

## Kazantzakis and biography\*

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It is well known that Kazantzakis refers to religious, mythical and historical figures in his plays: Christ, Buddha, Odysseus, Julian the Apostate, Nicephorus Phocas, Kapodistrias.<sup>1</sup> It is less well known that he often read biographies of people who interested him,<sup>2</sup> particularly before he began writing a work, which sometimes then took on a different form from that which had originally been planned. Both *Report to Greco* and *Julian*, for example, had initially been conceived as biographies (Prevelakis 1984: 169-70, 266).

I do not know whether attention has been drawn to Eleni Kazantzaki's novelistic biographies for children (Prevelakis 1984: 308), or whether this has been related to similar projects of Kazantzakis such as *Μέγας Αλέξανδρος*, or *Στα παλάτια της Κνωσσού*. Eleni Kazantzaki also wrote a book on Gandhi, for

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<sup>1</sup> "Σιγά-σιγά [...] βούλιαξα στο μελάνι: μεγάλοι ίσκιτοι στριγμώνουνταν γύρα από το λάκκο της καρδιάς μου και ζητούσαν να πιουν αίμα ζεστό να ζωντανέψουν – ο Ιουλιανός ο Παραβάτης, ο Νικηφόρος Φωκάς, ο Κωνσταντίνος ο Παλαιολόγος, ο Προμηθέας. [...] Μάχουμουν να τους ανασύρω από τον Άδη, για να δοξάσω μπροστά από τους ζωντανούς ανθρώπους τον πόνο τους και τον αγώνα· τον πόνο και τον αγώνα του ανθρώπου" (Kazantzakis 1962: 542-3; henceforth ΑΓκ.).

<sup>2</sup> In his correspondence with Prevelakis he refers, for example, to the following biographies: E. d'Ors, *Goya* (Prevelakis 1984: 170), S. Zweig, *Nietzsche* and *Tolstoy* (ibid. 195, 272, 275) W. Irving, *Mahomet* (ibid. 281, 283), V. Hersch, *The Bird of God* [on El Greco] (ibid. 218-19), P. Bertaux, *Hölderlin, essai de biographie intérieure* (ibid. 680). He was also acquainted with R. Rolland's *Gandhi* (E. Kazantzaki 1983: 150).

which she asked Romain Rolland to write a preface.<sup>3</sup> It is another little-known fact that in 1940 Kazantzakis anonymously published biographies of "Columbus", "Empress Elisabeth", "Bernadotte" and "Chateaubriand" in *Η Καθημερινή*, supplying a fashionable demand for such literature in order to make a living (Prevelakis 1984: 500).

The biographical model known in Europe as "new" or "modern biography" (illustrious exponents of which include Stefan Zweig, Emil Ludwig, André Maurois, Lytton Strachey) flourished in Greece from the 1930s onwards. It was given the name *μυθιστορηματική βιογραφία*, or the French equivalent *vie/biographie romancée* – the term preferred by Kazantzakis (e.g. Prevelakis 1984: 169) – and can be defined as the narration of the life of a historical figure which depends either on cursory research or – as is more frequently the case – on secondary sources which are re-presented in novelistic fashion. The *vie romancée* is designed to combine the appeal of the novel with a vague claim to authenticity.<sup>4</sup>

The "new biography" had its critics in the thirties, notably the Marxist Georg Lukács in his book *The historical novel* (first published in German, in Moscow in 1937). Lukács saw the "belletristic biographical form" as the main form of historical novel in the interwar period. Its authors, usually liberal humanists who were isolated from the life of the people, described great historical figures in essentialist terms, emphasizing biographical-psychological causalities rather than revealing their connection with the wider socio-economic conditions of the times. Instead of the heroes appearing great because their emotions and desires are closely linked with the role they are required to fulfil, their personality is presented as the origin of their vocation, and the biography undertakes to demonstrate this psychologically, through anecdotes etc. Thus, according to Lukács, while the historical novel of the nineteenth

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<sup>3</sup> The request was expressed through a letter of recommendation from Stefan Zweig, but the preface failed to materialize (E. Kazantzaki 1983: 303-4).

<sup>4</sup> Commenting on the biography of El Greco which he intended to write in the thirties, Kazantzakis singled out "*érudition* and lyricism" as the essential elements of biographical writing (Prevelakis 1984: 169-70, 260).

century knew of everyday life and its problems and was able to concentrate them into typical situations which gave an image of the truth, the new version of the historical novel is not able to connect the private life of a great person with the generation of great ideas. Greatness is regarded here as the root cause of great acts, whereas greatness – the ability to respond to situations in a way which influences the life of the people – should really be seen as a result, measurable in terms of the success or failure of great figures in their historical task.

One of the few who survived Lukács's attack was Romain Rolland, whose biographies of Michelangelo, Beethoven and Tolstoy (all of them translated into Greek) analysed the historical contexts of their lives. Strangely, it was above all the novel *Colas Breugnon* (translated into Greek by Kosmas Politis in 1953), "a kind of interlude between his large epic and dramatic cycles", which found approval. According to Lukács, "Colas Breugnon is conceived by his author not only as a son of his time [the Regency under Louis XIII] [...] but also as an eternal type, [...] a type representative of the French popular life" (394-5).<sup>5</sup> The hero is a craftsman whose "wisdom is [...] drawn from popular life" (395). His characteristics are "human genuineness, subtlety and tenderness in his relations to people, his simple and shrewd decisiveness which in moments of real trial and danger soars into true heroism" (395). He has an "aloofness from the political struggles of the time portrayed, an aloofness which has been raised into a philosophy" (396), and a "plebeian mistrust for all that happens 'above'" (397). Lukács contrasts Rolland's novel to Stefan Zweig's *Erasmus* (translated into Greek by Yiannis Beratis in 1949), in which the people are treated as an "irrational mass", and the Renaissance humanist displays "an anxious and nervous shrinking back from any decision, a cautious balancing between 'on the one hand' and 'on the other hand', the conceited intellectual's attempt to transcend intellectual contradictions and social antagonisms" (398).

To my mind, this exposition reveals some striking similarities between Romain Rolland's novel, as perceived by Lukács, and Kazantzakis's *Βίος και πολιτεία του Αλέξη Ζορμπά*, similarities which can be considered in the framework of the

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<sup>5</sup> References are to Lukács 1981.

interwar biographical form and in relation to Lukács's notion of *Volkstümlichkeit*.<sup>6</sup> A later comment by Kazantzakis seems to confirm this view: "Ο Ζορμπάς ήταν κυρίως διάλογος ενούς καλαμαρά κι ενούς ανθρώπου του λαού· διάλογος μεταξύ του δικηγόρου Νου και της μεγάλης ψυχής του λαού." (E. Kazantzaki 1983: 567, my italics). Just as Colas Breugnon has been considered a typical representative of the French people, so *Βίος και πολιτεία* has been read as a typification of the character of the Greek people. The title of the English translation and the film version, *Zorba the Greek*, contributed to this perception.

The above account shows that before Kazantzakis embarked on his novelistic career, which began in 1941 with *Βίος και πολιτεία* and ended in 1956 with *Ο Φτωχούλης του Θεού*,<sup>7</sup> he was already well versed in the art of biography. As usual with Kazantzakis, his interest included the most contradictory models: *vie romancée* and its critique; Carlyle's hero-worship; and hagiography in the form of the *synaxaria* and the Lives of the Saints of the Orthodox and Catholic Churches. This last influence is revealed in the title *Βίος και πολιτεία του Αλέξη Ζορμπά*,<sup>8</sup> the book was previously to have been entitled "Το Συναξάρι του Ζορμπά". *Ο τελευταίος πειρασμός* is sometimes given the title "Τ' απομνημονέματα του Χριστού", while in *Ο Φτωχούλης του Θεού*<sup>9</sup> (which is also referred to within the text as "βίος και πολιτεία" and "συναξάρι") Kazantzakis deals with the most popular Western saint, Francis of Assisi, one of the recent biographies of whom he translated into Greek during the German Occupation in 1943.<sup>10</sup>

The purpose of the present paper is to indicate some common elements of these two apparently dissimilar novels, *Βίος και*

<sup>6</sup> See Heller 1991: 29-31.

<sup>7</sup> *Βίος και πολιτεία* was written between 1941 and 1943 and published in 1946; *Ο Φτωχούλης του Θεού* was written between 1952 and 1953, published in instalments in 1954 and in book form in 1956. See Prevelakis 1984: 499 and 650-72.

<sup>8</sup> References to this work are to Kazantzakis 1964; henceforth Z.

<sup>9</sup> References to this work are to Kazantzakis 1981; henceforth ΦΘ.

<sup>10</sup> Joergensen n.d. The preface to the translation, with some omissions, was included in *Αναφορά στον Γκρέκο* in the chapter "Βερολίνο – Μια Οβραία". Kazantzakis knew Joergensen's biography before 1924; cf. G. Kazantzaki 1993: 253, 258-60.

*πολιτεία του Αλέξη Ζορμπά* and *Ο Φτωχούλης του Θεού*, and to show that some of the similarities are due to the biographical model which underlies them. Taking as a starting point the ambivalent position of both the novels' narrators towards biography, I would like to put forward some thoughts on Kazantzakis's writing and particularly on his construction of characters and of himself as a character.

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Both Zorbas and Saint Francis have eye-witness biographers, that is, biographers who are themselves characters in the books and spend some part of their lives with the biographee. Although the titles prepare us for texts which will move within the usual time-span of a biography (i.e. from birth to death), the beginnings and endings of the books do not coincide with the beginnings and ends of the subjects' lives. *Βίος και πολιτεία* is limited to the year that the biographer-character spends with Zorbas, while the more traditional *Ο Φτωχούλης του Θεού* starts with a moment of crisis (in the presence of the biographer), and comes to an end with Francis's death.

Zorbas's life is written by his employer, referred to simply as "the Boss" ("το Αφεντικό"). Judging by the preface, in which the distinction between author and narrator is somewhat blurred, the biographer considers that *Βίος και πολιτεία* demeans Zorbas, in the sense that it turns its live subject into a mere text, "ο Ζορμπάς, ο γεμάτος σάρκα και κόκαλα, κατάντησε στα χέρια μου μελάνι και χαρτί" (Z 8-9). In the afterword, on the other hand, the completed biography is presented as the result of the Boss's desire to salvage ("να [...] περισώσω") Zorbas's life (perhaps the Friend's/Stavridakis's life as well; see Z 365). The end of Zorbas's life coincides with the birth of his biography, since the Boss-biographer immobilizes the life-flux and thus monumentalizes the subject of his biography. Biography exorcizes death and becomes "μνημόσυνο" (or "δίσκος με κόλυβα"). The way that the various senses of the terms memory and monument are intertwined in the text suggests how appropriate the image is to biography: the biographical narrative as *μνήμα, μνημείο, μνημόσυνο, απομνημόνευμα*. This is the ultimate undertaking of *Βίος και πολιτεία*: to create a biography-

monument which will bring Zorbas to life again, allowing him to live forever as it converts life-made-text into text-made-life.<sup>11</sup>

In *Ο Φτωχούλης του Θεού* Frate Leone writes the biography after St Francis's death. The biographer's initial strong distrust of the demonic and uncontrolled power of writing<sup>12</sup> is also ironically undermined when the dead saint leaves the paradise for which he had struggled during his whole life and asks for clothes, food and housing, or in other words for a biography.

The assertion of both biographers at the beginning of their enterprise is related to the general dichotomy we find in Kazantzakis (cf. *Ο τελευταίος πειρασμός, Αναφορά στον Γκρέκο*) between life and action on the one hand and writing on the other. This distinction can be seen as a characteristic case of "logocentrism", which privileges speech over writing. Speech is seen as immediacy, presence, life and identity, whereas writing is seen as absence and difference. Speech is primary, writing secondary. Speech is further identified with nature, writing with culture. Culture functions as a *supplement* to nature in two ways: it adds to it and substitutes for it.<sup>13</sup> Although saintly, Francis's life is not complete. In order to become complete, it must be written, but then the biography may replace life/nature. These hesitations which occupy Frate Leone are ironically overcome through recourse to rhetoric and particularly to *metaphor*, which identifies writing with speech. For example, in Frate Leone's account of the dream which motivated him to write the biography, birds (nature) are equated with letters of the alphabet (culture):

ήμουν ξαπλωμένος ... κάτω από ένα δέντρο ανθισμένο ... ήταν το δέντρο της Παράδεισος κι είχε ανθίσει! Κι άξαφνα, εκεί που κοίταζα, ανάμεσα από τ' ανθισμένα κλώνια, τον ουρανό, ήρθαν και κάθισαν πάνω στο κάθε κλαρί κι ένα πουλί μικρό μικρό, σαν ένα γράμμα της Αλφαβήτας, κι άρχισε να κελαηδάει· στην αρχή ένα ένα, μοναχικό, ύστερα δυο μαζί, ύστερα τρία, πηδούσαν από κλαρί σε κλαρί, έσμιγαν συδύ, συντρία, συμπέντε, και κελαηδούσαν, συνεπαρμένα, όλα μαζί. (ΦΘ 21-2; cf. E. Kazantzaki 1983: 539-40)

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Epstein 1987: 28-9.

<sup>12</sup> See also Beaton 1997.

<sup>13</sup> See Leitch 1983: 169-75.

Biography's success is assured because it has turned nature (life) into something that is also "nature" (biography). The last words of the text are:

Την άγια ετούτη στιγμή, που, σκυμμένος μέσα στο κελί μου, χάραξα τα στερνά ετούτα λόγια και μ' έπαιρναν τα κλάματα [...] ένα σπουργιτάκι ήρθε και χτύπησε το παραθύρι· ολόβρεχτα ήταν τα φτερά του, κρύωνε· σηκώθηκα να του ανοίξω· κι ήσουν εσύ, πάτερ Φραγκίσκο, ντυμένος σα σπουργιτάκι. (ΦΘ 366)

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In *Βίος και πολιτεία* the foreman is the biographee, while his employer is his biographer; although this peculiar biographical situation is discussed in the novel, the biographee is characterized in the preface<sup>14</sup> as the biographer's "ψυχικός οδηγός", "Γέροντας", and "γκουρού" (Z 7). In *Ο Φτωχούλης του Θεού* Frate Leone is described as St Francis's first disciple but also – according to the tradition – as his secretary and confessor. In both cases the biographer-disciple is presented as the biographee's counterpoint. When the biographee is "φαγάς, πιοτής, δουλευταράς, γυναικάς κι αλήτης" (Z 13), the biographer is the ascetic and intellectual aesthete who contends that he has been corrupted by art. When the biographee is an ascetic saint who tries to surpass human limits and identify with the suffering Christ (Francis's life is already an *Imitatio Christi*, i.e. an imitation of a biography), the biographer acquires the characteristics of the ordinary man. In both novels, then, we have on the one hand the presence of the eye-witness disciple and on the other the partial reversal (especially in *Βίος και πολιτεία*) of the relation biographer–disciple as it has conventionally been presented since the biographies of the Socratics.

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In *Βίος και πολιτεία* there is an ambiguity surrounding the biographer's identity. The Boss has many characteristics in

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<sup>14</sup> The preface, with a few changes, is included in the chapter entitled "Ο Ζορμπάς" in ΑΓκ.

common with Kazantzakis himself, who had worked with someone called *Yoryis Zorbas*. The Boss is acquainted with *Alexis Zorbas*. This appropriate change of only the first half of the name positions the novel between reality and fiction. (The choice of the name Alexis in a novel called *Βίος και πολιτεία* could be read as a reference to the popular eleventh-century romance *Vie de Saint Alexis*, with strong parodic overtones.)

As we have already remarked, *Βίος και πολιτεία* is not a biography in the strict sense of the term. The biographer simply transmits the "discussions" ("κουβέντες") he has with the biographee on various topics ("για [...] τις γυναίκες, το Θεό, την πατρίδα και το θάνατο" [Z 9]), setting them within a story which allows them to appear realistically motivated.

Alexis Zorbas is in a way a pretext, since although the real Zorbas did lead what one might call a novelistic life,<sup>15</sup> Kazantzakis did not make much use of it. He simply mixed elements of his encounter with Zorbas with the lives of other people (Stavridakis, Istrati), and with incidents and events that had happened to himself previously (his visit to the Holy Mountain with Sikelianos) or afterwards (his assignment in the Caucasus). He changed the place of action (from Mani to Crete) and he left the story-time unspecified (he worked with Y. Zorbas from 1916 to 1917), using as temporal markers only the seasons and the corresponding Christian festivals. Moreover, he inserted into the events one of his attempts at writing *Buddha*,<sup>16</sup> the composition of which in any case started later. The Zorbatic "Buddha" most likely combines the first two writing attempts (1922-23) – during which Kazantzakis tried to overcome "τον τελευταίο πειρασμό της τέχνης" (Z 77; G. Kazantzaki 1993: 78-9, 99, 105) – with the writing process of *Yang-Tse* (1940-1) shortly before the very rapid composition of *Βίος και πολιτεία* itself.

In short, *Βίος και πολιτεία* moves in a time-space indeterminacy which is heightened by its additional dislocation in *Αναφορά στον Γκρέκο*. There the encounter with Zorbas is located immediately after the return from Russia (ΑΓκ. 534-5), and the writing of *Βίος και πολιτεία* (ΑΓκ. 551-61) before the writing of

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Anapliotis 1960; G. Kazantzaki 1993: 16, 48-9, 111, 208, 226; and E. Kazantzaki 1983: 115-19.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Bien 1977.

*Οδύσεια* with which it is, in a way, associated. Each time, Zorbas acquires a different biography in order to meet Kazantzakis's changing requirements.

In *Ο Φτωχούλης του Θεού* the biographee is a historical figure whom Kazantzakis knew and admired from early on in his life,<sup>17</sup> seeing him sometimes as a model communist (G. Kazantzaki 1993: 251-4, 258-60), sometimes as someone who achieved the complete union of man with nature (E. Kazantzaki 1983: 608-9), and at other times as a symbol of man's struggle with God (Prevelakis 1984: 650). Not infrequently, he detected similarities between his life and the life of the saint, on matters such as their parents (Prevelakis 1984: 158-9), his dermatitis (G. Kazantzaki 1993: 49), or his eye disease. St Francis is also connected with *Buddha*, in that the second prose version of that work was completed in Assisi and the author tried to draw analogies between the two figures.<sup>18</sup>

When he started his biography, Kazantzakis had at his disposal both the older and the more recent hagiographical traditions (Sabatier, Joergensen, Chesterton, Merezhkovsky, Hesse).<sup>19</sup> St Francis's biographies vary according to the interpretative appropriation of his life. The first *Vitae*, as for example *Vita Prima* by Celano (ΑΓκ. 462) and *Acta beati Francisci et sociorum ejus* (the source of the fourteenth-century Italian *Fioretti* (E. Kazantzaki 1983: 14-15, 135-6) give a picture of an itinerant life divided almost equally between prayer and preaching, and supported by work (where possible manual) or by begging, with the stress laid on voluntary self-denial and renunciation of property for the single purpose of enabling oneself and inspiring others to live a life of union with Christ.<sup>20</sup> Then

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<sup>17</sup> He probably became acquainted with the life of St Francis during his time at the Franciscan monastery on Naxos. For additional information see Levitt 1980: 156-9.

<sup>18</sup> Joergensen n.d.: θ.

<sup>19</sup> See Levitt 1980: 145, 157. It would be extremely interesting to examine for what reasons and by what routes each of the above-mentioned biographers came to undertake a biography of St Francis. On Merezhkovsky see Pachmuss 1990: 4, 162-71.

<sup>20</sup> Habig 1973: 1272 and Brooke 1967: 177-98. For the presentation of St Francis in Dante, see Auerbach 1984: 79-98.

came the learned biography, St Bonaventura's *Legenda Major*, which was intended to replace all previous edifying Lives and to canonize St Francis as the leader of the Order.

Kazantzakis chose incidents and anecdotes from the first group, which represents a direct oral tradition transmitted by some of the saint's closest friends (Leone included). They are collections of stories arranged by character trait or theme and centre around some notable saying or remarkable act of the saint. Although indeterminate or even inaccurate in chronology and topography, these Lives are in the main considered reliable, though they sometimes border on the legendary. In the same way, *Ο Φτωχούλης του Θεού* provides a minimal and somewhat vague spatio-temporal framework, which serves as a narrative link between the events of St Francis's life and above all as a setting for Leone's discussions with him (many of them invented or quoted from other texts with a change of contexts).

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Both *Βίος και πολιτεία* and *Ο Φτωχούλης του Θεού* structure their narrative in the manner of a biography which aims at monumentalizing, i.e. at venerating (synchronically) and perpetuating (diachronically) the memory of an elder or a teacher.

Biographers of this kind are disciples whose objective is the exposition of the life and principles of their teacher. Examples of such biographies are some of Plato's dialogues (*Phaedo*, *Apology*) and Xenophon's *Memorabilia*. In these – particularly in Xenophon – we are shown Socrates's position on several basic problems or concepts (divinity, justice, etc.). Socrates's ideas are presented through a loose series of dialogues, anecdotes, characteristic incidents, etc., rather than within a systematic biography from birth to death. Momigliano wonders whether Xenophon intended to present Socrates's real speeches and whether this was possible in any case.<sup>21</sup> His conclusion is that what Xenophon does is to discuss topics which had been the subject of debate by other Socratics before him:

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<sup>21</sup> Momigliano 1971: 54.

All Socrates' disciples were involved in elaborate developments of Socrates' thought which bore little resemblance to the original. Socratic disciples created or perfected a biographical form – the report of conversations preceded by a general introduction to the character of the main character – but in actual fact used this form for what amounted to fiction. (54)

I think that – *mutatis mutandis* – Zorbas and St Francis created their biographers, who in turn created Alexis Zorbas and St Francis as we know them from Kazantzakis's novels. We must not lose sight of the fact that Zorbas's "κουβέντες" are continuously under the critical or interpretative control of the Boss, who draws them out, generalizes them, extrapolates from them, or admires them. In *Ο Φτωχούλης του Θεού* Frate Leone records, but at the same time criticizes and thereby dialogizes, the saint's words (e.g. ΦΘ 292), so that the novel is not characterized by the monologism usually expected of a hagiographical text.<sup>22</sup>

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If we accept that these two novels of Kazantzakis belong to the same model, that they are narratives which through anecdotes, incidents and aphorisms represent the life and ideas of two figures who are considered ideal models, then the question arises as to the exact meaning of the phrase "ideal person" and "ideal life" (since Zorbas's and St Francis's lives are quite dissimilar).

A first answer would be that for Kazantzakis the ideal is not connected with morality but with aesthetics. He creates heroes who combine their weaknesses with their strengths in such a way that neither can exist without the other. Their character emerges from these constantly changing interrelations. The unity of their selves is not something given but a goal which is achieved in an ongoing process by the addition of new habits and patterns of behaviour. They possess strong wills because of the clarity and the precision of their orientation ("Ο επαναστάτης έχει σύστημα, τάξη, συνοχή στην ενέργειά του" ΑΓκ. 489), and the cooperation of their intellectual and spiritual powers towards a common end, guided by a dominant impulse. "Οι μισές δουλειές

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. Bakhtin 1981: 342, 426.

[...], οι μισές κουβέντες, οι μισές αμαρτίες, οι μισές καλοσύνες έφεραν τον κόσμο στα σημερινά του χάλια. Φτάσε μαρέ άνθρωπε ως την άκρα" (Z 273, 27, 53). Both see "το σκληρό, αγέλαστο κρανίο της Ανάγκης" (Z 344), but they do not yield to it; they each face it in a different way:

[Ο Φραγκίσκος] υπόταξε την πραγματικότητα, λευτέρωσε τον άνθρωπο από την ανάγκη, έκαμε, μέσα του, όλη τη σάρκα πνέμα. (ΑΓκ. 454, cf. ΦΘ 100-1)

Να λες "Ναι!" στην ανάγκη, να μετουσιώνεις το αναπόφευκτο σε δικιά σου λεύτερη βούληση, αυτός, ίσως είναι ο μόνος ανθρώπινος δρόμος της λύτρωσης. (Z 321)

Both characters perceive the world "με παρθενική ματιά, έτσι που όλα τα καθημερινά και τα ξεθωριασμένα ξανάπαιρναν τη λάμψη που είχαν τις πρώτες μέρες που βγήκαν από τα χέρια του Θεού" (Z 73, ΦΘ 182). In short, though they lead different kinds of life, both biographees face reality as if it were fiction and transform "το ασυνάρτητο χάος που το λέμε ζωή" into harmony (ΑΓκ. 171), thus becoming poets of their own lives.<sup>23</sup>

What has been described is very reminiscent of the Nietzschean concept of self, as it is expounded in Alexander Nehamas's *Nietzsche: Life as literature*.<sup>24</sup> According to Nehamas, Nietzsche "looks at the world as if it were a literary text and he arrives at many of his views of the world and things within it by generalizing to them ideas and principles that apply almost intuitively to the creation and interpretation of literary texts and characters."<sup>25</sup> Kazantzakis, of course, writes

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Nietzsche's view in *Beyond Good and Evil*: "It is artists who seem to have more sensitive noses in these matters, knowing only too well that precisely when they no longer do something 'voluntarily' but do everything of necessity, the feeling of freedom, subtlety, full power, of creative placing, disposing and forming reaches its peak – in short, that necessity and 'freedom of will' then become one in them." Quoted in Nehamas 1985: 195.

<sup>24</sup> Kazantzakis's relationship with Nietzsche is well known; see for example Levitt 1980: 108, n. 10 and Bien 1989. What interests us here is not so much the thematic influence of Nietzsche on Kazantzakis's work as Nietzsche's influence on his creative practice.

<sup>25</sup> Nehamas 1985: 3. My view relies heavily on Nehamas's excellent book. See particularly pp. 163-9, 193-5, 230-4. For a treatment of the same topic from a different viewpoint (literature as life), see Thiele 1990: 99-164.

literature, and to say that his characters resemble literary characters would be tautologous.

What I am trying to point out is that although Kazantzakis expresses a strong dislike of writing and a strong desire for action, in fact he managed to transform writing into action or to live writing as action. The binary opposition life/writing is not a hierarchical opposition in which writing depends on life, which is primary. The opposition is in a way rhetorical and can be reversed. Kazantzakis does so by taking his characters from myth, history, or lived experience and in each case trying "να τον δαμάσει αφομοιώνοντάς τον" (ΑΓκ. 553). His choices may surprise us at first sight, because the various lives do not have many points in common. What could be the relation between Zorbas, Christ, Kapetan Michalis, St Francis? It is an internal coherence which corresponds to the intertextual model of the hero and the saint, with the various meanings that Kazantzakis occasionally gave to these terms – martyr (ΑΓκ. 44), warrior (ΑΓκ. 89), ascetic (ΑΓκ. 95), holy fool, knight (ΑΓκ. 96), desperado (ΑΓκ. 96), outcast, superman (ΑΓκ. 394).

Since Kazantzakis could become neither a hero nor a saint, he became the author (ΑΓκ. 229)<sup>26</sup> – literally "το Αφεντικό" – who exercises his authority in the process of the formation of characters, which is simultaneously a process of self-formation. "Δημιουργώ [χαρακτήρες] και δημιουργώντας [τους] μάχουμαι να [τους] μοιάσω. Δημιουργούμαι κι εγώ" (ΑΓκ. 587). This procedure is not simple and clear-cut. In *Βίος και πολιτεία* for example,

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<sup>26</sup> "Έγραφα και καμάρωνα, ήμουν θεός κι έκανα ό,τι ήθελα, μετουσίωνα την πραγματικότητα, [...] όλα ζύμη μαλακιά και την έπλαθα, την ξέπλαθα, όπως μου κανοναρχούσε το κέφι μου, λεύτερα, χωρίς να πάρω κανενός την άδεια. [...] Η πάλη αυτή ανάμεσα πραγματικότητας και φαντασίας, ανάμεσα δημιουργού Θεού και δημιουργού ανθρώπου, μια στιγμή μέθυσε την καρδιά μου. Αυτός είναι ο δρόμος μου, [...] αυτότο χρέος μου· καθένας παίρνει το ανάστημα του οχτρού που μαζί του παλεύει· μου αρέσει, κι ας χαθώ, να παλεύω με το Θεό. Αυτός πήρε λάσπη κι έπλασε τον κόσμο, εγώ λέξεις· αυτός έκαμε τους ανθρώπους όπως τους βλέπουμε να σούρνονται στο χώμα· εγώ θα πλάσω με φαντασιά και αγέρα, με το υλικό που πλάθονται τα όνειρα, άλλους ανθρώπους, με πιο πολλή ψυχή, ν' αντέχουν στον καιρό, να πεθαίνουν οι άνθρωποι του Θεού και να ζουν οι δικοί μου" (ΑΓκ. 174-5). See also Taylor 1983: 379-86.

Kazantzakis identifies with the Boss<sup>27</sup> while Zorbas resembles Istrati (Z 23), who was to replace Stavridakis (Prevelakis 1984: 60-1), who in turn resembled Rembrandt's "Warrior" (Z 56), with whom Kazantzakis himself also identifies (Prevelakis 1984: 341; cf. also ΑΓκ. 551). Such a series of substitutions takes us away from the single person, the single life or the single meaning.

After his "novels", Kazantzakis wrote *Αναφορά στον Γκρέκο* with the explicit subtitle "Novel", a book in which he invents and discovers himself, and in which the character who speaks to us is the author who has created him and who is in turn a character created by or implicit in all the books that were written by the author who is writing this one (see Nehamas 1985: 196). After becoming the Plato of many a Socrates, Kazantzakis officially became Socrates and Plato at once, biographer and biographee. After all this, to pose the question who is the real Kazantzakis is perhaps as pointless as asking who is the real Zorbas or the real St Francis.

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<sup>27</sup> The Boss is usually read only as a biographer, not as the protagonist of his own life and *Bildung*. Thus, though we are encouraged to consider him as the biographee's negative, in fact he could also be perceived as a Nietzschean version of aesthetic asceticism; cf. Nehamas 1985: 114-37; Holub 1995: 122-7.

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