

this technique which became increasingly less popular in antiquity until it was finally replaced by fresco and tempera painting. Encaustics produced brilliant effects, were suitable for paintings that had difficult support, such as marble, or when the goal was permanency, as in the Fayum funerary portraits, but this hot wax and resin technique had one serious drawback. To fuse the colours, bind the pigment to the support, and bring out the colours, it was necessary to lower a hot metal plate over the surface. When properly controlled, this produced a fine matte surface and greater durability than oil.

Fine detail was impossible, however, since the pigment could be applied only by means of a metal spatula while still semi-liquid. Miss Farley, in order to escape the drawbacks of heavy texture and inevitable vagaries in line, has taken to using a live flame which, combined with copal as a resin substitute, gives the paintings a high sheen and a disconcertingly blurred effect. Farley's colours are rich and vibrant; her point of contact with 'Greek light' is at that time of day when most of us are having our siesta and the mind boggles at being enclosed in light.

—NIKOS STAVROULAKIS

books

Nikos Kazantzakis

SYMPOSIUM

Translated by Theodora Vasils and Themis Vasils.

Crowell. New York, 1974. 97 pages. \$5.95; paperback, Minerva Press. New York. \$1.95

Kazantzakis wrote *Symposium* probably around 1922, about the same time he was writing *Saviors of God* (completed in 1923) and just before he began writing his play *Buddha* and his epic poem the *Odyssey* at the end of 1924. He only referred to *Symposium* once, in a letter in 1922, then seems to have put it out of his mind completely. The manuscript was found in a safe belonging to Kazantzakis's father after his death in 1932, given to a nephew (who, inexplicably, seems never to have communicated with his uncle about it), and was finally published in Greek in 1971, fourteen years after Kazantzakis's death. The speculation is that Kazantzakis had 'forgotten' this work, but it seems to me more likely that he had discarded it because so much of its material appears later in other works, particularly in *Saviors*.

'Just as Plato talks of love, we talk about God,' Kazantzakis wrote in the letter mentioned above. The 'we' are Kazantzakis and three friends: Arpagos (from the root word meaning 'rapaciousness' — Kazantzakis himself at his most voracious); Kosmas (the statesman and politician Ion Dragoumis); Petros (the poet Angelos Sikelianos); and Myrsos (a childhood friend, Myron Gonolakis). Kosmas represents Kazantzakis's opposite, the kind of man of action he had always admired, apostle of

danger and frontier guard whom Arpagos exalts in the opening pages. Petros represents the poet who tries to conquer life's futility by turning it into song, who proudly declares 'All the world is a Troy, burning for the sake of Homer,' and whom Arpagos chides for not writing poems of social content, wheatbread to nourish the bones, songs to change the world. Myrsos, so far as I can see, acts merely as a catalyst to Arpagos, his supporting shadow. 'Reveal your struggle,' he begs, 'show us the way to liberation.'

Exactly half of this small book then becomes Arpagos's 'confession', a delirious monologue wherein he describes his search for 'the essence of the struggle—God', for Liberation. He describes autobiographical instances (true of Kazantzakis himself) of how moved he was as a young man by the torturous lives of the saints, how all his life he thirsted for martyrdom, how he struggled to suppress the desires of sinful flesh and turn them into spirit. He retreats to Mount Athos for two years (in actuality, forty days with Sikelianos in 1914) and there plunges into his Asceticism: 'My plan was simple: to do whatever I don't like ... I shall humble and constrict to the limit the desires of the flesh. Does it want to sleep? I'll stay awake. Does it want to eat? I'll fast. Does it want to sit? I'll get up and climb

the mountain. Is it cold? I'll strip and walk on the stones!' He will even subdue temptations of the soul: reading, memory, friendship, tenderness, joy, sorrow. And finally, he will conquer his final enemy, 'rotten-thighed Hope', as he calls it in the *Odyssey*. Here is Kazantzakis the Buddhist, the nihilist, the desperado.

In this *Symposium*, Arpagos is not a very attractive figure. At times his pitch of praise rises so high it turns false; his scorn for the weakness of others and his own exalted notion of his destiny turn pride into arrogance, into *hubris*. He is full of unresolved contradictions, and he castigates himself with an almost voluptuous pleasure (which, to my mind, makes *St. Francis* his only disagreeable book). He is the wrathful Old Testament Prophet, calling down curses on the sinful world, that whore of Babylon.

In this book, then, I find the raw material in Kazantzakis's search for God, in his attempt to transubstantiate flesh into spirit, expressed in an exalted, unresolved state, and to which he gave definite form in other books such as *St. Francis*, *Report to Greco*, the *Odyssey*, and which he codified in *Saviors*. He wanted to lay out his program 'with figures, with strict logical tools, with geometric madness,' and this he did in *Saviors* with his three duties, his four steps, although such codification is arbitrary and not organic in Kazantzakis, as many other numerations throughout his work testify. *Saviors* begins where *Symposium* ends in the scornful voice of Arpagos's father (Kazantzakis's father in reality): 'You're seeking God? ... He's action, full of mistakes, groping, perseverance and struggle. God is not the force that found eternal harmony, but the force that eternally breaks every harmony, always seeking something higher ... Get up, go mingle with people, learn to love them and kill them — love is reverence, affection and disgust! Don't expect to give birth to anything but yourself. You will raise yourself only by struggling with men, pitying and despising our miserable heart. Come, whole, with all your weakness, misgivings and illusions.'

The *Symposium*, in this fine translation by the Vasils sisters (except for a tendency often to translate the word *sporos*, 'seed', into 'sperm') is fascinating for the reader, invaluable for the scholar, though Kazantzakis had finally no need of it, having drained it dry in other, more superior works.

—KIMON FRIAR

