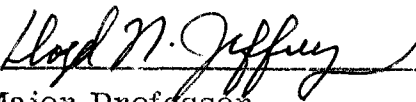


NIKOS KAZANTZAKIS' VIEW OF WOMANKIND


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NIKOS KAZANTZAKIS' VIEW OF WOMANKIND

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of the  
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By

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## PREFACE

Many of the major works of Nikos Kazantzakis have been made available to the English-speaking world during the past fifteen years. Since it is now possible to become familiar with his writing through translation, his peculiar intensity and complexity of thought seem to be attracting a large number of readers. There are numerous facets of his works any one of which would serve as a fascinating and profitable subject for detailed investigation, but this study concerns itself primarily with the attitude Kazantzakis expresses toward womankind and woman's relationship with man. His view of the basic sexuality of human beings is an important aspect of his thought, for he sees this sexuality as a main source of both the sufferings and the triumphs of mankind.

Although probably his most significant works have been translated, there are many of his early productions which are not available in English at this time. These include such comparatively short pieces as Sodom and Gomorrah, Theseus, Nikephoros Phocas, Odysseus, and Christ, as well as travel essays and various articles published in Greek periodicals such as Nea Hestia and Neo-Ellenika Grammata. His personal correspondence would, of course, have been most valuable

had it been available for this study, especially the Letters to Galatea, which his first wife published in Athens in 1958.

Kazantzakis seems to be attracting a great deal of critical attention in this country--each translation of his work has been met with numerous reviews--but critical commentaries are not yet plentiful. Indeed, even in Greek criticism, there appear to be relatively few responsible studies of his work. And of these few, the only one available in English is Pandelis Prevelakis' Nikos Kazantzakis and His Odyssey: A Study of the Poet and the Poem. In the materials consulted for the present study a few titles were discovered which, were they available, would no doubt have been immensely useful. Some of these are Lily Zografou's Nikos Kazantzakis: A Tragic Man, Galatea Alexiou Kazantzakis' Men and Supermen, Yannis Anapliotis' The True Zorba and Nikos Kazantzakis, and Nikiphoros Vrettakos' account of Kazantzakis' life and works.

Although all of Kazantzakis' works were not available for this study, it seems unlikely that any of them would contain material which would significantly modify any of the conclusions presented here. Kazantzakis' attitude toward women appears to have remained fairly constant throughout his maturity. His feelings are complex and contradictory, to be sure, but there is no reason to believe that there was ever any kind of major alteration in his view of womankind after he

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began to write. It seems, therefore, safe to assume that the works available for this study provide a sufficient basis for its conclusions.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION: THE BACKGROUND OF KAZANTZAKIS' THOUGHT

On February 18, 1883, Nikos Kazantzakis was born into the violent atmosphere of Crete's battle for liberation. As a young child, he gradually absorbed the fierceness and passion for freedom that motivated the Cretans to revolt periodically against their Turkish oppressors. His father was a ferocious man who instilled in the child a deep sense of human dignity and courage as well as pride in being a Cretan.<sup>1</sup> His mother Kazantzakis describes as a "saintly woman," who "had the patience, endurance, and sweetness of the earth itself."<sup>2</sup>

The first fourteen years of Kazantzakis' life were spent in the turbulent environment of rebellion, but in 1897 the climactic uprising of the Cretan people forced the Kazantzakis family to seek refuge in Greece. They proceeded to the island of Naxos, where the young boy who had been imbued with the violence, savagery, and heroism of his birthplace was now confronted with an entirely new world. For the next two years he studied at a French school directed by Franciscan monks;

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<sup>1</sup>Nikos Kazantzakis, Report to Greco (New York, 1965), pp. 31-33, 84, 86.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 34.

he learned French and Italian, and he became acquainted with the culture of the Western world.<sup>3</sup> Then, in 1899, the family was able to return to Crete, free at last from the Turks, and the young Kazantzakis witnessed the joy with which a long-enslaved people welcomed liberty to their island.<sup>4</sup>

The Cretan struggle for freedom was naturally a tremendous influence upon the impressionable Kazantzakis. "Without this struggle," he says, "my life would have taken a different course, God surely have acquired a different face . . . . This was the seed. From this seed the entire tree of my life germinated, budded, flowered and bore fruit."<sup>5</sup> The heroic and desperate men who fearlessly sacrificed their lives for the sake of Crete embodied the ideals of masculinity which were planted in Kazantzakis' mind. His own father, who never laughed or shaved off his beard because he was in mourning for his country, lived up to these ideals and reared his son accordingly. He locked the boy outdoors at night to make him overcome his fear of the darkness, and he forced him to kiss the feet of the dead freedom-fighters hanging from a tree in their village.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Pandelis Prevelakis, Nikos Kazantzakis and His Odyssey: A Study of the Poet and the Poem (New York, 1961), p. 15.

<sup>4</sup> Kazantzakis, Report to Greco, pp. 102-108.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., pp. 67-68.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., pp. 69, 89-90.



The second great influence upon the boy was religion. He was a devout child and was especially impressed by the saints' legends; his admiration for martyrs remained with him all his life. "Hero together with saint," he says in Report to Greco, "is mankind's supreme model."<sup>7</sup>

But Kazantzakis happened to be born too late to participate in the struggle for Crete's freedom. His heroism would have to reveal itself in some way other than fighting for his homeland. Pandelis Prevelakis asserts, ". . . Kazantzakis, on the morrow of the Cretan struggle for liberty, was as avid for glory as Julien Sorel after the Napoleonic Wars. Frustration was at the root of his ambition."<sup>8</sup> The young man could not follow the glorious paths that his Cretan forefathers had taken, because their goal had finally been attained. So Kazantzakis had to find a new struggle. [As he says himself,

To gain freedom from the Turk, that was the initial step; after that, later, this new struggle began: to gain freedom from the inner Turk--from ignorance, malice and envy, from fear and laziness, from dazzling false ideas; and finally from idols, all of them, even the most revered and beloved.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 71.

<sup>8</sup> Prevelakis, p. 14.

<sup>9</sup> Kazantzakis, Report to Greco, p. 68.

Struggle and freedom--these are the two concepts more important to Kazantzakis than any others.

After attending school again in Crete after the liberation, Kazantzakis sought his education farther and farther from his native island. He studied law at the University of Athens, where he received his degree in 1906, and spent the next five years traveling and studying in Europe. He studied philosophy in Paris, where he was a student of Bergson at the Collège de France from 1907 until 1909. The philosophy of this teacher was perhaps the major influence upon Kazantzakis' own thought, for Bergson led him to perceive life as "the expression of an élan vital, a vital or creative impulse . . . ," and caused him to recognize the necessity for collaboration between the intellect and instinct.<sup>10</sup>

Another powerful influence awaited Kazantzakis' discovery in Paris: that of Nietzsche, who had died in 1900. Prevelakis maintains that it was Nietzsche's philosophy which led the young writer to develop the major themes in his works, the concept of the Superman, for example, "optimistic or Dionysiac nihilism," and the imminent demise of Western civilization.<sup>11</sup> Prevelakis goes on to assert,

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<sup>10</sup> Kimon Friar, Introduction to The Odyssey: A Modern Sequel, by Nikos Kazantzakis (New York, 1958), pp. xvi-xvii.

<sup>11</sup> Prevelakis, pp. 15-16.

A parallelism between Nietzsche and Kazantzakis is in a certain way maintained . . . not only through the external events of their lives, but also through their fundamental experiences--the loneliness, the tension, the struggle and the creation--and most of all through the relationship between, not to say identity of, their ideas.<sup>12</sup>

In Report to Greco Kazantzakis himself reveals the profound impression that Nietzsche's writings had upon him, and he also describes how he identified his own struggle with that of the philosopher.<sup>13</sup>

Along with Nietzsche's influence, Oswald Spengler's theory of the mortality of civilizations led Kazantzakis to the conclusion that Western civilization is dying and that the death of any civilization causes its people to lose contact with the world. Their old gods, morality, and institutions are no longer valid and leave a void in place of themselves. Kazantzakis desired to fill this void. First, he attempted to resurrect a Christ free of church dogmas. Later, he turned to Buddhism, and still later he flirted with Marxism.<sup>14</sup> But each of these "saviors" proved insufficient for Kazantzakis' needs; he accepted each for a time, but remained committed to no particular one. The eclecticism of his nature and its results are described by Prevelakis as follows:

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>13</sup>Kazantzakis, Report to Greco, pp. 317-339.

<sup>14</sup>Prevelakis, pp. 60-62.

The inadequate [literary] sustenance offered him by modern Greece was to be supplemented by both fresh and conserved food, of European, Asiatic, and even African provenance. The different levels of the civilization of the sources and their lack of homogeneity were to make a "monster" out of Kazantzakis' primitive nature.<sup>15</sup>

According to Prevelakis, The Odyssey: A Modern Sequel, with its enormous bulk, its overwhelming number of fantastic incidents, and its mixture of diverse customs, legends, and beliefs, is the fruit of Kazantzakis' effort to order and utilize all the elements of his vast intellectual life.<sup>16</sup>

Long before the completion of The Odyssey: A Modern Sequel, Kazantzakis published The Saviors of God: Spiritual Exercises, a book which marked the end, in 1927, of his philosophical activity. From that time on, his goal was to give appropriate poetic expression to the ideas already clarified in his own mind.<sup>17</sup> These ideas were to set him apart from all religious dogmas and all political ideologies, for in his works exists "a bomb timed to explode all visions which are betrayed into the petrification of ritual, constitution, or dogma."<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., pp. 46-47.

<sup>18</sup>Kimon Friar, "The Spiritual Exercises of Nikos Kazantzakis," an Introduction to The Saviors of God: Spiritual Exercises, by Nikos Kazantzakis (New York, 1960), p. 39.

He finally came to realize that the face of God was unchanging and eternal behind all religious masks. But he went even further than this discovery and saw the chaos behind that face--"a terrifying uninhabited darkness," the abyss.<sup>19</sup> For Kazantzakis, God is not a predetermined goal which men try to attain, but a continuous and progressive evolution toward an ever higher refinement of spirituality.<sup>20</sup> "The unceasing creativity of life" is the God which both Kazantzakis and his teacher Bergson accepted.<sup>21</sup> Kazantzakis felt a great responsibility to contribute his part to God's "salvation," to struggle diligently and turn as much matter as possible into spirit. He believed that man, composed of both flesh and spirit, is half God,<sup>22</sup> and he says in Report to Greco,

I felt this was my duty, my sole duty: to reconcile the irreconcilables, to draw the thick ancestral darkness out of my loins and transform it, to the best of my ability, into light.

Is not God's method the same? Do we not have a duty to apply this method . . . ?

. . . man has been enabled to enter God's workshop and labor with Him. The more flesh he transubstantiates

<sup>19</sup> Kazantzakis, Report to Greco, p. 150.

<sup>20</sup> Friar, "The Spiritual Exercises of Nikos Kazantzakis," p. 20.

<sup>21</sup> Friar, Introduction to The Odyssey: A Modern Sequel, p. xvii.

<sup>22</sup> Kazantzakis, Report to Greco, p. 290.

into love, valor, and freedom, the more truly he becomes Son of God.<sup>23</sup>

God ascends by means of plants, animals, and men. Each of these creations of his is possessed of a more refined spirit than the last, and God mercilessly uses his creations and discards them as he progresses upward toward total spirituality.<sup>24</sup> Since man is the highest creation so far, God must depend on him for his "salvation." Man must "save God" by dedicating himself to creative activity.<sup>25</sup> As Kazantzakis says, "God is being built. I too have applied my tiny red pebble, a drop of blood, to give Him solidarity lest He perish . . . ."<sup>26</sup> Mankind, according to Kazantzakis, faces an obligation to work toward the realization of God.

It is our duty to set ourselves an end beyond our individual concerns . . . higher than our own selves, and disdaining laughter, hunger, even death, to toil night and day to attain that end . . . . Not to attain it, but never to halt in the ascent.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>24</sup> Nikos Kazantzakis, The Saviors of God: Spiritual Exercises (New York, 1960), pp. 93-94.

<sup>25</sup> Prevelakis, p. 27.

<sup>26</sup> Kazantzakis, Report to Greco, p. 18.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 80.

The striving to achieve this end beyond ourselves is necessary "even though that end be chimerical." The attainment of the goal is not important; it is the struggle itself which ennobles human life.<sup>28</sup> And perhaps the greatest nobility of all lies in the realization that the goal we seek is impossible to achieve. Kimon Friar describes this aspect of the struggle:

The essence of God is to find freedom, salvation. Our duty is to aid him in this ascent, and to save ourselves at last from our final hope of salvation, to say to ourselves that not even salvation exists, and to accept this with tragic joy . . . . The greatest virtue is not to be free, but to struggle ceaselessly for freedom.<sup>29</sup>

The ability to face chaos unflinchingly is what Kazantzakis terms the "Cretan Glance." He believed that in Crete's ancient culture is found a synthesis between the Oriental passive resignation to infinite, impersonal forces, and "the Greek tendency to cast a veil over the chaos of human life."<sup>30</sup> To explain his conception of this Cretan response to life, he describes the Minoan cult of the Bull. Unlike the Spanish, the Minoan people did not kill the bull; "they played with him,

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., pp. 79-80.

<sup>29</sup>Friar, Introduction to The Odyssey: A Modern Sequel, p. xiv.

<sup>30</sup>William Bedell Stanford, The Ulysses Theme, 2nd ed. (New York, 1964), p. 238.

obstinately, respectfully, without hate."<sup>31</sup> They used this battle with the animal to whet their strength, and they learned to face his fearful power without panic.

Thus the Cretans transubstantiated horror, turning it into an exalted game in which man's virtue, in direct contact with mindless omnipotence, received stimulation and conquered--conquered without annihilating the bull, because it considered him not an enemy but a fellow worker. Without him, the body would not have become so flexible and strong, the soul so valiant.

Surely a person needs great training of both body and soul if he is to have the endurance to view the beast and play such a dangerous game. But once he is trained . . . he looks upon fear with intrepidity.<sup>32</sup>

Kazantzakis equated the bull with God, with the ferocious aspect of the twentieth century, with death, with the abyss. Weak souls cannot gaze upon the bull without terror, but the ideal man is able "to view the abyss with . . . a Cretan Glance--without hope and fear but also without insolence . . . ."<sup>33</sup>

Kazantzakis' emphasis upon the need for man to regard the abyss with neither fear nor hope has caused critics to apply to his attitude such terms as "Dionysian nihilism" and "heroic pessimism." These phrases are extremely misleading, because the Dionysian and heroic

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<sup>31</sup> Kazantzakis, Report to Greco, p. 486.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 487.



aspects of his thought are far more fundamental to it than any nihilistic or pessimistic overtones.<sup>34</sup> For example, his conviction that God is not almighty and must be saved by man is only superficially a submission to the impersonal spirit of creativity. "Beneath this pretense of submission . . . smoldered a tyrannical ambition and a haughty faith in the power of man such as had not been seen since the Renaissance."<sup>35</sup> Nietzsche taught Kazantzakis that the tragedy of life may be exalted into the joy of life, and that the strong man enjoys a "tragic optimism" and delights in the never-ceasing struggle of human life.<sup>36</sup> Although Kazantzakis did indeed become nihilistic at times in his life, he fought the tendency in himself as he fought all the binding chains which threaten mankind.<sup>37</sup>

The author struggled all his life to synthesize the antithetical forces which motivated him. One of his translators, Peter Bien, points out,

The process of clash and fusion underlies all of Kazantzakis' thinking, whether he is trying to describe the miracle of ancient Greece or prescribe a path for

<sup>34</sup> Friar, "The Spiritual Exercises of Nikos Kazantzakis," p. 37.

<sup>35</sup> Prevelakis, p. 27.

<sup>36</sup> Friar, Introduction to The Odyssey: A Modern Sequel, p. xv.

<sup>37</sup> Friar, "The Spiritual Exercises of Nikos Kazantzakis," p. 33.

contemporary man. It is the one constant in his work; but as for the actual nature of the clashing forces, he is by no means consistent.<sup>38</sup>

These "clashing forces" are sometimes contemplation versus action, asceticism versus sensuality, Eastern culture versus the Western, tenderness versus brutality, the soul versus the body. In Zorba the Greek the conflict between the Dionysian and Apollonian views of life is resolved by fusing the two contradictions into an Apollonian expression of Dionysian wisdom.<sup>39</sup> The character of Zorba is based upon a real person, of whom Kazantzakis says, "He taught me to love life and not to fear death."<sup>40</sup> Zorba represents the antithesis of Buddha, and he helped Kazantzakis rid himself of the negating principle of Buddhism, which he came to see as simply another veil to hide the abyss from man's view.<sup>41</sup>

Because of the geographical situation of Greece between the East and the West, Kazantzakis expresses the belief that this country bears the responsibility of reconciling the opposing forces of the two

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<sup>38</sup>Peter Bien, "Zorba the Greek, Nietzsche, and the Perennial Greek Predicament," The Antioch Review, XXV (Spring, 1965), 148.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 163.

<sup>40</sup>Friar, "The Spiritual Exercises of Nikos Kazantzakis," p. 38.

<sup>41</sup>Bien, p. 161.

civilizations. He recognizes a Western tendency to ignore the abyss or to try to place a beautiful curtain in front of it, and an equally weak Eastern tendency to give one's self up to negative resignation.<sup>42</sup> The Cretan Glance, described above, is Kazantzakis' attempt to synthesize these two extremes into an acceptance of both life and death.

The conflict between asceticism and sensuality is fundamental to Kazantzakis' work and reveals itself in his many characters who struggle to overcome the desires of the flesh. But again, Kazantzakis seeks to establish a reconciliation. In his Prologue to The Last Temptation of Christ, he says,

I loved my body and did not want it to perish; I loved my soul and did not want it to decay. I have fought to reconcile these two primordial forces which are so contrary to each other, to make them realize that they are not enemies but, rather, fellow workers, so that they might rejoice in their harmony and so that I might rejoice with them.<sup>43</sup>

In the ancient culture and harmonious art of Greece, Kazantzakis says, "a person confirms the fact that spirit is the continuation and flower of matter . . . ." <sup>44</sup> The flesh--matter--should not be considered the

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 155.

<sup>43</sup> Nikos Kazantzakis, Prologue to The Last Temptation of Christ (New York, 1960), p. 1.

<sup>44</sup> Kazantzakis, Report to Greco, p. 151.

antagonist of the spirit, for matter itself evolves into spirit through a process of refinement.

Despite his affirmation of the "goodness" of the body, Kazantzakis, in his ascent toward total freedom, saw a necessity for ascetic renunciation. He believed that man should dedicate himself to a "noble passion," and complete dedication demands renunciation also--renunciation of anything which obstructs or weakens that passion.<sup>45</sup> Kazantzakis was drawn also to mysticism all his life, as well as to asceticism. Although by 1926 he was almost completely dedicated to poetic creation, he sometimes longed, even in later years, to cut himself off from the world entirely and lose himself in some uninhabited wilderness. As Prevelakis points out, "Buddhist renunciation filtered through Kazantzakis like an unfulfilled presentiment, a way of living which he had planned but had never carried out."<sup>46</sup> His desire for total renunciation may be observed in his portrayals of Christ and Saint Francis, with whom he apparently felt a sense of kinship. He was by nature a solitary man, and Prevelakis attributes this aspect of Kazantzakis' personality both to his Cretan heritage and to his spiritual superiority over other men. Because of his loneliness and the fact that he never met a living

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<sup>45</sup>Prevelakis, pp. 24, 36, 89.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 25.

man who was his master, Prevelakis says, "He often gave me the impression of someone cutting a path through a jungle."<sup>47</sup>

Kazantzakis' lifelong endeavor was to synthesize the contradictory desires of his own nature and "to accept all the antinomies in nature which are neither good nor evil, moral nor immoral in themselves, and to fuse them in the fire of a mystical vision which arose, nevertheless, from a realistic view of nature . . . ."<sup>48</sup> His life of dedication ended in Freiburg, Germany, on October 26, 1957, when he was seventy-four years old. His last years were made happy by the constancy of his second wife, Helen, and by the recognition of his greatness by men such as Albert Schweitzer, whom Kazantzakis admired more than any other living man.<sup>49</sup> He also had written and published the culmination of his creative struggles, The Odyssey: A Modern Sequel, and in its hero had embodied all the agonies, contradictions, and triumphs of his own spiritual life and of contemporary Western man.

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., pp. 45-46.

<sup>48</sup> Friar, Introduction to The Odyssey: A Modern Sequel, p. xxv.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. xxiv.

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## CHAPTER II

### WOMEN IN THE MAJOR WORKS OF KAZANTZAKIS

No matter how much my intellect discourses, proving that women have the same worth, the same soul as men, the age-old heart inside me, the African heart which scorns the Europeanized mind and wants nothing to do with it, repulses women and refuses to trust them or permit them to penetrate deeply within me and take possession. Women are simply ornaments for men and more often a sickness and a necessity.<sup>1</sup>

To the twentieth-century American reader, the passage quoted above may offer little to recommend its author's intellectual enlightenment. It may offer even less to the reader who happens also to be feminine. Nevertheless, Nikos Kazantzakis is not at all a man to be dismissed as a blind misogynist. His writings reveal an extremely complex attitude toward women as well as a profound consciousness of the fundamental sexuality of human beings. He expresses the ambivalent feelings of a man torn between an insatiable desire for asceticism, even for martyrdom, and a tremendous, sensual love for the earth and for life's tangible pleasures. He, therefore, sees woman both as a temptress, a snare for men's souls, and as a source of man's

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<sup>1</sup>Kazantzakis, Report to Greco, p. 180.

greatest happiness. Thus, he is able to recount with equal ardor the spiritual achievements of a Saint Francis and the worldly exploits of a Zorba.

His ascetic nature and his dedication to the world of the spirit make it necessary for Kazantzakis to try to renounce the satisfactions of sexual love, but he sometimes despises himself for his lack of masculine aggressiveness toward women and toward other earthly experiences. This dissatisfaction with his own nature reveals itself in Zorba the Greek, a novel in which the character of the narrator often represents the author himself. Shamed by the voracious Zorba, the youthful writer admits, "I had fallen so low that, if I had had to choose between falling in love with a woman and reading a book about love, I should have chosen the book."<sup>2</sup> In the character of the narrator, Kazantzakis further expresses his longing to embrace life with Zorba's boisterousness as he hesitates outside the widow's garden:

To enter that gate and bolt it, to run after her, take her by the waist and, without a word, drag her to her large widow's bed, that was what you would call being a man! That was what my grandfather would have done, and what I hope my grandson will do! But I stood there like a poet, weighing things up and reflecting . . . :

"In another life," I murmured, smiling bitterly, "in some other life I'll behave better than this!"<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Nikos Kazantzakis, Zorba the Greek (New York, 1952), p. 101.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 123.

In Report to Greco Kazantzakis accuses himself of being a "nanny goat" who "instead of drinking wine and eating meat and bread" merely writes the words wine, meat, and bread and then eats the paper they are written on.<sup>4</sup> The author's own dilemma is perhaps best expressed in the words of Manolios, the central character in The Greek Passion, who comments on the marriage of his former fiancée and a young shepherd:

. . . they've taken the road which God in His mercy has traced out for Man on earth. I keep struggling to take another road--no wife, no children, no joy; I renounce the world, I shake the earth from my feet. Am I right? Christ was right, He was God, He was; but Man? Might it be overbold of him to follow in the footsteps of God?<sup>5</sup>

Kazantzakis, like Manolios, is torn between his ascetic inclinations and a desire to affirm the beauty in worldly experiences.

The "African heart" of Kazantzakis is an inheritance from his Bedouin ancestors. He expresses the belief many times that his ancestors live again through him and that they dictate to a great extent his most fundamental desires and attitudes. One of his Bedouin forefathers "jumped to his feet and dashed to the rescue," whenever Kazantzakis observed any waste of salt, fire, or water.<sup>6</sup> When he feels

<sup>4</sup>Kazantzakis, Report to Greco, p. 190.

<sup>5</sup>Nikos Kazantzakis, The Greek Passion (New York, 1953), p. 245.

<sup>6</sup>Kazantzakis, Report to Greco, p. 30.



himself irresistibly attracted to a Chinese girl, he says, "One of my ancestors must have loved and been unable to possess a woman who resembled this Chinese girl quivering before me."<sup>7</sup> Similarly, he believed that his desert-roaming forefathers had instilled in him a conviction that woman is naturally inferior to man. And this conviction could only have been strengthened by his being born and reared in Crete, where the status of women is far below that of men, as it is in all societies where living is often reduced to mere survival. The traditional view of women as the "weaker sex" is a part of Kazantzakis' heritage, and he considers any kind of weakness--physical or spiritual--to be a feminine characteristic. He says that "a feminine voice" inside him reminded him of his fear as he ascended a mountain to Jehovah in a dream,<sup>8</sup> and he remarks that a "man's womanish heart has constant need of consolation . . . ."<sup>9</sup> Kazantzakis despised these "feminine" traits in himself and in other men, and he sought to be entirely "masculine." His ideal of masculinity is perhaps epitomized by the command of El Greco, "Reach what you cannot!" Kazantzakis feels that this aspiration is mankind's most ennobling one, and he describes it as being "masculine."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Nikos Kazantzakis, The Rock Garden (New York, 1963), pp. 129-130.

<sup>8</sup> Kazantzakis, Report to Greco, p. 254.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 338.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 22.

It is obvious that Kazantzakis is keenly aware of the psychological differences between femininity and masculinity; and the differences he sees are much more subtle than the difference between weakness and strength. In The Last Temptation of Christ Mary Magdalene says to Jesus, "I must look at you, because woman issued from the body of man and still cannot detach her body from his. But you must look at heaven, because you are a man, and man was created by God."<sup>11</sup> Although Kazantzakis certainly does not agree with this character's biblical explanation of woman's physical relationship to man, he does recognize the difference between the sexes that she describes. Woman's natural domain is the earth, but man ideally seeks to rise above the earth. The narrator of Zorba the Greek recalls a brief encounter with a strange girl in a museum, where they were both looking at Rodin's "Hand of God." The girl remarked, ". . . Love may be the most intense joy on earth . . . . But, now I see that bronze hand, I want to escape." She was talking about the earthly, physical love of a man and a woman, but when the man tried to lift her comment to a metaphysical level, to a discussion of God, she quickly moved away. He had "suddenly darted from earth to heaven, and the woman had been

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<sup>11</sup>Kazantzakis, The Last Temptation of Christ, pp. 329-330.

startled and fled.”<sup>12</sup> She simply did not understand his attempt to go beyond the earthly implications of her statement. As Mary Magdalene says to Jesus,

Rabbi, why do you talk to me about the future life? We are not men, to have need of another, an eternal life; we are women, and for us one moment with the man we love is everlasting Paradise, one moment far from the man we love is everlasting hell. It is here on earth that we women live out eternity.<sup>13</sup>

Since woman is herself bound to the earth, she tends to chain man to his earthly and fleshly existence. The man who seeks to ascend to a spiritual realm is brought back down to earth by “the woman who embraces him,”<sup>14</sup> as she fulfills “her high mission of drowning man’s spirit.”<sup>15</sup> Perhaps the most striking example of feminine zeal in serving this mission is found in the portrayal of Mary in The Last Temptation of Christ. She is horrified that her only son is dissatisfied with earthly happiness, the only kind of happiness she can understand. The mother of Jesus laments, “. . . I want my son a man like everyone else, nothing more, nothing less . . . . I don’t want my son to be a

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<sup>12</sup> Kazantzakis, Zorba the Greek, p. 48.

<sup>13</sup> Kazantzakis, The Last Temptation of Christ, p. 353.

<sup>14</sup> Kazantzakis, The Rock Garden, p. 106.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

saint . . . . What good are angels to me? I want children and grandchildren to be following him, children and grandchildren, not angels!"<sup>16</sup>

Kazantzakis did not see woman as consciously desiring to deny man's spirit, but as simply not comprehending its existence. For example, Mary Magdalene felt compelled to touch the body of the risen Christ because, being a woman, she did not believe that he could exist in spirit only. Christ forbade her to touch him because, as Kazantzakis suggests, he perhaps feared that the tangible contact with a female might still have the power to call him back to a physical existence.<sup>17</sup>

This concept of a feminine necessity for physical expression is illustrated also when Kazantzakis attempts to explain Don Quixote to Siu-lan, the Chinese girl he loves. He feels a need to touch her lightly on the shoulder in order to communicate with her: "As if woman were forever incapable of grasping an abstract idea, it must be offered to her enveloped in warm flesh."<sup>18</sup>

Since woman's highest purpose is in direct opposition to man's most noble purpose, Kazantzakis depicts the sexes as being in almost constant conflict. To achieve harmony, either the woman must subordinate her goals to the man's, or the man must give up his heavenly

<sup>16</sup> Kazantzakis, The Last Temptation of Christ, pp. 64, 169, 190.

<sup>17</sup> Kazantzakis, The Rock Garden, p. 104.      <sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 177.

goals. With her obedience to the earthward force, woman can be nothing but an obstacle to man's spiritual aspirations if he allows her to influence him. To love a woman is to be enslaved, and Kazantzakis prized liberty above everything else in the world. In Report to Greco he says, ". . . I realized as far back as my childhood that this world possesses a good which is dearer than life, sweeter than happiness--liberty,"<sup>19</sup> and later on he remarks, "Freedom was my first great desire."<sup>20</sup> Woman has the power to rob man of his liberty, and the resulting enslavement may be manifested by a loss of reason, as in the case of Panayotaros in The Greek Passion, or it may be of a more insidious nature. It may result in a man's becoming satisfied, an intolerable prospect to Kazantzakis. The body of a woman could serve, he says, "slowly to dampen and extinguish the free flame which flickers within me."<sup>21</sup> Zebedee, in The Last Temptation of Christ, is an example of a man who has been satisfied: "When I was young there were times when I too got all heated up and twisted and turned on my bed. I thought I was looking for God, but I was really looking for a wife . . . . I got married and calmed down."<sup>22</sup> Kazantzakis expresses nothing but

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<sup>19</sup>Kazantzakis, Report to Greco, p. 68.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 71.

<sup>21</sup>Kazantzakis, Zorba the Greek, p. 113.

<sup>22</sup>Kazantzakis, The Last Temptation of Christ, p. 131.

contempt for a life such as Zebedee's, for as Pandelis Prevelakis has pointed out, "An undisturbed and settled career, comfort, respectability were in his eyes indication of a sluggish metaphysical life."<sup>23</sup> And to a man like Kazantzakis, a life without intense spiritual struggle is no life at all. Thus, in The Odyssey: A Modern Sequel as the hero recounts his adventures with Calypso, Circe, and Nausicaä, he feels that he has escaped three guises of death in freeing himself of their powerful charms. Calypso would have made him a "deathless god," Circe, a beast. In either case he would have lost his essential humanity--the struggle against death, the struggle to surpass animal instincts. Nausicaä promised him perfect human happiness, but this gift would also mark an end to man's struggle.<sup>24</sup>

The struggle itself against the temptations of the flesh is what appealed to Kazantzakis. As he says of his youth, "What I desired most deeply was not the cure but the wound."<sup>25</sup> The battle is infinitely more important to him than victory, for even if victory were achieved, it would be necessary to embark upon a new struggle. Kazantzakis

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<sup>23</sup>Prevelakis, p. 32.

<sup>24</sup>Nikos Kazantzakis, The Odyssey: A Modern Sequel (New York, 1958), pp. 37-38, Book Two, ll. 150-189.

<sup>25</sup>Kazantzakis, Report to Greco, p. 353.

apparently admires and desires to emulate the ascetic who is constantly tempted by earthly pleasures but who is able to resist them. He himself is evidently strongly attracted to women, but his fear of their enslaving powers makes him wish to avoid sexual involvement with them. His attempt to renounce the pleasures offered by women is not the result of an insensitivity to feminine charms, nor is he concerned with a question of morality. He says of the Christian attitude toward sex,

[It] soiled the union of man and woman by stigmatizing it as a sin. Whereas formerly it was a holy act, a joyous submission to God's will, in the Christian's terror-shaken soul it degenerated into a transgression. Before Christ, sex was a red apple; along came Christ, and a worm entered that apple and began to eat it.<sup>26</sup>

Kazantzakis obviously holds enslavement by a moral code to be no better than any other enslavement. He is concerned with the need to achieve and maintain his own personal liberty, and the very attraction that women have for him threatens this liberty. In Report to Greco he says that he first experienced the mystery of woman's power over him when he was only about three years old. A neighbor of his family, a newly married young woman, took him on her lap and hugged him. Overcome with an "erotic torpor" and the odor of her body, he fainted.

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 371.

Thereafter, she never picked him up again; she simply looked at him "very tenderly with her large eyes and smiled."<sup>27</sup>

Kazantzakis' struggle to resist this mysterious power of women represents the victory of spirit over flesh, of god over beast,<sup>28</sup> and the stronger the desires of the flesh, the more Kazantzakis would feel that they should be fought. The most difficult battles are the most important ones to him, for, as he says in his preface to The Last Temptation of Christ, "The Spirit wants to have to wrestle with flesh which is strong and full of resistance."<sup>29</sup> For this reason he depicts Christ as a man who has to battle the strongest of fleshly temptations. In Saint Francis he has Brother Leo say to Francis,

I am the only one . . . who knows about your carnal love for . . . Clara. All the others, because they are afraid of their own shadows, think you loved only her soul . . . . And not only did this carnal love . . . not hinder you from reaching God, it actually helped you greatly, because it was this love that unveiled for you the great secret; in what manner, and by what kind of struggle the flesh becomes spirit . . . . So you fought the flesh, vanquished it mercilessly, then kneaded it with your blood and tears and . . . transformed it into spirit.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>28</sup> Prevelakis, pp. 86-90.

<sup>29</sup> Kazantzakis, Prologue to The Last Temptation of Christ, p. 2.

<sup>30</sup> Nikos Kazantzakis, Saint Francis (New York, 1962), pp. 21-22.



Because a victory over the desires of the flesh would not be significant to Kazantzakis unless the desires were extremely powerful, all his heroes experience an overpowering sexual attraction which they must struggle to resist.

The author recounts in his Report to Greco how his imagination was kindled when he was a child by the stories of saints' lives. He was thrilled by the visions and martyrdoms of saints, and he devoutly wished to follow their examples. He says that his second great desire, after that for freedom, was for sanctity.<sup>31</sup> He also says that his first teacher's switch was what taught him as a child "that suffering is the greatest guide along the ascent which leads from animal to man."<sup>32</sup> Later, he says that he is not sure what God is, but he is sure that the only way to reach him is by "the ascent. Never the descent or the level road, only the ascent."<sup>33</sup> This "ascent" involves for Kazantzakis "independence from every attachment, the sacrifice of all human happiness."<sup>34</sup> He seems to distrust happiness, and whenever he allows himself to be happy, he says that he hears an "inner weeping,"<sup>35</sup> perhaps of his soul, which fears the enslaving powers of happiness.

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<sup>31</sup> Kazantzakis, Report to Greco, pp. 71-74.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., pp. 482-483.

<sup>34</sup> Prevelakis, p. 24.

<sup>35</sup> Kazantzakis, Report to Greco, p. 238.

Since women are sources of happiness for men, they are, therefore threats to his high purpose of resisting all attachments and human happiness. The pleasures offered by a woman seek to lead a man to comfort and contentment, destroyers of the passion to explore and the passion to create. Because she is a potential obstacle to these noble passions, Kazantzakis at times considers woman to be an agent of evil. As he says in The Saviors of God: Spiritual Exercises, "Whatever rushes upward and helps God to ascend is good. Whatever drags downward and impedes God from ascending is evil."<sup>36</sup> Pandelis Prevelakis asserts that evil to Kazantzakis is ". . . whatever obstructs the creative urge, whatever puts out the flame of noble passion."<sup>37</sup> Kazantzakis is not so narrowminded as to condemn all women as being merely "Whatever drags downward," of course, but his own susceptibility to feminine charms and his fear of their power over him led him occasionally to outbursts such as the following, with which the narrator of Zorba the Greek attempts to exorcise the widow's alluring spell:

Who then created this labyrinth of hesitation, this temple of presumption, this pitcher of sin, this field sown with a thousand deceptions, this gateway to Hell, this basket overflowing with artfulness, this poison which tastes like honey, this bond which chains mortals to the earth: woman?<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Kazantzakis, The Saviors of God: Spiritual Exercises, p. 108.

<sup>37</sup> Prevelakis, p. 36.      <sup>38</sup> Kazantzakis, Zorba the Greek, p. 112.

Saint Francis expresses a similar sentiment when he says to Clara, "I don't trust you women. Eve's serpent has been licking your ears and lips for too many centuries. Do not lead me into temptation."<sup>39</sup>

The author's distrust of woman's power reveals itself also in his descriptions of women. Chinese courtesans are compared to vipers, and they have "dangerous" bodies which cause men to lose their souls.<sup>40</sup>

The widow in Zorba the Greek is called a "beast of prey,"<sup>41</sup> and her walk is compared to that of a merciless black panther.<sup>42</sup> As Prevelakis

says, "Kazantzakis . . . does not leave us in any doubt of his opinion on the subject . . . woman kills the creative impulse . . ."<sup>43</sup>

Thus, man must slaughter woman, both metaphorically and literally, if he is to be free to devote himself to his most noble aspirations.<sup>44</sup>

In obedience to this principle, Captain Michales murders the beautiful Eminé because his desire for her has caused him to forget his duty to Crete,<sup>45</sup> and the Odysseus of Kazantzakis finds it necessary to abandon all the women in his life. Katerina in The Greek Passion and Mary

<sup>39</sup>Kazantzakis, Saint Francis, p. 228.

<sup>40</sup>Kazantzakis, The Rock Garden, pp. 103, 105, 211, 213.

<sup>41</sup>Kazantzakis, Zorba the Greek, p. 96.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 122.      <sup>43</sup>Prevelakis, p. 88.      <sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>45</sup>Nikos Kazantzakis, Freedom or Death (New York, 1956), p. 311.

Magdalene in The Last Temptation of Christ die violent deaths, each martyred for the sake of the man she loves.

In spite of his fear and distrust concerning women, Kazantzakis often evidences in his writing a profound compassion for the sorrows that women suffer. Over and over again he expresses pity for the aged woman, who has lost her physical beauty. Dame Hortense in Zorba the Greek is perhaps his most pathetic representation of the female who has lost her charms to time, the old woman who is still susceptible to male flattery, but this type appears in other works by Kazantzakis. The two most bitter memories he retains of his first journey through Italy deal with two aged women--one a lonely peasant woman who is grateful to the traveler for allowing her to lodge him in her home, the other a widowed countess, who is grateful to the young man for making her feel beautiful again with his attentions to her.<sup>46</sup> Kazantzakis is especially sensitive to the poignancy of an aged woman's vain effort to be alluring to men. He understands that she is still attempting to fulfill her natural function, but she has outlived her abilities. Unlike a man, she does not have the compensation of a creative spiritual life when her physical powers of creativity are gone. Zorba tells of his eighty-year-old grandmother who lets herself believe that the young men serenading the youthful beauty next door are serenading her. When the

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<sup>46</sup>Kazantzakis, Report to Greco, pp. 181-187.

callous young Zorba destroys her illusion and tells her that she is "just a stinking old corpse," she immediately begins to waste away and dies a few weeks later with a curse on her lips for the grandson who mortally wounded her feminine heart.<sup>47</sup> In The Last Temptation of Christ the angel of Jesus' dream is aware of the tragedy of a woman who has seen the last of her youth. He describes the death of Mary Magdalene as being the merciful gift of God. She was struck down at the height of her beauty, youth, and happiness. "Can there be a greater joy for a woman? She will not see her love fade, her heart turn coward, her flesh rot away."<sup>48</sup>

Kazantzakis sees women as creatures to be pitied no matter what their age or their station in life. He expresses a great compassion for prostitutes, particularly for Katerina in The Greek Passion and for Mary Magdalene in The Last Temptation of Christ. In The Rock Garden he sympathetically describes the Chinese courtesans as they make their nightly rounds,<sup>49</sup> and, in spite of their revolting appearances and shameless actions, he is almost overwhelmed with horror

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<sup>47</sup> Kazantzakis, Zorba the Greek, pp. 46-47.

<sup>48</sup> Kazantzakis, The Last Temptation of Christ, p. 456.

<sup>49</sup> Kazantzakis, The Rock Garden, pp. 94, 103.

and pity toward the Japanese prostitutes in Tokyo's Tamonoi and Yoshiwara districts.<sup>50</sup> He feels that these "wretched sisters" of his bear the "iron yoke" of humanity, and he says of their plight, "We men had let women assume the whole responsibility. We had let them fight at the most dangerous posts; and we, like cowards, had taken cover behind them."<sup>51</sup> He seems to feel that men have left to women the responsibility of keeping the human race going. Women must serve the earthward force; they must bear the children, maintain the homes, devote themselves to man's physical necessities. Men, on the other hand, are able to dedicate themselves to loftier goals, transcending the "mundane" demands of producing and preserving human life. When Kazantzakis views the misery of prostitutes, he realizes that woman's fate in the service of these earthly matters is one marked with pain and suffering. She has only sorrow to look forward to. Mary Magdalene tells Jesus, "You must learn that a woman is a wounded doe. She has no other joy, poor thing, except to lick her wounds,"<sup>52</sup> and she later refers to woman as "a creature maimed and wounded."<sup>53</sup> Kazantzakis himself remarks, "A woman's heart is a wound that never heals;

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<sup>50</sup>Ibid., pp. 139-140.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. 141.

<sup>52</sup>Kazantzakis, The Last Temptation of Christ, pp. 90-91.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., p. 393.

if you touch it even with a peacock feather, it shrieks in pain.”<sup>54</sup>

Women in the works of Kazantzakis seem to find satisfaction in their own suffering, as if bearing pain were their most noble accomplishment.

In The Last Temptation of Christ, Mary and Salome whisper to each other so that the men will not be able to hear, “and by interfering spoil the deep feminine joy given them by pain.”<sup>55</sup> Siu-lan in The Rock Garden thinks that being a woman is a sad fate, and she declares that even if she were given a choice, she would prefer to cry rather than to laugh.<sup>56</sup>

This sympathy and compassion for women perhaps led Kazantzakis to re-evaluate his traditional concept of women as “ornaments for men,” for his “Europeanized mind,” a product of his travels and his intellectual quests, was not by any means vanquished by his “African heart.” If the heart proclaimed women to be second-rate, untrustworthy creatures, the mind refused to ignore evidence to the contrary, examples of women who were able to rise above the temporal aspects of life and encourage man in his spiritual ascent. In striking contrast to the mother of Jesus in The Last Temptation of Christ, Lady Pica

<sup>54</sup> Kazantzakis, The Rock Garden, p. 209.

<sup>55</sup> Kazantzakis, The Last Temptation of Christ, p. 168.

<sup>56</sup> Kazantzakis, The Rock Garden, p. 144.

encourages the spiritual achievements of her son in Saint Francis. She herself abandoned her home and family when she was only sixteen in order to follow a severe and fiery monk as he traveled preaching through the countryside. Found by her brother, however, she was carried back to her father's house to be married and subsequently to give birth to a saint.<sup>57</sup> To be sure, she feels a mother's pangs at losing her son when Francis sets out upon his arduous road to sanctity, but she staunchly expresses the hope that he will succeed in doing what she attempted to do in following her monk.<sup>58</sup> Ultimately, she retires to Clara's convent and becomes "Sister Pica" to her own son.<sup>59</sup> Kazantzakis does not seem to have any difficulty in accepting this traditional characterization of the saint's mother, and his portrayal of her personality is free from any tinge of skepticism. He apparently believes woman to be capable of choosing spirituality over worldly human desires. Another mother, Salome, in The Last Temptation of Christ, expresses a desire to save her son John from inordinate fasting and prayer and to keep him near her.<sup>60</sup> But when she comes to realize the spiritual power of Jesus, she gladly watches both her

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<sup>57</sup> Kazantzakis, Saint Francis, pp. 46-49.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 118.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 327.

<sup>60</sup> Kazantzakis, The Last Temptation of Christ, p. 161.



sons set out to follow him, and she tells his mother, "You are blessed, Mary, and blessed is the fruit of your womb."<sup>61</sup> Salome herself eventually leaves her home and her husband to follow Christ.<sup>62</sup>

Younger women also are able to renounce earthly pleasures in favor of loftier goals. Katerina in The Greek Passion and Mary Magdalene give up their many lovers in order to follow their respective saviors, Manolios and Christ. And Siu-lan, in The Rock Garden, sacrifices love and happiness to her responsibility toward the "new China."<sup>63</sup> The Japanese Joshiro, in the same novel, has become so intense in her ambitions for Japan and China that she transcends the usual preoccupations of a woman. "The minor details of life--heat, love--could no longer touch her."<sup>64</sup> She has forgotten her "woman's mission," as she herself says, to sully men's bodies and steal their souls. She has become so devoted to her cause that she no longer regards love as true happiness, but has adopted the masculine attitude that "love can be nothing but the momentary pastime of heroes."<sup>65</sup>

Kazantzakis never forgets, however, the psychological differences between men and women. Although these women rise above their

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 190.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 362.

<sup>63</sup> Kazantzakis, The Rock Garden, pp. 168, 234.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

instinctive enslavement to the attractions of ordinary human happiness, they never lose their essential femininity altogether. Joshiro knows that she cannot escape the innate qualities of her sex, and she exclaims,

I wish I were a man! Only a man can free himself completely, body and soul. A woman can't. Yes, our intelligence can free itself . . . . But our heart, that naive old muscle, still fights on . . . .<sup>66</sup>

Perhaps Kazantzakis' "African heart" will not allow him to conceive of woman's possible independence of man, for the women mentioned above are all led directly by men to their renunciations, and they rely upon men to lend them emotional support. This fact is obvious concerning the women who actually follow their spiritual leaders, but even Siu-lan and Joshiro, who are devoted to ideas, have reached this stage of devotion as a result of their relationships with one particular man. Siu-lan's brother, Li-Te, has convinced his sister that her only responsibility is to her race and to her country, and that she has no time for personal feelings.<sup>67</sup> Joshiro's dedication to her cause, we are led to believe, actually springs from her love for this same man, her Chinese lover, who cruelly abandoned her. The Japanese conquest of China and her personal vengeance seem to have merged into one single goal in her life.<sup>68</sup> Even Clara, whom Francis believes strong

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<sup>66</sup>Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., pp. 168, 234.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., p. 19.

enough to follow his rigorous example of piety, expresses the need that she and her nuns feel for his masculine guidance:

Messages do not satisfy us . . . . We are women. To be calmed we must see the movement of the lips that are addressing us, we must feel upon our heads the hand that is held over us in benediction. We are women, I tell you. If you refuse to come here to comfort us with your words, Father Francis, we are lost.<sup>69</sup>

There are very few women in Kazantzakis' works who are free of personal involvements with men. Phida and Krino in The Odyssey have supposedly renounced men successfully, but as Pandelis Prevelakis points out, these two women, as shades, regret the path they chose in life and declare that they would enjoy their youth if they were allowed to live again. Rala, who chooses to die when she is tempted to place love over duty, expresses sorrow also that she did not enjoy love on earth.<sup>70</sup>

Kazantzakis appears to see women as being generally incapable of dedicating themselves to abstract principles. When they are successful in subordinating their basic feminine aims to spiritual goals, they are nearly always led to do so by a man. And the principle that the man stands for, be it God or China, seems to become important to the woman only as it is identified with the living man she

<sup>69</sup> Kazantzakis, Saint Francis, p. 248.

<sup>70</sup> Prevelakis, p. 89; Kazantzakis, The Odyssey: A Modern Sequel, pp. 758, 761, 770, Book Twenty-Four, ll. 617-22, 721-22, 1136-40.

follows. He becomes her "beloved," and she follows his ascent, not for the sake of the ascent, but for his sake. Even though she may renounce sexual love, she is still very much aware of his masculinity. For example, when Clara greets Francis upon his visit to her convent, she blushes deeply.<sup>71</sup> And when Jesus visits the home of Mary and Martha, the sisters rejoice at the spiritual glory that he evidences; but they seem to be more deeply impressed with the fact that he is a young man staying in their home and that they are unmarried women.<sup>72</sup> This situation is, of course, central to the theme of this particular novel, since the "last temptation" of Christ is the temptation to settle for ordinary human happiness--the happiness which women normally seek for themselves and for the men they love. Kazantzakis feels that every man seeking to attain total spirituality faces the temptation to give up the struggle and accept the earthly happiness and contentment offered by women.

Woman then seems to have a mission in life different from, but complementary to, that of man. As Kazantzakis has Saint Francis tell the nuns, "Love: that--God bless it!--is woman's destined role," and for the first time the nuns "felt what an infinitely divine gift it was to

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<sup>71</sup>Kazantzakis, Saint Francis, p. 248.

<sup>72</sup>Kazantzakis, The Last Temptation of Christ, p. 279.

be a woman, and also what a responsibility.”<sup>73</sup> In The Saviors of God Kazantzakis exhorts,

If you are a woman, then love. Choose austere-ly among all men the father of your children. It is not you who make the choice, but the indestructible, merciless, infinite, masculine God within you.<sup>74</sup>

Women hold the key to immortality. Kazantzakis cites a woman, Mary Magdalene, as being the only one of Christ’s followers who refused to accept His death; she, therefore, was the one who resurrected Him. Kazantzakis refers to the heart which wrestles with death as “Mary Magdalene,” and declares, “. . . had woman’s warm heart not been present, God would have left man to lie within the tomb forever. Our salvation hangs upon a thread, upon a cry of love.”<sup>75</sup> When Kazantzakis describes his relationship with the communist Itka, he says he came to realize “. . . that the body of woman is warm, hard, and filled with the waters of immortality; that death does not exist.”<sup>76</sup> As Mary Magdalene told Jesus, women have the ability to live out eternity on earth, and they are able to transmit this ability to a man through love.

<sup>73</sup> Kazantzakis, Saint Francis, pp. 252-253.

<sup>74</sup> Kazantzakis, The Saviors of God: Spiritual Exercises, p. 122.

<sup>75</sup> Kazantzakis, Report to Greco, pp. 240-242, 246.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 371.

But man should not allow himself to be enslaved even by a promise of immortality, Kazantzakis would say. And he knows that women represent snares to men, just as any part of life can become a snare if man allows himself to love it so much that he becomes enslaved by it. But in spite of his "African heart," Kazantzakis values and respects women. He recounts at least twice with evident approval the story of a peasant who rebels against custom and refuses to allow his wife to wash his feet every evening when he returns from the fields. The husband tells her that she is his wife, not his slave, and that henceforth he will wash his own feet.<sup>77</sup> Kazantzakis says of the community on Mount Athos, "It was a sorrowful, unbearable village of males, without a woman, without a child, without laughter. Nothing but beards . . . ."<sup>78</sup> When a zealously communistic girl in Berlin reveals her jealousy of another girl, who is beautiful and empty-headed, the author says that he is ". . . secretly delighted to hear the eternal feminine surging above ideas, above all theories about destroying and rebuilding the world."<sup>79</sup> Perhaps Kazantzakis himself best summarizes his attitude toward women in his Report to Greco. He is addressing

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<sup>77</sup> Kazantzakis, The Odyssey: A Modern Sequel, p. 182, Book Six, ll. 618-626; Report to Greco, p. 36.

<sup>78</sup> Kazantzakis, Report to Greco, p. 200.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p. 370.

El Greco directly as "grandfather":

Women I loved. I was fortunate in chancing to meet extraordinary women along my route. No man ever did me so much good or aided my struggle so greatly as these women--and one above all, the last . . . . We had good wives; yours was named Jeronima, mine Helen. What good fortune this was, grandfather! How many times did we not say to ourselves as we looked at them, Blessed be the day we were born!

But we did not allow women, even the dearest, to lead us astray. We did not follow their flower-strewn road, we took them with us. No we did not take them, these dauntless companions followed our ascents of their own free will.<sup>80</sup>

Woman is capable of devoting herself to causes; and she can even be worthy of Kazantzakis' admiration on the same basis that another man could win that admiration. Sometimes--but very infrequently--his female characters seem to surpass sexuality and become the spiritual equals of men. The Odysseus of Kazantzakis admires Helen of Troy, and when he leaves her on Crete to bear the barbarian's child, his "God" says to him,

"Archer, she has a proud soul, and I like her well!  
She follows in your footsteps now, and sprints for  
freedom . . . ."81

In The Rock Garden Kazantzakis says that Joshiro's body served her soul as a result of an ascetic impulse and that he "loved her as the

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., pp. 493-494.

<sup>81</sup> Kazantzakis, The Odyssey: A Modern Sequel, p. 210, Book Seven, ll. 457-458.

soldier loves his comrade.”<sup>82</sup> Odysseus also feels a comradeship with a woman--Phida; and he seems to be hardly aware of her sex at all.<sup>83</sup>

Kazantzakis' own inner conflicts are bound up in his complex attitude toward women. He describes the "masculine" and "feminine" aspects of his own nature as being in constant opposition; thus, to some extent, both the male and female characters of his works are often symbolic of the contradictory forces raging within the author's own heart.<sup>84</sup> In Report to Greco he speaks of the conflicting instincts which he inherited from his parents. He says that the "fierce, hard, and morose" nature of his father and the tenderness of his mother both circulate in his blood. He says further,

I have carried them all my days; neither has died. As long as I live, they too will live inside me and battle in their antithetical ways to govern my thoughts and actions. My lifelong effort is to reconcile them so that the one may give me his strength, the other her tenderness: . . . .<sup>85</sup>

These opposing forces might, in a very general way, be labeled masculine and feminine, as well as paternal and maternal.

<sup>82</sup>Kazantzakis, The Rock Garden, pp. 238, 181.

<sup>83</sup>Kazantzakis, The Odyssey: A Modern Sequel, p. 215, Book Seven, ll. 704-718.

<sup>84</sup>This symbolism is especially notable in the female characters of The Odyssey: A Modern Sequel.

<sup>85</sup>Kazantzakis, Report to Greco, p. 49.



It is certainly significant that although Kazantzakis often depicts man as being possessed of both masculine and feminine desires, which contradict each other, he seems to find in woman a more integral personality. Her desires, her goals are never sought with misgivings or with self-doubt in his works. She acts and, having acted, does not agonize over the consequences. She is not haunted by doubts concerning the course of action she chooses to follow. She may seek only earthly happiness as the highest goal of life, as Mary does in The Last Temptation of Christ, or she may, as Katerina does in The Greek Passion, renounce the world's pleasures in favor of spiritual rewards. In either case, she evidences no doubts concerning the path she has chosen. And that path is dictated to her by her basic motivating force, which is love for man. This love may cause her to try to hold its object close to her and to see him satisfied with earthly happiness; or it may cause a Katerina or a Mary Magdalene to follow her beloved in his spiritual ascent. Through woman's obedience to this eternal, cosmic force, she surpasses the ego and joins the "deindividualized realm of experience which is somehow more basic to life than is logic, reason, morality, or beauty . . . ." <sup>86</sup>

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<sup>86</sup>Bien, p. 151.

The love of woman draws man to the earth just as his love for any kind of earthly beauty serves to prevent his spiritual ascendancy over matter. She is "only the faithful, skillful servant of one of the two great forces it would be vain and sacrilegious to resist--of the force which draws us to the earth."<sup>87</sup> Woman thus becomes identified with nature and takes on qualities of nature. Her single-mindedness in performing her functions is similar to the impartiality of natural laws. When a new civilization is rising from an older one, for example, it is woman who "kills the dying, pitilessly, quickly . . . ."<sup>88</sup> Not only are women compared to beasts and snakes in the works of Kazantzakis, but they are compared to inanimate members of the natural world as well. The Irish girl in Report to Greco is compared to a fig,<sup>89</sup> and Zorba says, ". . . Woman is a fresh spring. You lean over her, you see your reflection and you drink . . . ."<sup>90</sup> In this same novel Dame Hortense is identified with Mother Earth.<sup>91</sup> Elements of nature also remind Kazantzakis of woman. The earth itself is, of course, feminine to him,

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<sup>87</sup> Kazantzakis, The Rock Garden, p. 107.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., pp. 160-161.

<sup>89</sup> Kazantzakis, Report to Greco, p. 127.

<sup>90</sup> Kazantzakis, Zorba the Greek, p. 83.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p. 220.

especially when it receives the "masculine" rain, and he says that when the peasants plow the land, "they re-experience the first night they slept with their wives."<sup>92</sup> Like any other aspect of nature, woman tends to fall into a class and easily loses her individuality. For Zorba, there is only the "female of the species"; when he looks at a woman, "The individual disappeared, the features were obliterated, whether young or senile, beautiful or ugly--those were mere unimportant variations. Behind each woman rises the austere, sacred and mysterious face of Aphrodite."<sup>93</sup> With a similar viewpoint, the angel in Jesus' dream says, "Only one woman exists in the world, one woman with countless faces. This one falls; the next rises."<sup>94</sup> Even women themselves may accept this lack of individuality. When Kazantzakis asks a girl he has met in a movie theatre what her name is, she replies, ". . . Why ask? My name is 'Woman.'"<sup>95</sup>

Kazantzakis seems to admire, even envy, this feminine simplicity and compliance; but at the same time he pities woman's powerlessness

<sup>92</sup>Kazantzakis, Report to Greco, p. 34. This passage also calls to mind Demeter, who lay with Iasion in a plowed field.

<sup>93</sup>Kazantzakis, Zorba the Greek, p. 41.

<sup>94</sup>Kazantzakis, The Last Temptation of Christ, p. 457.

<sup>95</sup>Kazantzakis, Report to Greco, p. 354.

to resist her own inclinations which bind her to the earth. As Odysseus gazes at the sleeping Diktena, he contemplates the lot of women:

The fate of woman suddenly seemed to him most cruel:  
 God, like a beast, mounts from the ground with muddy feet,  
 and woman, bowed and shuddering, her pale palms turned upward,  
 struggles, but can not, will not resist the beast.<sup>96</sup>

The Saint Francis of Kazantzakis also expresses sympathy for woman's inability to rise above the earth:

My sisters, you are the ones . . . I pity--much more than  
 the men; because you are women, and your hearts do not  
 steel themselves easily against the beauties of the world.  
 You look upon them and they please you. Flowers, children,  
 men, earrings, silk garments, stunning plumes: My God,  
 what snares! How many women can possibly escape?<sup>97</sup>

Again, Kazantzakis is first and last concerned with liberty. He pities woman because she is enslaved by her very personality.

Kazantzakis apparently believes that woman's fulfillment lies in her relationship with man. She may be a dauntless creature, as he calls his second wife, but she still must "follow" the spiritual ascent of a man. She is incapable of devoting her life to an abstract principle, or at least unwilling to do so. She must dedicate herself to a living human being. If she does orient her life around an idea, as Phida,

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<sup>96</sup> Kazantzakis, The Odyssey: A Modern Sequel, pp. 187, Book Six, ll. 862-865.

<sup>97</sup> Kazantzakis, Saint Francis, pp. 250-251.

Krino, and Rala do in The Odyssey, she does not achieve fulfillment. Even after they have died triumphantly upholding their principles, these three women, as shades, regret their wasted lives. For a man in Kazantzakis' works, to die for an ideal is a glorious victory, as it is for Manolios, Jesus, and Michales. But for these women, it signifies a wasted life. If they had died for the sakes of men they loved, as Katerina and Mary Magdalene do, they would probably have rejoiced, for these two martyred women apparently find fulfillment in their deaths. This tendency to refuse to devote herself to anything intangible is perhaps the fundamental quality of a woman which sets her apart from a man. Kazantzakis sees woman as an essentially practical creature. She does not understand a man's desire for glory, nor does she understand his willingness to be martyred for an ideal. A woman would not voluntarily sacrifice her life in a hopeless battle, as Captain Michales does in Freedom or Death. She would not sacrifice earthly happiness to a mystical thirst for martyrdom as Manolios and Christ do.

Woman's natural function in life, as Saint Francis says, is love. She is by nature bound to follow man to her fulfillment because of her love for him. To be sure, her love may be a selfish and destructive passion such as Eminé indulges in Freedom or Death, or it may be the pure and selfless love of Clara for Francis. In either case, however, the male object of her love faces the danger of being ensnared by her

love, because she naturally seeks only earthly happiness. Woman has difficulty understanding the spiritual striving of a man because her aspirations do not oppose one another. Her heart is not torn with conflicting desires, as his heart is. In Report to Greco Kazantzakis says,

Every integral man has inside him, in his heart of hearts, a mystic center around which all else revolves. This mystic whirling lends unity to his thoughts and actions; it helps him find or invent the cosmic harmony. For some this center is love, for other kindness or beauty, others the thirst for knowledge or the longing for gold and power. They examine the relative value of all else and subordinate it to this central passion.<sup>98</sup>

In the works of Kazantzakis, this "mystic center" for a woman is always love. This love may be distorted by external forces into a kind of hatred, as Joshiro's love is distorted in The Rock Garden, but this passion is still the motivating force for women. A man such as Manolios may agonize over the choice he must make between the earth and the spirit; Saint Francis may have to fight desperately against his fleshly love for Clara. But a woman enjoys a "cosmic harmony" between her desires and her actions. She is motivated by love for man either to seek earthly happiness with him or to follow him to spiritual joy via the renunciation of the world. The love of Mary for

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<sup>98</sup>Kazantzakis, Report to Greco, p. 494.

her son in The Last Temptation of Christ is, of course, too narrow for her to follow the second course of action, but she does not suffer any internal strife concerning her limitations. She is not faced with conflicting desires; she seeks earthly happiness for herself and for her son, and she is completely certain that she is right in seeking that goal.

Because woman's life revolves around other mortal human beings, she is extremely vulnerable to pain. Her fulfillment rests in the hands and fates of other people, whereas if she were able to dedicate herself to an idea, she might be independent of others. Because a woman submerges her ego in devotion to her loved ones, her life loses direction when she is old and no longer needed by others. Kazantzakis pities woman's dependence on man for her fulfillment and realizes that if man fails her, she has nothing else to turn to. He mentions at least twice in his works the idea that God will never forgive a man who does not answer a woman's call to sleep with her.<sup>99</sup> In Kazantzakis' novels men seldom seduce women. No matter how much a man may be attracted to a woman, he usually feels that he is bestowing a favor when he makes love to her. When, by pretending to be a god, Odysseus does seduce a girl he meets near a stream, he not only feels that he is admirable in leaving the girl pregnant, but he apparently feels that he

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<sup>99</sup>Ibid., p. 144; Zorba the Greek, p. 103.

has earned the calf that he takes from her.<sup>100</sup> The girl herself is perfectly satisfied with his treatment of her, as are the lonely widows and young girls whom Odysseus and his fellow shipbuilders visit during the nights in Ithaca.<sup>101</sup> Kazantzakis implies that woman's happiness lies in her sexual love for a man, and he pities the brevity of her joy:

But woman's flesh is an unable, transient thing,  
and then lip-closing Charon grabs it by both braids  
before it can rejoice an hour in man's embrace.<sup>102</sup>

Because of her unquestioning obedience to the natural forces which motivate her, woman is in closer harmony with the earth than is the spiritually striving man, and she represents a trap for men who desire to soar above the earth, to rebel against natural forces. In her most unselfish love for him, woman may create a snare for man, because she seeks his happiness--and happiness to her typically means earth-bound happiness. She desires man to follow her "flower-strewn road" to contentment, but Kazantzakis sees "the ascent" as the noblest road for man to take. In order to follow this road, man must resist the enticement of both woman and the earthward force which she serves, for they both have the power to lure him away from the ascending road.

<sup>100</sup> Kazantzakis, The Odyssey: A Modern Sequel, pp. 81-82, Book Three, ll. 482-555.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p. 57, Book Two, ll. 933-953.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., p. 148, Book Five, ll. 538-540.



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## CHAPTER III

### THE AMBIVALENT ROLE OF WOMAN IN KAZANTZAKIS' PHILOSOPHY

The responsibility of mankind, according to Kazantzakis, is to "save" God, and God's salvation lies in the never-ceasing refinement of matter into spirit. Since man is spiritually superior to plants and animals, he is the most "godlike" form of life on earth. It is his duty to further the evolutionary process and transubstantiate into spirit as much of his own flesh as he can. Kazantzakis considers this goal of total spiritualization to be man's most ennobling one, although he is well aware that not all men accept the responsibility of seeking it. Most men would rather follow the easy road to earthly contentment and accept a comforting belief in an almighty God who saves man. But a few men choose to follow uncompromisingly the arduous road which they feel will lead them to God. Just as Christ inspired his disciples, these dedicated men inspire others to follow their ascent, others who perhaps feel the same desire but less urgently than their leaders do.

Not every man is a Christ or a Saint Francis or an Odysseus-- but no woman is. The ideals which Kazantzakis sets forth in his writings, ideals of total spiritualization and freedom, cannot apply to

woman as he portrays her. He explicitly says that woman does not even comprehend the world of the spirit, that she is the unquestioning slave of the cosmic feminine principle which opposes man's most noble aspirations. At best then, she may perform secondary functions toward preserving the creative spirit of the universe. She may be a "dauntless companion," and she may offer man the everyday comforts of life as he labors in his heroic ascent.<sup>1</sup> By choosing the proper mate, she may even be able to bear a man-child who will become an Odysseus. But she herself is never able to lead or even to recognize the spiritual ascent on her own. A man must show it to her, and she must follow his footsteps. Kazantzakis sees this submission to man as woman's natural attitude; and although in The Odyssey: A Modern Sequel he presents Phida, Rala, and Krino as women whose souls are apparently free of masculine domination, he has their shades express regret for their "wasted" (manless) lives on earth. The author could not allow these females to deny their dependence upon man with impunity. In spite of his intellectual attempt to accept woman as man's equal, Kazantzakis cannot escape his ancient heritage, which assigns to woman a role inferior to that of man. Woman does not share the spiritual advancement of man and is therefore reduced to serving his more god-like character.

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<sup>1</sup>Prevelakis, p. 173, Note 22. Kazantzakis is quoted as saying, "To Eleni . . . I owe all the daily happiness of my life . . . ."

At her worst, woman is a temptress, a representative of all the evil forces which seek to prevent man from ascending to God. Kazantzakis expresses an ascetic attitude toward sex. With the exception of Zorba, all the heroes of his novels struggle to renounce a strong sexual desire. Kazantzakis himself suffered from a "saint's disease" which afflicted his face with running sores. The initial occasion of this malady took place in Vienna when a girl he had met in a movie theatre accepted his proposition. She was to come to his room the following night, but before that time, Kazantzakis' face swelled into hideous, oozing sores. A psychologist who was a student of Freud diagnosed the ailment and maintained that Kazantzakis' soul had brought it on to prevent the body's sin. As soon as he left Vienna, Kazantzakis' face miraculously healed.<sup>2</sup> Although he greatly admired men like Zorba, who are joyfully able to experience the pleasures of the flesh, Kazantzakis could never be like them, because he was too fascinated by asceticism. He reveals in his writings the basic fear and distrust he felt toward attractive women by having most of them die violent and gruesome deaths and by making his heroes deny them. Prevelakis notes this aspect of Kazantzakis' work in the following passage:

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The hero of Serpent and Lily . . . induced the woman he loved to commit suicide . . . . Master Mason . . . builds

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<sup>2</sup>Friar, "The Spiritual Exercises of Nikos Kazantzakis," pp. 8-10.

his beloved into the foundations of the Bridge . . . . Christ ignores the charms of the Magdalene. Odysseus denies Penelope and later Helen of Sparta and Diktena, and he burns the ascetic's daughter, the creation of his own mind, on a pyre.<sup>3</sup>

It is regrettable that Kazantzakis' personal life must be dealt with only sketchily here. His autobiography, Report to Greco, is true to the spirit rather than to the facts of his life and does not even mention, for example, his first marriage. There is a possibility also that some significant material is contained in his personal correspondence and minor works which have yet to be translated into English. Particularly intriguing is the subject of his first wife, Galatea, from whom he was divorced in 1924. The failure of this marriage was probably due at least in part to the fact that Kazantzakis was traveling alone during most of the fifteen years he was married to Galatea and actually lived with her very little.<sup>4</sup> But she was apparently unsympathetic toward his spiritual struggles and in 1957 published a book called Men and Supermen, which is but a thinly disguised account of her life with Kazantzakis and which, from all reports, paints a highly uncomplimentary picture of her former husband.<sup>5</sup> Kazantzakis apparently was

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<sup>3</sup>Prevelakis, p. 36.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 173, Note 23.

<sup>5</sup>Kimon Friar, Preface to Nikos Kazantzakis and His Odyssey, by Pandelis Prevelakis (New York, 1961), p. 8. Unfortunately, an English translation of Men and Supermen is not available.

more fortunate in his second marriage, for he frequently pays tribute to his wife's faithfulness and courage.<sup>6</sup>

Kazantzakis recognizes the peculiar virtues, abilities, and vital contributions of womankind, but there seems to be a repressed hostility underlying his acceptance of the female sex. Even when he praises them, there is a vague hint of condescension in his tone, for he is contemptuous of men who suffer no spiritual agony, and he recognizes no capacity for spiritual struggle in women. Consequently, woman must be at least one step farther from "Godliness" than is man, according to Kazantzakis' conception of God.

This superior attitude which Kazantzakis seems to feel toward women is not obtrusive in his works and does not prevent his offering some valuable insight into the feminine personality and into man-woman relationships. He is keenly aware of the fundamental differences between the sexes. Just as Kazantzakis maintains, woman is undeniably more closely bound to the physical processes of nature than man is--her biological make-up sees to that. She is traditionally and socially bound to be concerned with material necessities for her family. Throughout history she has not been allowed the freedom which man has had to devote himself to ideals and glorious abstractions.

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<sup>6</sup>Kazantzakis, Report to Greco, pp. 493-494.

Kazantzakis believes that she lacks the capacity for "masculine" pursuits of the spirit, but perhaps she has simply never had the opportunity to consider them. Her creative energies have been forever drained by the duties of childbearing and homemaking. Many readers would contend that women have never been the willingly enslaved creatures depicted by Kazantzakis, and even those who see some historical validity in his approach to the matter might insist that women have, especially in America, gone a long way in their struggle for equality with men and will probably go much further. One thing seems certain, however: there is no place in Kazantzakis' philosophy for woman except as a follower. She is ever dependent upon man, but he, ideally, surpasses any need of her.

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