi* [The Fire-forgers]. Thessaloniki: Egnatia, 1979. 56 pages.

This is Markopoulos' fourth booklet of verse since 1968, and is made up of six units in which the last consists of two pieces in lyrical prose. The poetry is simple, linear, with curves of nostalgia and quiet sadness and occasional notes of despair. Some of the themes: the "dead" bourgeois life, the war in disguise of cities, and the am-

biguity of personal relationships. The last theme marks the poem "My hand, my soul, shipwrecks":

My hand in your hair  
a snake returning to his  
nest after it did evil.

My soul  
slightly soiled like a  
white summer dress.

The sun rose, tired,  
over the shipwrecks.

Current realities, national and international, are also reflected in some poems, but it is mostly human situations, in general, that inspire Markopoulos. For him, the poet is often the "stranger" in his own society, a man who has to pretend indifference by "hiding his hands in his pockets," a thief of the other people's most intimate moments.



THANASSIS NIARHOS, *Eros Erotas*.  
Thessaloniki: Eghnatia, 1979.  
42 pages.

The title is a repetition of the word *eros* in its purist and the demotic Greek form and this may be meant to suggest a romantic-sensual duality in the poems. A tension between opposites may be also reflected in the two drawings that illustrate the booklet, an angelic female figure whose lower body, however, is skeletal, and a tree whose upper trunk is formed by the outlines of nude bodies in a strange embrace, ending in shoots and leaves — the myth of Apollo

and Daphne comes easily to mind. The poems are indeed sensual and metaphysical, informed by the struggle between flesh and spirit, the hormonic and the ideal:

Gentle charge of your limbs  
deeper deeper  
thirsty for my calmness  
with the snail of your brain  
haunting church pews  
and Byzantine frescoes  
with your aquatic entrails  
uprooting my myths  
while blindly I suck  
the womb of your thoughts.

Niarhos epigraphs his booklet with verses from Desnos and Tsiropoulos. The latter, who has been collaborating with Niarhos in the publication of the journal *Efthini* (in fact, Niarhos has singled out this collaboration in his brief curriculum vitae as one of the things he wants to remember) has surprised us recently with his new collection of poems *I Angheli* [The Angels]. With *Eros Erotas* Niarhos also seems to move away from metaphysics and to focus attention on the naked body's struggle. Is this a mere coincidence or a reciprocity of feeling between two intellectual partners?

—George Thaniel  
University College  
Toronto



CHARLES C. MOSKOS, JR. *Greek Americans, Struggle and Success*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1980.

There have been practically no

comprehensive studies of the history of Greeks in America. The last, to our knowledge, was Theodore Saloutos' *The Greeks in the United States*, published by the Harvard University Press in 1966. Saloutos, of course, was not aware of the full consequences of the Immigration Act of 1965, which removed the quotas by country that had slowed the growth of the Greek-American community, and resulted in a flood of approximately 175,000 new Greek immigrants in the last 15 years.

Now — courtesy of Prentice-Hall's "Ethnic Groups in American Life Series" and Milton M. Gordon, the series' editor — we have a new history.

*Greek Americans, Struggle and Success* is a bit of a disappointment, but a whole lot better than nothing. The book was clearly pulled together for the occasion. Yet Mr. Moskos did his homework. Despite minor errors (e.g., describing THE CHARIOTEER as an occasional rather than an annual publication), all the basic information is there from the dis-

appearance of the Greek sailor Don Teodoro in Florida in 1528 to the Greek-American support of and subsequent disappointment in Jimmy Carter.

The book is part history (Chapter I, The Greek Comes to America; Chapter II, Greek America Forms), part cultural exposition (Chapter III, The Greek-American Community; Chapter IV, Greek-American Themes; Chapter V, Making It in America), part personal memoir (Chapter VI, Growing Up Greek in America), and part sociology (Chapter VII, The Sociology of Greek Americans). It even includes an appendix on Greek Australians, and three and a half pages of bibliography.

The problem is that Mr. Moskos does not integrate all this wonderful material. One feels each chapter is a separate essay (some were undoubtedly written before the book was commissioned). The book provides much valuable and intriguing information, but leaves no lasting impression. As Aristotle might say, the matter is all there, but the form is lacking.

—James W. Manousos

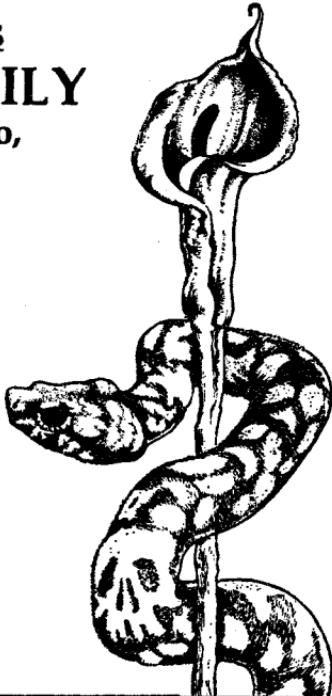
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