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## NIKOS KAZANTZAKIS' UNSHOT ADAPTATIONS OF *DON QUIXOTE* AND *DECAMERON*:

STUDIES ON IMAGES AND SOUND DURING EARLY TALKING  
CINEMA<sup>1</sup>

**ABSTRACT:** This article examines two of Nikos Kazantzakis' unshot screenplays of the early 1930s: his adaptations of Cervantes' *Don Quixote* and Boccaccio's *Decameron*, kept in typed manuscripts at the Nikos Kazantzakis Museum Foundation in Iraklion, Crete. The article analyses Kazantzakis' *Don Quixote* and *Decameron* in the contexts of early talking cinema and his ideas of the image-language relationship. Written at a time when the artistic value of talking cinema was still debated, Kazantzakis' adaptations demonstrate that he sought to express ideas with images rather than dialogue (*Don Quixote*) and use sound as a creative element (*Decameron*) in ways alluding to Eisenstein's 1928-1929 writings, with which, as evidence suggests, the Greek author was familiar. Thus, Kazantzakis' *Don Quixote* and *Decameron* show how a technological development in film history – the coming of sound – and the Soviet film theory influenced this author's adaptation

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<sup>1</sup> A shorter version of this essay was presented at the 20<sup>th</sup> Annual Mediterranean Studies Congress (University of Malta & Mediterranean Institute Valetta, Malta, May 31-June 3, 2017). I am grateful to the Nikos Kazantzakis Museum Foundation at Myrtia, Iraklion, Crete, for granting me access to Kazantzakis' unpublished screenplays and Pantelis Prevelakis' unpublished letters to Kazantzakis.

techniques, while also enhancing our understanding of his creative career as well as the worldwide resonance of Cervantes' and Boccaccio's literary milestones.

**KEY WORDS:** Nikos Kazantzakis, screenwriting, adaptation studies, *Don Quixote*, *Decameron*, Soviet film theory

Nikos Kazantzakis (1883–1957) is known worldwide for his novels, such as *Zorba the Greek* (*Βίος και πολιτεία του Αλέξη Ζορμπά*, 1946) and *The Last Temptation of Christ* (*Ο τελευταίος πειρασμός*, 1951), his epic poem *The Odyssey* (*Οδύσσεια*, 1938) and, to a lesser extent, his theatrical plays. What is not widely known outside his homeland is that Kazantzakis also wrote screenplays. Between 1928 and 1932, he completed eight: *The Red Handkerchief* [(*Les trois compagnons* ou *Kokino mandili* (*Le mouchoir rouge*)), *St Pahomios and Cia* (*Saint Pacôme et Cie*), *Lenin*, *A Solar Eclipse* (*Μια έκλειψη ήλιου*), *Muhammad* (*Mohammed*), *Buddha* (*Βούδας*), *Don Quixote* (*Don Quichotte*), and *Decameron*. The first three were written in French in 1928, when he was in Russia, and the remaining five in French or/and Greek in 1931–1932, in Gotesgab, Czechoslovakia.<sup>2</sup> Kazantzakis longed to see these works brought to the big screen. In the Soviet Union, he and Panait Istrati (1884–1935), his collaborator in this endeavor, hoped to have the films produced by the All-Ukrainian Photo-Cinema Administration (VUFKU).<sup>3</sup> Later, in the early 1930s, Kazantzakis and his friend Pantelis Prevelakis (1909–1986), who then lived in Paris, approached international filmmakers and producers with the screenplays from the 1930s.<sup>4</sup> As none were shot, Kazantzakis temporarily abandoned screenwriting, resuming it in 1956, when he wrote *A Greek Family* for 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox. This film was also never made.<sup>5</sup>

Kazantzakis' screenplays, most of which are available in published form or typed manuscripts, are invaluable. Not only do they deepen our understanding of his creative evolution;<sup>6</sup> they also shed light on particu-

<sup>2</sup> Anemoyannis 1988; Anemoyannis 1991.

<sup>3</sup> Bien 2000: 162; Mini 2016: 52–53.

<sup>4</sup> For these efforts, see Kazantzakis' published letters to Prevelakis in Prevelakis 1984.

<sup>5</sup> Anemoyannis 1988: 43.

<sup>6</sup> For this issue, see Taylor 1980: 163–168; Anemoyannis 1988; Philippidis 1998; Mini 2009; Mini 2010b; Mini 2011; Mini 2016; Mini 2021. For the importance of

lar topics in humanities studies. *Red Handkerchief* and *A Solar Eclipse*, for instance, provide us with new information on the international impact of Soviet montage cinema and French film impressionism.<sup>7</sup> *Mohammed*, a rare attempt to portray the Prophet Muhammad on film, supplements our knowledge of how artists have visualized him.<sup>8</sup> And *Don Quixote* and *Decameron*, his last two attempts at screenwriting of the early 1930s, enhances our appreciation of the worldwide resonance of two literary milestones, Giovanni Boccaccio's (1313–1375) *Decameron* (ca. 1353) and Miguel de Cervantes' (1547–1616) *El ingenioso hidalgo Don Quijote de la Mancha* (in two parts, 1605/1615, known as *Don Quixote*).

Cervantes' *Don Quixote* has inspired numerous screen adaptations from cinema's early days to the present, and Boccaccio's *Decameron*, although less popular among filmmakers, has nevertheless brought about such diverse products as a silent drama (*Decameron Nights*, Herbert Wilcox, 1924), a romantic adventure (*Decameron Nights*, Hugo Fregonese, 1953), an *auteur* work (*Il Decameron*, Pier Paolo Pasolini, 1971), and many erotic comedies (the Italian 'decamerotico' film cycle of the early 1970s). Critics and scholars have approached *Don Quixote*'s and *Decameron*'s adaptations through a range of perspectives, including ideological, semiotic, film *auteur*, and transnational analyses.<sup>9</sup> This article undertakes an examination of Kazantzakis' adaptations of these two works against a specific background – early talking cinema – in conjunction with Kazantzakis' views on the word/image relationship. Thus, the article situates Kazantzakis' adaptations in a precise context and reveals how a technological development in film history, the advent of sound, and certain theories about it influenced this author's techniques and adaptation process. In particular, written at a time when the artistic value of talking cinema was still debated, Kazantzakis' adaptations illustrate that

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unrealized or unfinished projects in Kazantzakis scholarship, more broadly, see, e.g., Bzinkowski 2017.

<sup>7</sup> Mini 2011; Mini 2016.

<sup>8</sup> Mini 2010b; Mini 2021.

<sup>9</sup> Given *Don Quixote*'s long-standing appeal to filmmakers, the literature on its screen adaptations is significantly more extensive than that on *Decameron*'s. Representative studies on *Don Quixote* in film include Stam 2005; España 2007; Dusi 2014; Herranz 2016; Garrido Ardila 2017; Childers 2020. For *Decameron*'s most famous adaptation, Pasolini's film, see, e.g., Lawton 1977; Marcus 1992.

he sought to express ideas with images rather than dialogue (*Don Quixote*) and use sound as a creative element (*Decameron*) in ways alluding to Sergei Eisenstein's 1928–1929 writings with which the Greek author was familiar. Since each screenplay adaptation addresses the image-language/sound relationship in a different manner, this article will look at each one separately. Before doing so, it will briefly discuss the contexts within which Kazantzakis' adaptations are situated: talking cinema and Kazantzakis' ideas of language and image.

## THE CONTEXTS

Contrary to the popular belief that talking cinema appeared overnight in 1927 with Warner Bros.' *The Jazz Singer* (Alan Crosland, 1927), this invention was the result of complex economic and industrial processes during the 1920s.<sup>10</sup> Subsequently, talking cinema met awe, skepticism, and open resistance.<sup>11</sup> As Douglas Gomery has shown, film producers were at first reluctant to switch to talking film and did so only after the invention promised substantial financial returns.<sup>12</sup> Movie theater owners in various countries gradually converted to sound, fully turning into it in different moments during the 1930s or even 1940s.<sup>13</sup> At the same time, many intellectuals, creative talents, and critics all over the world, including Greece, objected to talking pictures.<sup>14</sup> They saw in film 'talk' (not sound *per se*)<sup>15</sup> the demise of cinema's imagist capabilities, which had reached unprecedented heights thanks to the masterpieces of the silent movements (e.g., French Impressionism, German Expressionism, and Soviet montage) and to popular genres relying on gestures and

<sup>10</sup> I focus here on the 1920s, when the transition to the 'talkie,' as we know it, occurred. In fact, since the cinema's first days, inventors had attempted 'to join the image to mechanically reproduced sound, usually on phonograph records' but 'these systems had little success before the mid-1920s.' Thompson and Bordwell 2019: 172; see also Crafton 1997: 9–10.

<sup>11</sup> Crafton 1997.

<sup>12</sup> Gomery 1985; Gomery 2005.

<sup>13</sup> See, e.g., Freiberg 1987; Dibbets 1996; Crafton 1997: 165; Gomery 2005.

<sup>14</sup> For international reactions, see, e.g., Crafton 1997; O'Rawe 2006: 395–398. For reactions in Greece, see Mini 2010a.

<sup>15</sup> O'Rawe 2006: 396.

pantomime such as slapstick comedy. Most opponents of talking film thought that it threatened to reduce cinema from an independent art to a mere reproductive means of theater-like spectacles. Among the most well-known critical reactions were those of Charlie Chaplin,<sup>16</sup> who did not make a talkie before 1940 (*The Great Dictator*),<sup>17</sup> and of the Soviet filmmakers Sergei Eisenstein (1898–1948), Vsevolod Pudovkin (1893–1953), and Grigori Alexandrov (1903–1983), who in 1928 co-signed their famous ‘Statement on Sound.’ Aiming at safeguarding the primacy of montage and preventing the ‘unimaginative use’ of cinema ‘for “dramas of high culture” and other photographed presentations of a theatrical order,’ the Soviet filmmakers stipulated: ‘*The first experiments in sound must aim at a sharp discord with the visual images.*’ As they claimed, ‘*Only the contrapuntal use of sound vis-à-vis the visual fragment of montage will open up new possibilities for the development and perfection of montage.*’<sup>18</sup>

The ‘Statement on Sound,’ translated into German before the appearance of the original Russian version,<sup>19</sup> was soon also translated into English in the influential journal *Close Up*. Its ideas triggered stimulating discussions<sup>20</sup> and were refined by the Soviet filmmakers themselves.<sup>21</sup> Eisenstein elaborated on the inventive use of film sound in some of his widely translated essays of 1928–1929, with which, as evidence suggests, Kazantzakis was familiar.

Kazantzakis approached cinema as an important art in the Soviet Union between 1925 and early 1929, when Eisenstein, Pudovkin, and other filmmakers made some of the landmark works of the montage school.<sup>22</sup> His correspondence and notes are explicit that in Russia he saw ‘many films,’ including Eisenstein’s *Battleship Potemkin* (*Bronenosets Potyomkin*, 1925) and Pudovkin’s *Storm over Asia* (*Potomok Chingis-Khana*, 1928).<sup>23</sup> His screenplays of the 1920s and 1930s indicate that he

<sup>16</sup> See Crafton 1997: 17, 296, 347–348, 374–376.

<sup>17</sup> Thompson and Bordwell 2019: 199–200.

<sup>18</sup> Eisenstein, Pudovkin, Alexandrov 1988: 114, emphasis in the original.

<sup>19</sup> Kaganovsky 2018: 34.

<sup>20</sup> O’Rawe 2006: 397.

<sup>21</sup> Kaganovsky 2018: 15–17.

<sup>22</sup> Mini 2010b: 283.

<sup>23</sup> Prevelakis 1984: 16, 72; Bien 2012: 331.

was also familiar with Pudovkin's *Mother* (*Mat'*, 1926) and *The End of St. Petersburg* (*Konets Sankt-Peterburga*, 1927) and Alexander Dovzhenko's works.<sup>24</sup> Regarding his readings about cinema, we know that in 1928 he became infatuated with a seminal monograph on cinema's visual capacities, Léon Moussinac's *Naissance du cinema* (1925).<sup>25</sup> Kazantzakis' readings on film must have been broader. On May 9, 1930, for example, he wrote a letter to Prevelakis in which he described a Kabuki performance in Paris in a way highly reminiscent of Eisenstein's writings. As Kazantzakis wrote:

Last night I saw the Japanese theater that came to Paris; it is the single pleasure that France, that is Japan, gave me; exquisite *stylisée* art, grand impetus, actors who no way compare with the European *homunculus*. All [actors] were rapt with a tension *concentrée*, *hallucinée* and balanced beyond any imagination. They had analyzed and found the essence of every movement, which that alone they performed, freed from any detail. If you have ever seen *ralenti* [slow motion] in cinema, you understand what I mean.<sup>26</sup>

Kazantzakis' description clearly draws from Eisenstein's famous analyses of the Kabuki theater that had visited Moscow in the late 1920s. Eisenstein exalted the Kabuki's use of non-realist conventions contrary to European practices and naturalism;<sup>27</sup> its use of sound, movement, space, and voice as equivalent elements within a 'monistic ensemble';<sup>28</sup> and its cinematographic qualities, including the meaningful use of slow motion<sup>29</sup> and unexpected 'juncture' with sound film.<sup>30</sup> In the Kabuki, said Eisenstein, 'we actually "hear movement" and "see sound",' because 'the basic affective intention' is transferred 'from one material to

<sup>24</sup> Mini 2010b; Mini 2011; Mini 2016.

<sup>25</sup> Kazantzakis 1983: 187; Taylor 1980: 158.

<sup>26</sup> In: Prevelakis 1984: 196. Kazantzakis does not explain that the Japanese performance was a Kabuki one, but without doubt refers to the Kabuki theater headed by Tsutsui Tokujirō that performed in Paris, 2–15 May 1930. For the May 1930 Kabuki performance in Paris, see Tschudin 2013: 7. All translations from Greek and French into English in this article are mine, unless otherwise noted.

<sup>27</sup> Eisenstein 1988a: 116; Eisenstein 1988b: 149.

<sup>28</sup> Eisenstein 1988a: 117.

<sup>29</sup> Eisenstein 1988b: 149.

<sup>30</sup> Eisenstein 1988a: 122.

another'; for instance, in the Japanese performance, a 'further distancing [was] emphasized by the *samisen*, i.e. by sound!'<sup>31</sup> Sound film, Eisenstein claimed, 'can and must learn from the Japanese what to it is fundamental: the reduction of visual and aural sensations to a single physiological denominator.'<sup>32</sup>

The films that Kazantzakis saw in the early 1930s also attest to his interest in sophisticated film sound; they included Georg Wilhelm Pabst's *Westfront 1918* (*Westfront 1918. Vier von der Infanterie*, 1930), Fritz Lang's *M* (1931), Leontine Sagan's *Mädchen in Uniform* (1931), and René Clair's *À nous la liberté* (1931).<sup>33</sup>

We can understand Kazantzakis' attraction to iconographic silent films, formalist film writings, and artistic film sound strategies if we consider his long-standing preference of images over language. A life-long admirer of Henri Bergson (1859–1941), Kazantzakis shared his idea that language solidifies our ever-changing impressions and sensations in order to express them.<sup>34</sup> 'Words,' Kazantzakis wrote in 1933, 'are hard material, too solid; they distort and limit the fluidity. When I see how the turmoil of my breast solidifies in the form of words, I feel disgusted.'<sup>35</sup> Regarding images, since 1912, when he presented Bergson's theory to the Greek public, Kazantzakis had stated: '[H]ow can the intellect express with precision the moving depth of reality, since it will transform it into immobility? At present, there is only one way: express through images the conclusions of innermost experience. Images can transmit the rhythm, the initial emotion of feelings; they can somehow render the quality and suggest the fluidity.'<sup>36</sup> Given these ideas, to which Kazantzakis remained faithful throughout his life, it is not surprising that when cinema was making the transition from silent to talking film, his screenplay adaptations demonstrate that he followed two directions: he sought to transmit ideas with vivid images instead of dialogues (*Don*

<sup>31</sup> Eisenstein 1988a: 118.

<sup>32</sup> Eisenstein 1988b: 149.

<sup>33</sup> Prevelakis 1984: 239, 329; Kazantzakis 1983: 253, 259.

<sup>34</sup> Bergson 2001: 129–132.

<sup>35</sup> In: Prevelakis 1984: 402.

<sup>36</sup> Kazantzakis 1912: 331; see also Leontaritou 1981: 191–219; Mini 2010b: 281–283.

*Quixote*) and experimented with sound in ways reminding one of the Soviets' stipulations (*Decameron*).

## DON QUIXOTE

Kazantzakis conceived of adapting *Don Quixote* into a screenplay in early 1931. By mid-January 1932, he had completed the first draft.<sup>37</sup> Having finished the final version in French (now kept in typed manuscript at the Nikos Kazantzakis Museum Foundation), he sent it to Prevelakis, who met with Walter Ruttmann (1887–1941) in Paris and gave him a copy of *Don Quixote* and a copy of *Mohammed*.<sup>38</sup> As Prevelakis wrote to Kazantzakis, the idea of an adaptation of Cervantes' work captivated the German director. Prevelakis also suggested to Ruttmann that Chaplin would be an ideal Don Quixote, a thought that did not appeal to Ruttmann.<sup>39</sup> Three days after his meeting with Ruttmann, however, Prevelakis sent a new letter to Kazantzakis, accompanied by a newspaper cutting, announcing a film adaptation of *Don Quixote* starring the famous Russian opera singer Feodor Chaliapin.<sup>40</sup> Kazantzakis did not feel apprehension. 'For sure, everyone will go to *hear* Chaliapin,' he wrote to Prevelakis. 'But it is very likely that other people will go to *see* our *Don Q. [Quixote]*,' he added.<sup>41</sup> Clearly, Kazantzakis distinguished between two film events: one relying on sound and the other on images.

<sup>37</sup> Prevelakis 1984: 245, 284. This draft must be the published Greek version of Kazantzakis' *Don Quixote*. See Kazantzakis 1997.

<sup>38</sup> I here use the French, last version of Kazantzakis' *Don Quixote* which is longer than the Greek one. Both texts do not offer a shot-by-shot breakdown. They are divided into enumerated paragraphs (81 in the Greek and 134 in the French version), corresponding to what we could consider scenes, segments, or sub-segments. In the longer French version, Kazantzakis often breaks one section of the Greek text into two or more parts and/or describes the actions in more detail. The analysis of Kazantzakis' French text of *Don Quixote* in this article elaborates on arguments presented in Mini 2009 which were based on the then only known shorter Greek version of the screenplay.

<sup>39</sup> Prevelakis 1932a.

<sup>40</sup> Prevelakis 1932b. Chaliapin first appeared as Don Quixote in 1910 in Mules Massenet's eponymous opera (De Paepe 2009: 147). The talking film starring Chaliapin was completed in 1933 by Pabst.

<sup>41</sup> In: Prevelakis 1984: 301, emphasis in the original.



As is evident from Kazantzakis' *Don Quixote*, he perceived Cervantes' hero through two filters. One was the Romantics' interpretation of Don Quixote as an eternal 'rebel' in the service of imagination and the 'Ideal.'<sup>42</sup> The other was Miguel de Unamuno's (1864–1936) neo-romantic interpretation of him as a modern Jesus,<sup>43</sup> who against all rational odds could rouse his compatriots from lethargy.<sup>44</sup> Unamuno supported this interpretation by identifying analogies between Jesus' and Don Quixote's lives and worldviews.<sup>45</sup>

In combining the standard romantic and Unamuno's neo-romantic ideas, Kazantzakis shaped Don Quixote as a Christ-like figure salvaging imagination.<sup>46</sup> To convey his interpretation, Kazantzakis altered the original source. He did not consider Cervantes' long argumentative passages and diversions involving figures other than Don Quixote. The Greek author retained a few episodes related to the central hero, which he considered 'the most representative' in his effort to extract 'the tragic and comic soul of Quixote' from the novel's 'complicated story.'<sup>47</sup> Kazantzakis drew from the first part of the original work. He dramatized Don Quixote's initial signs of madness when, influenced by tales of chivalry, Don Quixote fights some imaginary enemies in his bedroom; his perception of an inn as a castle inhabited by princesses; his self-ordination to a knight; the episode of the windmills; his release of some prisoners; his attack on shepherds whom he mistakes for a Muslim army; and a trick of his fellow-villagers that brings him back to his village. By altering Cervantes' description of this trick, Kazantzakis moved to the screenplay's final scene, depicting Don Quixote's death, a situation that derives from the closing pages of Cervantes' second part.

In *Don Quixote*, Kazantzakis conveyed his ideas virtually only through images. Although abundant dialogue exchanges are present in those parts of Cervantes' work, on which Kazantzakis' adaptation was

<sup>42</sup> Iffland 1987: 9–13. This interpretation, fully articulated by F. W. J. Schelling and promoted by other Romantics (see Iffland 1987), has remained popular.

<sup>43</sup> Samouil 2007: 198–204.

<sup>44</sup> Iffland 1987: 13–16.

<sup>45</sup> See, e.g., Unamuno 1972: 341–342, 350–354; Unamuno 1976: 32–33, 84, 147–148, 207–208, 235.

<sup>46</sup> Mini 2009.

<sup>47</sup> In: Prevelakis 1984: 284.

based,<sup>48</sup> the Greek author made minimal use of verbal elements, which could actually be transferred to the screen by means of intertitles. Most of these elements consist of interjections, exclamations, particles, vocative names and nouns, short imperative sentences, short questions, or a combination of them (e.g. ‘Ah!’; ‘Ouch’; ‘No!’; ‘My God!’; ‘Oh! Dulcinea!’; ‘Wait a minute!’; ‘Leave me alone!’; ‘My spear!’; ‘They are coming!’; ‘Forward!’; ‘Let’s save the princess!’). In addition, instead of transmitting what the characters say, Kazantzakis informs us that they ‘speak’ and goes on writing ‘We see:’<sup>49</sup> and describing imagery. Kazantzakis thus builds his adaptation as a series of actions, enacted visions, fantasies, and other subjective states. Kazantzakis’ choices suggest that, while transferring *Don Quixote* to a script for the screen, he struggled not simply to express dreams, visions, and the unconscious, as he once wrote regarding cinema’s capacities,<sup>50</sup> but also to experiment in different pictorial ways of conveying them.

Specifically, when Kazantzakis’ characters narrate previous incidents or future plans, Kazantzakis describes vivid images functioning either as flashbacks of past events or as illustrations of ideas. He even depicts people’s false stories and describes earlier events in two ways: as they had happened and as Don Quixote or other characters misrepresent them. Moreover, Kazantzakis illustrates an overabundance of Don Quixote’s visions and sometimes enlivens an event in both the subjective manner in which Don Quixote perceives it and the objective way in which other characters experience it. And he sometimes blurs the boundary between ‘subjective’ and ‘objective’ images,<sup>51</sup> in the ambiguous manner that David Bordwell has pinpointed in art cinema narration.<sup>52</sup>

Furthermore, Kazantzakis presents Don Quixote as a Christ-like symbol of imagination through visual motifs absent in the original work. The power of imagination, for example, is signified by a large emblem, depicting a heart aflame and bearing the motto ‘I am burning!’ over the

<sup>48</sup> See, for instance, Cervantes 2003: chapters IV–VIII.

<sup>49</sup> ‘Nous voyons’ in the original.

<sup>50</sup> In: Bien 2012: 313.

<sup>51</sup> For details on and more examples of Kazantzakis’ methods see Mini 2009: 221–225.

<sup>52</sup> Bordwell 1990: 208–213.

entrance to Don Quixote's house.<sup>53</sup> Flames also emanate from a crucifix hung in Don Quixote's bedroom in the screenplay's closing scene.

Earlier in the screenplay, the connection between Christ and Don Quixote is underlined through images of wounds and blood on Don Quixote's body. A servant, for example, hits Don Quixote. When Don Quixote is then carried to his bedroom, opposite his bed is a 'very large, very expressive Crucifix,' with blood dropping from Christ's wounds.<sup>54</sup> In front of the crucifix, a large vigil lamp burns while an old woman dresses Don Quixote's wounds with oil from the vigil lamp. In another adventure, herdsman beat Don Quixote 'with no mercy' and Don Quixote 'falls full of blood.'<sup>55</sup> The prisoners, whom he sets free, also beat him ferociously; as a modern Christ, Don Quixote cries 'Me, me, your benefactor?' and takes care of his wounds with his blood-stained shirt.<sup>56</sup> When he is brought back to his village on his horse, Rocinante, children throw stones at him.<sup>57</sup>

Physical attacks on Don Quixote also appear in the original novel. Most of the visual motifs (blood, wounds, the crucifix, the vigil lamp), though, which strengthen Kazantzakis' parallelism between Don Quixote and Jesus, constitute this author's invention. This parallelism reaches its climax at the screenplay's conclusion which completely changes Cervantes' ending. In the novel, while on his deathbed, Don Quixote says:

My mind has been restored to me, and it is now clear and free, without those gloomy shadows of ignorance cast over me by my wretched, obsessive reading of those detestable books of chivalry. Now I can recognize their absurdity and their deceitfulness, and my only regret is that this discovery has come so late that it leaves me no time to make amends by reading other books that might be a light for my soul [...]. [N]ow all those profane histories of knight-errantry are odious to me; now I acknowledge my folly and the peril in which I was placed by reading them; now, by God's mercy, having at long last learned my lesson, I abominate them all.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>53</sup> Kazantzakis 1932a: 2.

<sup>54</sup> Kazantzakis 1932a: 12–13.

<sup>55</sup> Kazantzakis 1932a: 17.

<sup>56</sup> Kazantzakis 1932a: 26.

<sup>57</sup> Kazantzakis 1932a: 32.

<sup>58</sup> Cervantes 2003: 976–977.

Don Quixote confesses to a priest and dictates his will to a notary. ‘Eventually,’ Cervantes writes, ‘Don Quixote’s last day on earth arrived, after he had received all the sacraments and had expressed, in many powerful words, his loathing of books of chivalry.’<sup>59</sup> Instead of this ending, which pays tribute to rational thinking, the screenplay’s closure brings together earlier visual motifs to associate Don Quixote with Jesus and praise imagination. As Kazantzakis describes:

In his bed, Don Quixote, suffering [...]. The great Crucifix stands facing Don Quixote. On his knees, in front of Don Quixote, Sancho cries... Don Quixote has put his hand on Sancho’s head as if blessing him [...]. The old woman lights the vigil lamp in front of the Crucifix. Christ is enlightened with a bright light. He appears all bloody, the thorn crown dripping blood [...]. All candles are lit. Don Quixote and the Crucifix shine amidst the flames.

Suddenly, Don Quixote sits up right; opens his eyes, smiles, happy.... The gates of the Paradise open. The Paradise is a medieval castle. Angels, on the ramparts, play golden clarions and announce the arrival of Don Quixote. Two angels slowly lower the drawbridge. All the knights, whom Don Quixote had met in his thick book, all the great ladies of his imagination, exit the doors of the Paradise and proceed to welcome him [...]. Don Quixote proceeds majestically, very slowly, covered with a golden armor, long feathers on the head. At this moment, Dulcinea appears at the doorstep of the Paradise and opens her arms to him. Don Quixote opens his arms, lets out a loud cry of triumph and collapses onto his bed, dead.<sup>60</sup>

By early March 1932, as Prevelakis had not received any news from Ruttmann about Kazantzakis’ screenplays, he contacted the French director Jean Lods (1903–1974), suggesting that *Don Quixote* be played with *piccoli* [marionettes]. Lods loved this idea and further proposed that the marionettes appear against real Spanish landscapes.<sup>61</sup> Still, nothing came of Prevelakis’ new contact. So, between late 1932 and early 1933, while in Spain, Kazantzakis approached Boris Bureba (1892–

<sup>59</sup> Cervantes 2003: 980.

<sup>60</sup> Kazantzakis 1932a: 33–34.

<sup>61</sup> Prevelakis 1932c.

1972), a theater and film critic of the weekly *Il socialista*. According to Kazantzakis, Bureba liked the screenplay and considered it suitable for a newly-formed film company, the 'Spanish-American,' which would have Cervantes' name as its emblem.<sup>62</sup> However, the Spanish company never responded to Kazantzakis about *Don Quixote. Decameron*, which Kazantzakis had also handed to Bureba<sup>63</sup> and was to become his last screenplay of the 1930s, met a similar fate.

## **DECAMERON**

Before turning to Bureba, due to *Decameron's* appealing topic, Kazantzakis had wished to negotiate for this adaptation with Ufa and Paramount Pictures.<sup>64</sup> Prevelakis shared his friend's plan, especially since he considered *Decameron* Kazantzakis' best screenplay.<sup>65</sup> Prevelakis also thought that this screenplay would be a great opportunity for Paramount to feature many stars in a single film. He tried to contact Paramount through the journalist Renaud de Jouvenel,<sup>66</sup> while urging Kazantzakis to visit Paris to discuss this and other projects face to face with Jouvenel and be introduced to the right Parisian circles.<sup>67</sup> Kazantzakis never made that trip to Paris, and it is unclear whether his *Decameron* ever reached Paramount.

Boccaccio's *Decameron* contains 100 tales ('novellas') narrated by ten aristocratic Florentines – seven young women and three men – who have fled to a villa near Florence to escape a plague in the city. For ten days, each day, each Florentine tells a story, resulting in 100 stories. Out of these, Kazantzakis chose nine: the third story of the third day and

<sup>62</sup> In: Prevelakis 1984: 345–346. This company should be Cinematográfica Española Americana (CEA). CEA was formed in March 1932 in Madrid; although it never used 'Cervantes' as its logo, it did pay homage to prestigious Spanish works, having as a honorary director Spain's great dramatist Jacinto Benavente and managed by renowned authors and musicians. See Cerdán *et al.* 2013: 402.

<sup>63</sup> See Prevelakis 1984: 345.

<sup>64</sup> Prevelakis 1984: 309.

<sup>65</sup> Prevelakis 1932d.

<sup>66</sup> By that time Paramount had taken over the Joinville Studios near Paris, where it produced numerous foreign-language films. See Waldman 1998.

<sup>67</sup> Prevelakis 1932e.

eight tales of the seventh day.<sup>68</sup> As Kazantzakis explained in an introduction ('Notice préliminaire') to *Decameron*, he selected these nine tales so that the screenplay would center on 'an inner idea,' 'a single theme,' the wives' plans to cheat on their husbands.<sup>69</sup> In addition, he set these stories in different times and places, so the film spectators would both understand the universality of the women's schemes and see a variety of locales, costumes and people, such as Africans, Algerians, Jews, and ancient Romans. Furthermore, to cater to a wider audience, Kazantzakis downplayed Boccaccio's more shocking parts, emphasizing instead love and its victory over death. To this end, he added a figure absent in Boccaccio, a young Eros, who appears at the beginning and ending of each tale and occasionally intervenes. Kazantzakis also changed the gender balance of the storytellers; in his adaptation, the group consists of five women and five men, who form five couples on the tenth night, thus confirming the triumph of love.<sup>70</sup>

Another important change is that in the screenplay the ten young Florentines do not narrate their tales. Instead, they stage them. Each night (instead of day as in Boccaccio),<sup>71</sup> one of the nobles – that night's 'queen' or 'king' (Boccaccio's terms) – turns into a director; he or she introduces a tale, casts the performers for the roles, and selects the costumes, settings and props. Sometimes, during a staging he or she gives directions to the performers or addresses the rest of the group, the spectators. Kazantzakis' solution has been connected to his interest in Luigi Pirandello's meta-theater techniques.<sup>72</sup> In addition to this, we can see Kazantzakis' method as a strategy to use as little dialogue as possible. Indeed, in his introduction to *Decameron*, Kazantzakis stated that he used this solution to minimize recitation and emphasize action and interest.<sup>73</sup> He also noted that he simplified the stories, stripping them to make them faster and more interesting, an explanation reminiscent of

<sup>68</sup> Kazantzakis 1932c: 1. See also Zoras 2011–2012: 334; Zoras 2014: 39.

<sup>69</sup> Kazantzakis 1932c: 1. For a presentation of Kazantzakis' 'Notice préliminaire' – as well as this screenplay's plot – see also Zoras 2011–2012: 336–364 (also Agathos 2017: 51–56).

<sup>70</sup> Kazantzakis 1932c; Zoras 2011–2012: 336–338.

<sup>71</sup> Zoras 2014: 39.

<sup>72</sup> Zoras 2011–2012: 335, 365–369.

<sup>73</sup> Kazantzakis 1932c: 2.

the 1920s ideas of Lev Kuleshov (1899–1970) and Pudovkin regarding clear, precise, and economic visual material in silent cinema. Regarding the acting, Kazantzakis suggested ‘an absolutely modern’ and ‘caricaturist’ style.<sup>74</sup> The make-up or the tricks, for example, ‘were to take place blatantly before the spectators,’ contrary to any notion of illusionism or realistic representation.

Like Kazantzakis’ previous screenplays, *Decameron* includes vivid images, most of which are present in Boccaccio’s work (trees, flowers, fruits, birds). In contrast to those screenplays, however, in *Decameron* Kazantzakis relies on dialogues, making it clear that he conceived of a talking film. The text indicates that he was at pains to use dialogue and sounds in creative ways.

Like Boccaccio, Kazantzakis incorporates a wealth of sounds and musical parts in the frame story and individual fables.<sup>75</sup> Again and again, he refers to songs, tunes, and musical instruments; sounds of steps, kisses, doors, and bells, birds chirping, chickens clucking, pigs grunting, dogs barking, or the Black Death screaming. Different from Boccaccio’s work, even the opening sentence of the screenplay includes sounds: ‘We hear happy guitar and mandolin sounds,’ Kazantzakis writes. The second paragraph develops the aural ambience: ‘Once more, happy guitar and mandolin sounds [...]. Bells sound, death knell. Five young noble men of Florence, holding a guitar and a mandolin with ribbons and flowers, return from a happy feast. They are cheerful, sing a little tired. The youngest among them [...] starts singing an old, very sweet song.’<sup>76</sup> The adaptation also ends with a sound: the song of a nightingale which had been heard throughout the tenth night.<sup>77</sup>

Furthermore, while staging their tales, the queens and kings may give directions to the performers with regards to not only their movements but also the sounds which they are expected to produce. In the first story, Dioneos plays an old priest, with a deep, low voice. Dioneos changes his voice appropriately to chant the ‘Pater Noster.’ Laurette, that night’s queen, interrupts him: ‘No, no, we need a much lower voice.’

<sup>74</sup> Kazantzakis 1932c: 2.

<sup>75</sup> For the use of music in *Decameron*, see, for instance, Beck 1993, which has also a rich bibliography.

<sup>76</sup> Kazantzakis 1932b: 1.

<sup>77</sup> Kazantzakis 1932b: 53–54.

Dioneos complies.<sup>78</sup> On another night, the queen wants the performers to pretend to be Jews and shows them how Jews presumably speak.<sup>79</sup>

On another level, the plot development of Kazantzakis' enacted tales is often conveyed by sounds. The characters listen to sounds that indicate actions which they see later – or never. It seems that Kazantzakis applied Eisenstein's observations on the juncture between the Kabuki and sound cinema. As we saw, in the Kabuki performance Eisenstein had admired, distancing was emphasized by the sound of a *samisen*.<sup>80</sup> In the same performance, Eisenstein also marveled at its complex image-sound relation, 'And... it is a *flute* that enters triumphantly! And you *see* those same snow-covered fields, that same "resonant" emptiness and night that you "*heard*" a short while before when you were *looking* at an empty stage...'.<sup>81</sup> Similarly, in the adaptation, many people's actions outside the rooms are suggested through the noises they make. Conversely, Kazantzakis even presents characters supposedly discussing something, but so far from the spectators that their words cannot be heard. And death knells frequently remind the young nobles of Florence that the plague is still around, threatening to conquer love.

Finally, Kazantzakis adds material to Boccaccio's stories so that he produces inventive sound effects. One example is the story of the Enchanted Pear tree. In Boccaccio's story, the nobleman Nicostratos is married to the much younger Lydia, who is obsessed with Pyrrhus, a handsome young servant. After Pyrrhus is convinced that Lydia is attracted to him, they devise a scheme through which they could satisfy their lust despite her husband's presence. Pyrrhus climbs a pear tree and pretends that he sees Lydia and Nicostratos making love underneath, while they do nothing. Pyrrhus claims that the tree is enchanted and convinces Nicostratos to climb it. From the pear tree the husband indeed sees the lovers making love (as they actually do) and is persuaded that the tree is enchanted.<sup>82</sup> In Kazantzakis' adaptation, Lydia's lover is not a servant

<sup>78</sup> Kazantzakis 1932b: 5.

<sup>79</sup> Kazantzakis 1932b: 36–37.

<sup>80</sup> Eisenstein 1988a: 118.

<sup>81</sup> Eisenstein 1988a: 119, emphasis in the original.

<sup>82</sup> Boccaccio 1993: 457–467.



but a singer and flute player. Thus, crucial moments during the tryst are implied by changes in the volume of singing and flute playing.<sup>83</sup>

Even more extensive is Kazantzakis' adaptation of the third story of the seventh day. In Boccaccio, the story describes the affair between a young friar, Rinaldo, and his neighbor's wife, Agnesa. One day Agnesa's husband comes home early. As Rinaldo is in Agnesa's bedroom, he takes her son in his arms, pretending that he is there to save the child from certain death from some worms close to his heart. The husband believes this explanation and at the story's end has a life-sized wax statue made to glorify God for his child's cure.<sup>84</sup>

Kazantzakis changes or adds material that produces different sound effects. Instead of a young person, Kazantzakis' friar is an old, deaf man. Because he cannot hear, the other characters must either shout at him or communicate through gestures, to the amusement of the audience. Kazantzakis also adds a statue of Priapus, which comes to life, laughs and produces various sounds. Furthermore, Kazantzakis describes the child (a baby in the screenplay) crying, with a 'metallic voice of a doll.'<sup>85</sup> He also makes the husband into a one-man band, with a tambourine on his back, a trumpet in his mouth, drums in his hands, and bells on his legs, so 'in every movement, he is all sounding, like a whole band.'<sup>86</sup> In some cases, the sounds that his musical instruments produce correspond to his emotions. For example, when he learns of his child's illness, he falls flat, and 'a flute starts whining.'<sup>87</sup> When he later takes his healthy baby into his arms, all of the instruments start playing while the baby cries 'Daddy,'<sup>88</sup> in what Eisenstein would characterize as a 'reduction of visual and aural sensations to a single physiological denominator'<sup>89</sup>: joy.

Kazantzakis' *Don Quixote* and *Decameron* attract scholarly attention for reasons that transcend the scope of this essay. Detailed comparisons between these adaptations and their original sources, for instance, could shed light on subjects in literature or cinema of the 1930s such as gender

<sup>83</sup> Kazantzakis 1932b: 45–53.

<sup>84</sup> Boccaccio 1993: 426–431.

<sup>85</sup> Kazantzakis 1932b: 32–33.

<sup>86</sup> Kazantzakis 1932b: 29.

<sup>87</sup> Kazantzakis 1932b: 34.

<sup>88</sup> Kazantzakis 1932b: 35.

<sup>89</sup> Eisenstein 1988b: 149.

or race. These adaptations might also help us understand better the multicultural cinema market in the Europe of the early 1930s. Still, in the context of this article – Kazantzakis’ work against the background of early talking cinema – these adaptations bring to the fore a range of important issues in Kazantzakis and humanities studies. They reveal how a cinematic development had an effect in Kazantzakis’ work; show how cinema inspired this author to express inventively images and sounds; and, more broadly, help us consider the way in which cinema may have affected literary authors’ thoughts about the image/language relationship and the use of sound.

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