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Archetypes of masculinity in Nikos Kazantzakis' novel "Kapetan Michalis"

Minos Orphanides

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The images depicted here were largely factual, but the meanings behind them are meant to be implemented regardless of time, place or nation.

An aid to comprehension might be a pinch of cinnamon or nutmeg (endemic Greek herbs), and maybe some local lyre music (in the library, records NGS 02857 and T903-X).

Probably no other book portrays so graphically the image of the Cretan warriors, an archetype that may have never actually existed as in the ideal form, but which can well grow to this shape by our own expectations. These very same expectations, and deep, inherent wishes to identify with, and eventually become, the heroes of our childhood.

Kapetan Michalis is not just a novel; it is a chronograph. The era it is situated around, which is Crete in the 1830's, when the first glimpses of freedom from the 400-year Turkish occupation were sparking in Athens, was a time of turmoil and controversies. Crete, although constantly in a cycle of rebellion/conflict/plateau, had never managed to acquire total independence, as it was a major base for control of the Mediterranean. Its people had grown rough, as the constant situation of either warfare or having extraneous loads on their shoulders, had removed the basic elements of dolce vita from all but the elite (who, from their positions, functioned mostly as directors of resources). Men had evolved by nature as warriors, thus depicting a sociobiologic evolutionism first-hand, whereas women had specialized in keeping the household for the man to come and rest after the daily struggle.

Please have in mind that the small societies, especially ones with such common and archaic linkages as the Cretans, are always functioning under a totally different mentality than the ones we follow today: There is a higher bonding among the people, one that makes us think whether ideas like Jung's "collective unconscious" have a material manifestation. In order to retain an individuality, though, inside such a common pool of knowledge, one has to cultivate his/her most eminent characteristics into an artform. The housewife needs to be the perfect cook, hostess, mother; the Priest has to be both a leader and a liaison to the Divine, the two roles being reciprocally interconnected. Leaders, though, were primarily the warriors, who could gather people with them should they be bold enough as to reject Death, and thus become Kapetanaei (Captains). Everyone had this image in mind, and everyone wanted deep inside to follow it, but life was so sweet... Especially with the influence of the Turkish occupiers, who were enjoying the wealth of the island, dragging narcotically sometimes the wishes of the people for something relaxing, just as we today admire the figures of Fashion Models, due to our difficulty in keeping up with what they portray. Kapetan Michalis was the image of rejection of anything sweet in life, not in the neurotic sense that any modern psychologist would attempt to attribute, but in the awareness that it was simply not the time to enjoy. And Kapetan Michalis was well inside the spirit of his time; for one thing, he *represented* that spirit more than anyone else.

The story

The story starts with a depiction of the surroundings, that showed how everyone was positioned in the phenomenally placid environment. The village life was growing as usual, with the Greeks and the Turks dwelling in separate neighborhoods inside the walled city, but still in an interactive mode concerning the issue of neighborliness. The primary feature of the first chapters is the konaki (elegant mansion) of Nourembey, the "elite" of the Turks. Young, handsome and spirited, he was admired even by the Greek women (but detested by

the men, naturally, although secretly confronted as another archetype and respected highly among his own. His equivalent today would be something like Marlon Brando; they both depict an ideal image for men that draws the women nearer, seduces the general population with the arrogance that derives from power, and someone with objective binoculars can easily sense that there is something wrong in the image; justice is expected to put things in place.

As usually happens with every mighty man though, there is an intense prevalence of the female figure, which draws upon it all the unacknowledged attributes of the male personality. Thus, Nourembey, who depicted the ease of the yuppie, fell in passionate love with a woman depicting the wildness of the primitive matriarchal female, the one who controls when, how and with whom she mates. Emine is totally unpredictable to the average village person, warrior, or even the priesthood. But to the average reader, she is obviously drawn to the wilder of men, the ones who actually live by the Heroic Code of primordity of the Self regardless of the consequences, and who can use their physical attributes (strength, stench from the fight) to virtually "grasp" the female and "make her their own", like a valuable object. It is here where the womens' reactions of saying "no" meaning "yes, after pressure" could well be a precursor of rape, although such an action would have been unthinkable inside the small community. I would not justify this mentality, and sometimes the thought occurs whether it was a kind of brainwashing that the women were passing through, as they were under the males' control regarding resources, politics and physical strength. Such a case, though, would have generated humongous imbalances in the societal plastinx, which would cause its collapse upon itself, much as patriarchy is now collapsing under its own actions, based on its underlying premise: The "controlling" of the female.

As nothing remains hidden under the sun, especially the blazing Helios of Crete in its small communities, the awareness of the desirable female (Emine) was spread, not only in the general male populace, but also to the ruthless Kapetanaeoi. There, we can see a typical polarized attraction: Although ferocious, these men would become totally flaccid when a woman like Emine would stroll down the alleys, shedding nutmeg and cinnamon odors in her passage. The sweetness of the feminine component of their character would emerge, and the direction of the Hunter Instinct innovations would focus on her, rather than keep being an abstract aggression. Is woman the "civilizer" of the savage man? She sure was for Nourembey, who had totally lost his previous mood for fights and was now living joyfully and more socially. When a man, though, reaches such a state, the initial factor that made him attractive (i.e. advancing assertiveness) is slowly fading out, and the might of the initial bondage starts to fall along with the man's belly. Thus, Emine was seduced (reciprocally) with Kapetan Polyxiggis, the Greek's equivalent of Nourembey in his earlier years. Emine was seemingly trying to catch on to the primordial image that she had of the male, which included youth, strength, ruthlessness ("grabbing" the woman) and looks. Once she gained those, men would turn into jello and thus be rendered incompetent in her eyes. This was the next stage for her emotional development:

Kapetan Polyxiggis and Nourembey had proven just ordinary warriors, but there was one among this clan that did not seem so easy: In his stubborn self-centeredness, which rendered him invincible and respected as integral, Kapetan Michalis was representing a value significantly higher than what women could grasp on and possess. Up to the level of grasping, he was attainable without having to do anything for others; just like heros do not have you, or me, in mind when they act as such, but we still hold on to them. The awe he inspired seemed to be deriving from his very stability in his beliefs, and the assumption of the whole people's load upon his shoulders. Without being an organizer (ferocious warriors are not necessarily accumulative leaders), he would gather the whole Greek

population's hopes and efforts upon his person. He was married, and his wife was a typical tidy, caring and emotional woman, who seemed to be exchanging her insecurities with his need for a relaxing base. The word "love" cannot even be conceived of here, not because it did not exist, but due to the expectation of men not to be affective (not implying "lust", however. We do find, however, Kapetan Michalis being overtly emotional with his school-age son, who in turn does not even think of disobeying the father's directions. Rather, his constant effort is to make the father proud, and by taking his actions as a model, we can see him commit abduction of a female in an exhibition of strength, where when the girl's father comes out to shout at the kid and his gang holding a broomstick, they make use of Kapetan Michalis' reputation to have the poor father accept the molestation of his daughter as granted. The kids could not even rape; actually, such an action would have disgraced them in the eyes of everyone (although the abduction would not).

The other female in Kapetan Michalis' life was his twenty-year old daughter, whom he had not seen since her puberty started, as he had ordered her to hide in her room whenever he was home. Was this an act of avoiding the sexual/mystical attraction of the Electra Syndrome? Or rather an avoidance by the man to view his female personality evolve? It is claimed that men growing up in houses with women tend to be more affective and collaborative, because they can identify with some features. Consequently, women in such environments gain some increasing sense of craftsmanship and assertiveness, even aggression. Kapetan Michalis' daughter seemed to have grasped these characteristics by secretly admiring her father; however, he did not seem to have a healthy female contact.

This is where Emine came into play: They had only met once, in Nourbey's konaki, where in an act of fury Kapetan Michalis broke a shotglass in his fingers. This was the trigger that Emine needed to realize he was to be the primary depicter of the male power she needed. On the other hand, Kapetan Michalis realized an attraction to this "wild

woman" which was different than the effeminate compassion he could meet in his wife: It was as if he wished Emine's arrogance more like a peer than as a spouse. She was a figure like Artemis (Diana); intangible, attractive and desirable.

When the spirits had arisen to a level of yet another massive rebellion, Emine was taken into Kapetan Polyxiggi's place, from where the Turks managed to re-abduct her. But from his post, Kapetan Michalis took his team that night and slayed the abductors, thus retrieving Emine. In the meantime, the Turks attacked from the side he was supposed to be covering and destroyed the monastery he was to be protecting. This act totally shifted his attention from doubt over his feelings to a blind adherence to fighting for the cause of freedom solely. To get rid of Emine's image even further, he went on secretly to kill her on night (sacrificing the Anima?). This way, his previous function as a totally male warrior, devoid of any hang-ups or cognitions of his actions, is now exacerbated to an artform that is seen as somewhat of a paranoia -a total rejection of the social norms and a struggle of a man solely for the cause. There is no one who can convince him to come back into the world of the "sane", not even his nephew Cosmas, who had come by boat from France where he was giving his own battle, in the field of Diplomacy. Although this latter figure comes to establish peace, he is viewed as a "sissy" library rat from the warlord Kapetanaeoi. The end of the book finds Kapetan Michalis, alone in a doomed battle in which he has sent all his comrades away, fighting by himself just because this is what he should be doing. Now more than ever, even, as his desertion for the eyes of a woman - even for only one night- caused the greater battle to be lost. Just as he is alone, though, his nephew decides to stay with him in the heat of the moment, thus changing radically the conception that Kapetan Michalis had of him. As the relief of having another one join the "clan of warriors" is shed upon both men's shoulders, Cosmas gets shot dead. His uncle soon follows, but dies knowing that the idea he depicted was fulfilled, and can live on.

Cross-reference and rationale

Although it seemed like a myth, after coming across Kazantzakis' final book -"Report to Greco"-, which was also his autobiography, I came to realize the immense patterns that led him to draw such an image of a ruthless male warrior as Kapetan Michalis: The very same characters we met in the book under study were for the most real, and they were archetypical exaggerations of adaptations to people in the young Kazantzakis' life. Michalis was actually the author's father, whom he had as a prototype of integrity, principles and masculine power, devoid of the meagreness of domination and power play, though. The hero's son, Thrassaki (= "little arrogance") is actually the author himself, who appears in the last part of the book also as Cosmas (= "of the world"), fighting his battle abroad with the pen which is mightier than the sword. It seems that Kazantzakis' dream would be to reach a warrior's apotheosis, both as a Kapetan Michalis (who had this goal from the beginning), and as a conqueror of knowledge (Cosmas) alongside in the battle. In today's terms, it would be like the Star Trek characters of the warrior Whorf and the diplomat Picard joined in one. This way, I believe that Kazantzakis was trying to show that education alone is not enough; it takes the heart to support the responsibilities that come with the knowledge, and it is that heart's climax is the plunging into battle of an otherwise book-rat or city-laden student. Kazantzakis himself, in his autobiography, mentioned how he went abroad to study for many years, after Crete was liberated, while his father, Michalis, was actually alive. He was almost caught up into staying abroad, thus betraying his highest principles of Country, Religion (he came close to Buddhism and Catholicism) and Family. His father would never have forgiven that, and it would actually have been a major disgrace to both men's egos. So, the decisions made by the men in "Kapetan Michalis" are mostly an apology, and a depiction of the extreme side in human conditions, where self-destruction brought an epitome. The actual father of the author, after Crete was liberated, started exhibiting signs of affection in scarce occasions, never

author's primary muses and their utmost condition (the feeling of union with something Divine) led him into immense trouble when he wrote of a possible thought that Jesus could have made on the cross, that of getting down and living as a human, in "The Last Temptation of Christ". For this and his direct confrontations with the male-dominated patriarchal authority of the Priesthood (whom he was trying to dissociate from the purity of God in the people's uneducated minds) he was cast outside of Church and lost a Nobel literature prize. This was, though, his justification: To be accused by the "bad guys" is to raise one's position closer to where the Knowledge of God's Logos lies. Since there were no human enemies to fight against, the instinct of the warrior had to be satisfied through disputing the malfunctions in Peace; that is where our roles are today: The warrior within us has never died, and he (our male archetype) will always be having ground for fighting enemies much stronger and complex than any human equivalent. Call these Ignorance, Bureaucracy, Depression, Pride or Fear of Success -what Joseph Cambell calls our "dragons", will always exist. The more we slay, the further we advance; after we have passed Survival Point, the ones remaining are those hindering our exypsis.