

The Immortal Spirit of Creation: Kazantzakis and the Bhagavad Gita

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Introduction

The religious thought of Nikos Kazantzakis, particularly as contained within 'The Saviors of God: Spiritual Exercises', is still demanding attention. Although there have been recent welcoming attempts to elucidate his religious position in relation to Christian thought¹ and process theism², these attempts still remain largely theoretically speculative. What the present paper hopes to contribute is a combination of both speculation and fact. Through an examination of Kazantzakis' personal library housed in the Historical Museum of Iraklion, Crete, one can become affiliated with the literature that was occupying Kazantzakis immediately prior to and during the composition of the 'Spiritual Exercises'. The speculative part naturally comes when one tries to ascertain the influence of such literature upon his subsequent thought.

It is clear that during the years 1922–23, when he was based in Vienna and Berlin, Kazantzakis was engaged with works of Freud, Rank, Spengler, Luxemborg as well as certain commentaries on Buddhist thought. These sources are generally recognised as shaping Kazantzakis' thought during this time. However, one source that has not received any attention is the *Bhagavad Gita*, literally 'The Song of God'. Kazantzakis had his own German translation of this Sanskrit poetic work and inside this copy may be found a ticket advertising an evening of readings dated 'Berlin, Mittwoch 2 Oktober, 1922'. It thus appears fair to assume that this was a work that Kazantzakis was engaged with to a degree during his sojourn in Berlin.

During this time, Kazantzakis witnessed the crumbling German economic system, had first hand experience of profound poverty and became associated with an active group of communists. However, he never totally embraced communism due to its materialistic emphasis and subsequently espoused his own theory of 'meta-communism', claiming: 'Spiritual Exercises was written in Germany in 1923 in order to express the spiritual agony and the hopes of a communistic circle of German, Poles and Russians who could not breathe easily within the narrow backward materialistic perception of the Communist Idea'.⁴ This meta-

communist 'credo', however, still bears witness to the prevailing philosophical influence of Kazantzakis' greatest teachers: Bergson, Nietzsche and Buddha. The work is saturated with a mixture of Bergson's creative *elan vital*, Nietzsche's desired overcoming of mankind and the Schopenhauerian-Buddhist call to free oneself from the bondage of hopes and fears.⁵

Upon reading the *Bhagavad Gita*, Kazantzakis would certainly have found affinities between its cosmic system and the philosophy of his earlier teacher Bergson. Bergson equates his creative life-force, the *elan vital*, the evolutionary drive behind everything, with love. He wrote: 'The creative energy which happens to be love... would like to draw from itself the beings worthy to be loved'.⁶ Kazantzakis agrees: 'I identify love with *elan vital*'.⁷ The *Bhagavad Gita* stresses a close interweaving of Light and Love. Light is the final vision of God, beyond everything, and this vision is driven by Love. Juan Mascaro, in the introduction to his translation of the work, claims: 'Love is the power that moves the universe, the day of life, the night of death, and the new day after death. The radiance of this universe sends us a message of love and says that all creation came from love, that love impels evolution and that at the end of their time love returns all things to eternity'.⁸

The affinities between the ideas of Bergson, especially those he inherits from Plotinus⁹ and the *Bhagavad Gita* have been noted by Nataraja Guru who claims, when commenting of Chapter 5, verse 14:

The expression 'svabhavas to pravartate' (the innate urge in beings, however, exerts itself does not refer particularly to gross aspects of nature in manifestation. That would make the activity one-sided or asymmetrical and not in keeping with the notion of prabhuh (the Superior One).

Bergson 's *elan vital* (vital impulse,) in the most general terms comes nearest perhaps to what is intended¹⁰

Likewise, when discussing Chapter 7, verse 26, he believes:

...the notion of the Absolute refers to pure time or the eternal present as understood in the philosophy of Bergson or Plotinus.¹¹

Bergson offered a dialectic between spirit and matter that saw the latter to be a congealed state of the former that desired its spiritual transformation. Bergson's desire, as is Kazantzakis', is not for a dualism between spirit and matter, (matter is expressed in the 'Spiritual Exercises' as the 'wife' of God), but a spirituality in which matter is overcome in the ascent towards the Light or Freedom.

Through Bergson's *elan vital*, which is a creative force perpetually unmaking itself in order to continue its progressive and invisible struggle for self-consciousness, freedom from material obstruction is desired and ultimately achieved. Bergson claimed an indeterminate, groundless ground to all existence, which contains all potential for life. God, for Bergson, is the source of creation, an infinite reservoir of life:

I simply express this probable similitude when I speak of a centre from which worlds shoot out like rockets in a fire works display —provided, however, that I do not present this centre as a thing, but as a continuity of shooting out: God, thus defined, has nothing of the ready made, He is unceasing life action, freedom.¹²

This dynamic conception of nature was itself largely born out of the attempt to discern how Oneness or Unity could be the source of all plurality whilst still remaining the supremely transcendent One. The foundation for this speculation had largely been provided by the dynamic system of Plotinus that had a marked influence upon Bergson.¹³

Kazantzakis may also have found affinities between the Gita and Nietzsche's poetic thought, in spite of the fact that on a initial reading the two philosophies appear to have very little in common. Nietzsche may have encountered the Gita through Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Representation* or the work *The System of Vedanta*, written by his close friend Paul Deussen.¹⁴

Indeed, in the character of Arjuna within the Gita, one may see an expression similar to the rapture of the pre-Socratics and the ecstatic vision of Zarathustra. Both Arjuna and Zarathustra have visions centring on the notion of time. For Zarathustra it concerns the eternal return, whilst Arjuna sees a vision of God's many mouths which '*like Time's devouring flames*'¹⁵ stress both the Creative and Destructive side of God who is truly imperishable Time. Consequent of this vision, Ariuna realises he is merely an instrument that is at the service of God's will.

In the Gita, the created world is a manifestation of God's creative power. The individual, comprised of a body containing the ego and the will, as well as pure consciousness or the self, follows, as a microcosm, the constitution of God. God's 'higher nature', the Self, upholds and sustains the 'lower nature' of God or manifest world. After such knowledge has been received, one is in a position to realise that the manifest world is the body of God.

After the Vision, then comes the necessary action to be performed in this world, the body of God. All action is due to an inherent drive within all beings to follow their own nature. In the *Gita*, this nature is constituted by one of the three *gunas*, or constituents of nature. It is these *gunas* that

lead to action; the individual has not option but to follow: 'It is material Nature's constituents that do all works wherever (works are done), (but) he whose self is by the ego fooled thinks, 'It is I who do'¹⁶ The individual ego is in the service of something greater than itself.

Individual actions are determined by past karmic influences. In a sense, therefore, the individual is its own present creation as its present state is determined by past actions. Similarly, Nietzsche argued that the individual is its own fate, hence he can call for an acceptance and rejoicing of all existence in his doctrine of *amor fati*.

Largely through the influence of Schopenhauer, who referred to the Gita in his work *The World as Will and Representation*, Nietzsche saw Buddhism as pessimistic and life-denying due to its denial of the will to live and its acceptance of suffering.

Kazantzakis was familiar with the work of Schopenhauer during his student days in Paris. As early as 1910 he was equating Schopenhauer and Tolstoy as 'life-deniers'¹⁸. He writes of Schopenhauer's notion of the will in an Encyclopaedia article in the year 1927–8:

The deep understanding of life's vanity ... unites us and identifies us with all beings; we must undo our individuality and egotism. Thus the unconscious will, ... evolves into consciousness for the first time in the human being, apprehends life's suffering and turns ... to annihilation, uprooting the will to life¹⁹.

Schopenhauer claimed all life to be the objectification and manifestation of the Will, the *ding-an-sich*²⁰. The Will that is manifested into all phenomena remains beyond the births and deaths that dominate the natural realm. He wrote:

Birth and death belong only to the phenomenon of the will, and hence to life; and it is essential to this that it manifests itself as individuals that come into being and pass away, as fleeting phenomena, appearing in the form of time, of that which in itself knows no time, but must be manifested precisely in the way aforesaid in order to objectify its real nature.²¹

The Will, as the 'thing-in-itself, is thus beyond the confines of space, time and causality, therefore remaining unknowable and inaccessible to the human mind. The world that is perceived is a merely a creation of the perceiving intellect. The Will, however, is the primal reality underlying everything and is characterised by its striving for life. The individual comes to realise, through volition, passions and emotions, that it is a combination of Will and the Will's appearance in the phenomenal realm. This

phenomenon realm which includes the body, is subjected to death, unlike the immortal Will, the noumenal realm, which cares little for the destruction of an individual. Schopenhauer urges the individual to prevent the will-to-life manifesting itself by arguing for the denial of personal volition.

The individual is unable to see the inner nature of things which is at essence the one Will, but deals only with the phenomenal world situated in space, time and causality. In this limited phenomenal realm the one Will is manifested into innumerable different forms that appear distinct and opposed, contrary to their true nature. However, such 'individuality' is an illusion. There is in essence no distinction between individuals. The one Will that manifests itself in nature is the source of all phenomenon and thus any distinction between individuals 'belongs only to a fleeting, deceptive phenomenon'²². It is at death that the individual is freed from the Will-to-life that is the source of all suffering. Death is a loss of the illusion of individuality and self-consciousness and enables a return to the 'thing-in-itself beyond the veil of life and death. Thus the person at death is freed from deception and returns to the prior and desired state of pre-existence.

With death thus comes the release from consciousness and hence illusory individuality. The overcoming of the individual existence at death enables a return to the one Will that is prior to all phenomenon and constitutes a release from inevitable self-inflicted suffering. The individuality of the person at death merges into the thing-in-itself, the ultimate goal of life. Death is a restoration of the being's intrinsic state, a return to where all life originates, enabling the Will to once again manifest itself²³.

For Schopenhauer, the Will, the thing-in-itself, to which all things return, is unable to be articulate with words or concepts. It is totally inaccessible and unknowable. It is best approached with a negation. That is, there are no concepts that are able to capture adequately that which is totally other to life. Thus, the realm of the Will, which has its parallel in the Buddhist notion of Nirvana, is to be designated as 'nothing'. However, this is only a *relative* nothing, the result of its ineffability.²⁴

As Peter Bien argues, in his play '*Buddha*', Kazantzakis claims that life and death are seen as just such deceptive masks of multiplicity that hide the Nothingness, Abyss or silent One that lies beyond. Behind the many stands the One. In this play the Magician claims: 'The One is divided and we are to blame. The One divided and became Life and Death. Before we were born, he was One; as soon as we die, he will become One again'²⁵. For Kazantzakis, The One is the Abyss that lies beyond the creative manifestation into the manifold.

The Bhagavad Gita

Within the *Bhagavad Gita* one is confronted with a poetic description of the Immortal Spirit of Krishna. This everlasting Spirit is 'interwoven in his creation'²⁶, beyond all destruction and moves through creation whilst remaining 'omnipresent, never-changing, never-moving, ever One'.²⁷ Within creation, the Spirit moves from one body to the next as these bodies die: 'As a man leaves an old garment and puts on one that is new, the Spirit leaves his mortal body and then puts on one that is new'.²⁸

The Immortal Spirit moves through mortal beings. Creation is a finite manifestation of the transcendent and everlasting One: 'Invisible before birth are all beings and after death invisible again. They are seen between two unseens.'²⁹ The Invisible Spirit, the One, is manifested into the innumerable forms of creation. This One is beyond earthly opposites³⁰ and it is the duty of the individual to transcend attachment to earthly desires and fears in order to be 'one with the One'.³¹

In order to achieve such oneness, the individual is to become free from all binding attachments and enter the realm of pure action which does not desire rewards or benefits and is joyful action done for the glory of God. It is through this pure action that freedom is attained: freedom from the desires of the created order and oneness with the One, the Supreme Light. Pure action is therefore characterised by freedom from all desires. It is a sacrifice to the Divine and expressed in silence³²: 'The man who in his work finds silence, and who sees that silence is work, this man in truth sees the Light and in all his works finds peace'.³³ This inner peace or joy comprises a oneness with the Light of God. Beyond all hopes and fears, the soul rests silent before the One.³⁴ It is thus essential that the mind is trained to be free from passions, desires, hopes and fears; to go beyond earthly, finite, material attachment and strive for the Light that is imperishable. The individual must strive beyond the world of visible nature to the Invisible Spirit: 'This is the fountain of life whereby this universe has its being. All things have their life in this Life, and I am their beginning and end'.³⁵ The Beginning and End of all life is the Invisible One, the Spirit of Light and this creative process is everlasting:

When that day comes all the visible creation arises from the Invisible; and all creation disappears into the Invisible when the night of darkness comes. Thus the infinity of beings, which live again and again all powerlessly disappear when the night of darkness comes, and they all return again at the rising of the day.³⁶

The Supreme Spirit, the One, is thus the Source from which all things come: the visible flows from the Invisible³⁷. Creation from the One is an Eternal process:

At the end of the night of time all things return to my nature; and when the new day of time begins, I bring them again into light. Thus through my nature I bring forth all creation, and this rolls round in the circles of time.³⁸

The One, the source of all evolution and life³⁹, does not diminish in power despite becoming manifested in innumerable forms: the light of consciousness, the god of destruction, fire, the god of war, the prayer of silence⁴⁰. The everlasting One is the source of creation and destruction, life and death. All nature is an instrument of the Spirit which is 'all that is, and all that is not, and all that is beyond'⁴¹ This vision of the One, the Supreme Kingdom of Light, is both sublime and terrifying. Arjuna exclaims: 'I rejoice in exultation and yet my heart trembles with fear'⁴².

The One is manifested in the many and from this primal source comes both creation and destruction. The One is 'the Light of all lights which shines beyond all darkness'⁴³. The person who sees the vision of the One lies beyond the fate of nature: 'The spirit of man when in nature feels the ever-changing conditions of nature. When he binds himself to things ever-changing, a good or evil fate whirls him round through life-in-death'⁴⁴. The Spirit lies beyond such fates of good and evil: 'He who knows in truth this Spirit and knows nature with its changing conditions, wherever this man may be he is no more whirled round by fate'⁴⁵.

The individual must step beyond the powers of material nature to see the liberation of spirit from matter⁴⁶ in the ascent towards to One. The seed of all nature emerges from the Spirit, the mother and father of all.⁴⁷ All creation is perishable but the Spirit remains the imperishable source of all. Whoever reaches the Light returns no more to the cycles of life and death, creation and destruction and is beyond everything. Here, one dwells in Silence.⁴⁸

Conclusion

It would not be justified to conclude that the *Bhagavad Gita* was the chief influence behind the 'Spiritual Exercises' of Kazantzakis. However, it is fair to argue that not only was Kazantzakis engaged to some degree with the work during his time in Berlin, but similar ideas are apparent in both works: the perishable creation in the service of the Imperishable which eternally creates life out of death, something out of nothing; the call to see the Eternal within the temporal but acknowledge the human necessity to work with the temporal; the vision of the Eternal One beyond the created phenomenal world as both sublime and terrifying⁴⁹. This suggests that the *Bhagavad Gita* may well be a hitherto unrecognised source casting fresh light upon the much-interpreted 'Spiritual Exercises'.

In the 'Spiritual Exercises', the Invisible Spirit has struggled beyond plants, animals and has progressed through generations of mankind⁵⁰. The

Spirit is 'He who eternally ascends'⁵¹, although mankind is a channel to aid the Spirit in its endless ascent. The Spirit passes ruthlessly from body to body and drives through matter, beyond animals and mankind. It is mankind's duty to enable this journey to continue as humanity is at the service of an Immortal force. As in the *Gita*, the 'Spiritual Exercises' proclaim that it is the vision of the eternal Invisible Spirit that leads to action; pure action in the service of the Divine Spirit, not with the desire or expectation for a reward. After 'Vision' the spiritual trainee is implored to enter into 'Action' and become one with the movement of the Spirit by ascending with it. By so doing 'we collaborate with One who is Deathless'⁵². Although words are deemed inadequate to capture this Immortal Spirit, it is necessary for *humans* to work with appearances, the 'ephemeral masks', after intuiting the essence, the 'indestructible unity' behind the '*ceaseless flux*'.⁷³

A new contemporary symbolism for God is required that encompasses both the creative and destructive sides He uses in his path towards freedom, the Light 'beyond and above everything'⁵⁴. Indeed, the essence of God is the struggle for freedom and such a superhuman and erotic force drives humanity. This erotic force seeks to unite all mankind, 'to merge all breaths into one violent gale that may lift the earth'⁵⁵ and transcend the distinction between 'you' and 'I' so that it no longer exists.

The whole Universe, including the human individual, is comprised of a dialectical conflict between light and darkness, spirit and matter, life and death that constitutes the visible manifestation of the Invisible. All visible life takes place between two abysses. The *Gita* states 'Invisible before birth are all beings and after death invisible again. They are seen between two unseens' while Kazantzakis, arguing that the state of death constitutes a return to the 'Abyss', begins the 'The Saviors of God: Spiritual Exercises' with the following aphorism:

We come from a dark abyss and we go to a dark abyss and the luminous interval in between we call life.⁵⁶

This Abyss, the 'primordial essence'⁵⁷ that is 'One' prior to its manifestation into nature and hence the source of all phenomenon, is, as with Schopenhauer's Will, also a 'relative nothing'. Thus Kazantzakis can claim that 'this "One" does not exist!'⁵⁸. It is significant that Kazantzakis revised the ending of 'The Saviors of God', in which he included a final section: 'Silence', adding the above line close in temporal proximity to composing the encyclopaedia article on Schopenhauer. Drawing also on Bergson's notion of the *elan vital* which conglomerates with matter but then wills its own unmaking in order to achieve freedom from material obstruction, Kazantzakis uses the 'Abyss' to refer to the 'nothingness' that

is the pre-requisite for further creative activity in nature.

For Kazantzakis therefore, as for his teacher Bergson, the 'abyss' is the achievement of total freedom attained by overcoming material attachment. In order to achieve this necessary detachment, Plotinus had exclaimed 'Take Everything Away!'⁵⁹ and the Gita 'Leave All Things Behind'⁶⁰. Kazantzakis continues this approach when he aims to 'go beyond hope and fear'⁶¹ and transcend the desires of the will. This enables the liberation of spirit from matter, thus leading to the emerging radiance of Light 'that final fruit of fire'⁶² and the triumph of the creative force that surges upwards towards the 'One' which does not exist as it lies beyond and above everything visible and is prior to its creative manifestation into the phenomenal world.

- 1 *God's Struggler: Religion in the writings of Nikos Kazantzakis*—edited by Darren Middleton and Peter Bien. Mercer University Press, 1997.
- 2 Daniel A. Dombrowski: *Kazantzakis and God*. Suny Series. State University of New York Press, 1997.
- 3 The ticket advertises the names of Rahel Lipstein and Elisabeth Greitsch. According to his letters, Kazantzakis had made the acquaintance of Lipstein two days previously, that is October 2. 1922.
- 4 Quoted in Kimon Friar's Introduction to *The Saviors of God. Spiritual Exercises* Simon and Schuster, New York, 1960— pg. 22. All subsequent references come from this source.
- 5 A desire to go beyond hopes and fears may also be seen in Meister Eckhart's sermon *Beati pauperes spiritu*, where he calls for an overcoming of the will and its accompanying intentions of receiving good or avoiding evil. Actions must be performed without a 'why' or 'for what'. The soul must give up the will to do even the will of God and become spiritually 'poor' in order to allow the Divine will to work. Similarities with these ideas can also be seen in Kazantzakis's later work 'St. Francis: The Poor Man of God'. See my article "'Does This 'One' Exist'?' The Unveiled Abyss of Nikos Kazantzakis'. *The Journal of Modern Greek Studies*, October 1998.
- 6 Henri Bergson *L'Evolution Créatrice*, Paris 1909, pg. 275. Cited in *Nietzsche and Bergson*, KM. Jamil, Rajshahi, 1959, pg. 36.
- 7 Helen Kazantzakis: *Nikos Kazantzakis A Biography Based on his Letters*. Translated by Amy Mims. Bruno Cassirer, Oxford, 1968, pg. 69.
- 8 Juan Mascaro *The Bhagavad Gita* Introduction and Translation. London, 1970), pgs. xxxi-xxxii. All subsequent references come from this source.
- 9 Nataraja Guru in his work *The Bhagavad Gita: A Sublime Hymn of Dialectics Composed by the Antique Sage — Bard VYASA* (Asia Publishing House, 1961), has much to say on the affinities between the Gita, Plotinus and Bergson: 'The paradoxes of Zeno and the dialectical method of Parmenides which were present in the writings of Plotinus 900 years later, and which have at least a theoretical kinship another 1500 years later in our own times in Hegel and Bergson, have a mystical intuitive contemplative approach to wisdom or happiness which is the way of perennial philosophy none other than the Yoga of the Gita' (pg. 20); 'The Neo-platonic philosopher Plotinus employed this method of dialectics almost as in the Gita, unitively bringing together matter and spirit. In modern times Bergson also understood and employed dialectics in developing his metaphysical ideas' (pg. 48); 'In the theorization implied here (Chapter 13, verse 26), Vyasa is not unlike Plotinus in his graphic description of how the soul enters matter. Bergson's theory of matter and spirit follow the same lines' (pg. 559). The dialectics of spirit and matter, seen

with Plotinus and Bergson is clearly evident in the *The Saviors of God*: in this work, matter is referred to as the 'wife' of God (pg. 123, aphorism 32).

- 10 Nataraja Guru, *Ibid.*, pg. 269.
- 11 *Ibid.*, pg. 347. The notion of the 'eternal present' is also referred to by Berkeley in his work *Siris* the text that Bergson was lecturing on during the time Kazantzakis was in Paris. When discussing Plato's *Parmenides*, Berkeley writes: 'According to the nice metaphysics of those ancient philosophers, *to hen*, being considered as what was first and simplest in the Deity, was prescinded even from entity, to which it was thought prior and superior; and is therefore by the Platonics styled super-essential. And in the *Parmenides* it is said, *to hen* doth not exist; which might seem to imply a negation of the Divine Being. The truth is, Zeno and Parmenides argued that a thing existing in time was older and younger than itself; therefore the constant immutable *to hen* did not exist in time: and if not in time, then in none of the differences of time past, present, or to come; therefore we cannot say that it was, is, or will be.' *Siris: A Chain of Philosophical Reflexions and Inquiries Concerning the Virtues of Tar-Water, and Divers Other Subjects Connected Together and Arising one from Another*, (1744). AC. Fraser, 1871, aphorism 351.
- 12 *Creative Evolution*, translated by Arthur Mitchell, London 1919, pg.262
- 13 See, for example: Marie Cariou *Bergson et la fait Mystique* Aubier Montaigne, Paris, 1976; Bernard Gilson *La Revision Bergsonienne de la Philosophie de l'esprit*, Paris, 1992; Henri Gouhier *Bergson dans l'histoire de la pensée occidentale* Paris, 1989; Henri Hude *Bergson* Philosophie Européenne, Editions Universitaires: Rose-Marie Mosse-Bastide: *Bergson et Plotin*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 1959; Bernard Gilson *L'individualité dans la Philosophie de Bergson*, Paris, 1985; Lydie Adolphe *La Philosophie Religieuse de Bergson*, Presses Universitaires de France, 1946; Pierre Magnard 'Bergson interprete de Plotin' in '*Bergson*' *Naissance d'une Philosophie*, Acts du Colloque de Clermont, Ferrard 17 et 18 Novembre 1989, Presses Universitaires de France.
- 14 Richard Brown claims: 'Whatever the depth of Nietzsche's knowledge of the Gita and whoever it was that might have influenced his thinking, it can be demonstrated that Nietzsche's own philosophical position on a number of key issues is uncannily akin to the Gita — if only Nietzsche had understood it properly': *Nietzsche and The Bhagavad Gita: Ironic or Eclectic Affinities* (Unpublished Paper).
- 15 Gita: 11: 25.
- 16 Gita: 3: 27. Also 'For no one can remain even for a moment without doing work; everyone is made to act helplessly by the impulses born of nature'(3:5).
- 17 'The life or death of the individual is of no consequence'. Arthur Schopenhauer: *The World as Will and Representation* (hereafter WWR). Translated from the German by E.F.J. Payne, Volume 1 pg. 473.
- 18 Peter Bien *Kazantzakis: The Politics of the Spirit* (Princeton University Press, 1989), pg. 39.
- 19 Cited in Peter Bien's *Kazantzakis: The Politics of the Spirit*. *Ibid.*, pg. 268, note 40.
- 20 'Thing-in itself signifies that which exists independently of our perception, that which actually is. To Democritus it was matter; fundamentally that is what it still was to Locke; to Kant it was =x to mime it is will' (Schopenhauer: *Essays and Aphorisms*, translated with an Introduction by R.G.Hollingdale. Penguin Books, 1970, pg. 53).
- 21 WWR Volume 1 pg. 275.
- 22 WWR, pg. 372.
- 23 Schopenhauer summarises his views on the question of individual existence after death in his 'On the Indestructibility of our Essential Being by Death' (in *Essays and Aphorisms*', *Ibid.*, pgs 66–76). In this short collection of aphorisms Schopenhauer defends his view that although there is no continued individual existence after death, the inner essence of the human being, the thing-in-itself, is indestructible and hence does not die: 'The more clearly you become conscious of the frailty, vanity and dream-like quality of all things, the more clearly will you also become conscious of

- the eternity of your own inner being' (#5, pg. 68). Thus according to the dialogue between Thrasymachus and Philaethes, the latter claims that, after death, Philaethes will become 'everything and nothing' (pg. 73).
- 24 I have dealt with Kazantzakis' relation to Schopenhauer elsewhere, in an unpublished article: "'Life is a Dream': Schopenhauer, Tolstoy and Kazantzakis on Death as an Awakening from Life. The Beginning of Kazantzakian mysticism".
- 25 Bien: 'Buddha: Kazantzakis' Most Ambitious and Most Neglected Play'. *Comparative Drama*, 11, 1977-78, pg. 257.
- 26 *The Bhagavad Gita*: 2:17.
- 27 *Ibid.*, 2:24
- 28 *Ibid.*, 2:22
- 29 *Ibid.*, 2:28. In an interesting article on 'Kazantzakis and the Cinema' (*Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 6 1980), Timothy Taylor highlights the Buddhist influence that inspired Kazantzakis to flirt with the potential to create a deceptive multiplicity of images that appear separate from the mind. This may be seen, Taylor argues, as a metaphoric parallel to existential idea of nothingness, or the two abysses that parenthesis life. In the cinematic universe, the images spark into life from nothing (prior to the film) and disappear into nothing (when the film is over). In the philosophical universe, the individual likewise comes into existence from nothing (prior to birth) and heads towards nothing (death). In between is the 'film' of life. Taylor concludes:
 'So we see that the cinema for Kazantzakis served several functions: (1). It forced him to transform his abstract ideas into motion, light and form; (2), it served as a metaphor for the training between two Abyss of both artistic imagination and existence; (3) it represented a Buddha-like playing with masks that are facets of the unified face behind' (pg. 161).
 In cinematic creation, all multiplicity comes from the unified mind; in cosmic creation, all multiplicity are ephemeral masks shielding the One.
- 30 *The Bhagavad Gita*: 2:45.
- 31 *Ibid.*, 2:44.
- 32 *Ibid.*, 4:17.
- 33 *Ibid.*, 4:18.
- 34 *Ibid.*, 6:12.
- 35 *Ibid.*, 7:6-7.
- 36 *Ibid.*, 8 18-19.
- 37 *Ibid.*, 9:4.
- 38 *Ibid.*, 9:7-8
- 39 *Ibid.*, 8 40.
- 40 *Ibid.*, 10:22-25.
- 41 *Ibid.*, 11:37.
- 42 *Ibid.*, 11:45.
- 43 *Ibid.*, 13:17.
- 44 *Ibid.*, 13:21.
- 45 *Ibid.*, 13:23.
- 46 *Ibid.*, 14:26.
- 47 *Ibid.*, 14:4.
- 48 *Ibid.*, 18:52.
- 49 After the vision of the One, Arjuna rejoices in exaltation whilst also trembling with fear (11:45). For Kazantzakis, the final secret that 'even this One does not exist' is 'great, sublime', yet 'terrifying' (pg. 131, aphorism 9).
- 50 'The Saviors of God: Spiritual Exercises', op.cit., pg. 76, aphorism 8.
- 51 *Ibid.*, pg. 80, aphorism 35.
- 52 *Ibid.*, pg. 100, aphorism 7.
- 53 *Ibid.*, pg. 130, aphorism 2.
- 54 *Ibid.*, pg. 91, aphorism 32.
- 55 *Ibid.*, pg. 110, aphorism 15.

- 56 Ibid., pg. 43.
57 Ibid., pg. 44.
58 Ibid., pg. 131, aphorism 9.
59 Plotinus: Ennead V.3. 39.
60 *The Bhagavad Gita*, 18:66.
61 'The Saviors of God': pg. 59. aphorism 37.
62 Ibid., pg. 127, aphorism 2.

Drafting the obituary

The bony hand of time
makes finicking corrections
on the beloved manuscripts
of memories, crossing out,
rephrasing, altering spells,
refocussing the brightness
of dreams when young
hopeful in brilliance, erasing
them to pallor, fading
them in their docketts
of coherence of meaning
until the blotched splotched
narratives, images of enthusiasm,
blend into tired confusion,
doubts about all that happened
or did not happen. Time
to resist, to dig in, to resurrect
in obstinate humble prayer.

Michael Kelly