Zorba the Greek Study Guide

Zorba the Greek by Nikos Kazantzakis

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Plot Summary

Determined to prove that he can live an active life, a bookworm sets out to make his fortune mining coal on Crete. Waiting for his ship to set sail, this narrator sits in a pub and ruminates over memories of a friend who has gone to sea defending Greece from foreign invasion and rescuing countrymen abroad. He and this friend made a pact requiring each to warn the other in case of danger, transmitting a distress signal through their unbreakable bond of friendship. In the pub, the narrator has the unexpected good luck to meet Zorba before setting sail and takes him on as a foreman to oversee the work. The narrator is immediately taken with his new companion and seeks to emulate his passionate, instinctual behavior.

After they arrive in Crete, Zorba and the narrator find refuge with the widow, Madame Hortense, whom Zorba romances to pass the time. Zorba tutors the narrator in how to live in the world and goads him to pursue a widow of his own. Throughout their friendship, Zorba shares stories of his life and expounds his own unique take on God, who Zorba believes is a debaucher like himself. He looks to the narrator for advice on spiritual matters but grows frustrated when his friend cannot provide definitive answers. Zorba reasons that he knows what he knows with all of his being, and what good are books if they cannot offer the same for other men?

Zorba and the narrator encounter their first calamity when a gallery in the mines collapses, and the workers barely escape with their lives. The near-death experience intensifies the narrator's desire for an alluring widow, but in his mind she is still an abstraction, a temptress sent to torment him. Eventually, though, fortified by Zorba's slogans of wine and women, he succeeds in courting the widow. Making love to the widow brings the narrator back into the physical world and lets him finish letting go of abstract thoughts. When the widow is murdered by a vengeful mob, however, angry at her role in a young lover's suicide, the narrator returns to abstraction to cope with her death. Though Zorba's own heartfelt mourning shames him, the narrator begins to accept his own nature and realize that it is possible to integrate the mind and the body.

Despite the trouble at the mines, Zorba has another plan to make them wildly rich: they will build a timber railway from the top of a nearby mountain to the harbor, facilitating a lucrative timber export trade. While Zorba is away buying supplies and cavorting with a younger woman, the narrator is compelled to propose to Madame Hortense on his behalf. Zorba agrees to marry her, but Hortense falls ill and dies before they can perform the wedding. Nevertheless, in agreeing to make her an honest woman, Zorba has given Hortense her heart's greatest desire. The timber railway, however, is a colossal disaster, but by this point the men's friendship is so strong that they are beyond caring about financial ruin.

In the final chapter, the narrator learns that both his seafaring friend and the great Zorba have died. The friend, Stavridaki, dies of pneumonia after his greatest military victory, while Zorba dies howling at the moon; thus, both leave the world in a manner fitting their statures. Zorba leaves the narrator his lyrical *santuri*, the emblem of his happiness.

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

The unnamed narrator of the story, a scholar, sits in a bar full of sea-ragged sailors and thinks of his friend. In the narrator's memories, this friend chides him for spending his life chewing over books instead of exploring the seas and having adventures. The speaker laments that the two men could never properly express their feelings, but rather they sparred verbally to show affection. Before parting, the friends make a pact for each to telepathically warn the other if he senses danger... despite the fact that neither man believes in superstition.

On this day, though, at the start of the novel, the narrator has made a new friend - Alexis Zorba. Before setting off for Crete and a halfhearted endeavor to lead the life his soldier-friend would have him live, the speaker employs a roguish mineworker to aid him in prospecting lignite. Zorba promises to cook him an excellent soup and charm his nerves by playing the *santuri* - but only when he's in the mood to do so.

Chapter 1 Analysis

In this first chapter, the author sets up the contrasting ideals of man. The narrator, the friend (named near the end of the book as one Stavridaki), and Zorba, represent what the speaker classifies as men who live for God, Mankind, and man as an individual. The first appearance of Zorba is remarkable for the character's seeming lack of reason to his actions; seeking employment, he recounts the tale of how he assaulted his previous boss, and can offer no explanation or motivation for the attack. Zorba also introduces the theme of freedom, which he views as synonymous with manliness. The extent of man's ability to be free is explored in later chapters without ever forming a distinct conclusion. Finally, the chapter concludes with an exclamation of "God and the devil!" the first indication that these adversaries may be one and the same.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

The comrades sail on the Aegean Sea toward Crete. As Zorba looks in wonder at two dolphins leaping near the boat, the narrator notices that his eccentric is missing half of one finger. Zorba explains that he cut it off because the finger got in the way of his pottery. The speaker is awed by Zorba's passion, but warns him that this tendency may lead to the frenzied removal of other body parts - like the sexual organs. Zorba grows furious, and denies that there's any danger of his committing such an act.

Retiring to his cabin, the narrator reads from *The Dialogue of Buddha and the Shepherd*, which emphasizes the virtue of possessing nothing. When he wakes, the ship has docked on Crete, and Zorba describes his adventures on the island when he was young. He speaks of the many wars and revolutions of Crete, but he refuses to name his own savage actions. Zorba goes on to wonder how such senseless slaughter could have brought peace and liberty to the land, but he must acknowledge that this is indeed what happened.

Many villagers come to welcome Zorba and the narrator, but Zorba insists they rely on the kindness of a widow. Someone suggests they visit Dame Hortense, and the old woman agrees to put them up for the evening. Though the storyteller finds no charm in the widow, Zorba begins a fruitful romance.

Chapter 2 Analysis

The connection between freedom and manliness is made more concrete, as Zorba relates his feelings on crafting pottery - and, of course, an impediment to that freedom must be removed. Conversely, the narrator suggests that the sexual organs may be more of an obstacle than a finger, since promiscuity mars one's prospects of entering heaven. Zorba rebukes him, saying that, on the contrary, sex is the very essence of paradise. Zorba lives for visceral, worldly pleasures, unlike his philosopher companion.

Zorba revisits this train of thought when he recalls his experiences in wartime Crete. He tells the narrator, who by now he's taken to calling "Boss," that a man cannot know the world unless he goes through a period of savagery and commits every sin he can. He calls the narrator "innocent" because he thinks and considers rather than acting, and thus for all

his learning, the boss knows nothing because he has experienced nothing.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

After resting the night at Dame Hortense's hotel, the narrator goes for an early morning stroll in the Cretan countryside. He encounters some young women, who are frightened because the fear of strangers has become ingrained in the culture through a history of violence. Soon the fear passes, and the girls continue on their way. The narrator contemplates the sea, and reads from Dante before Zorba interrupts him to come in for lunch.

The village elder Mavrandoni offers the travelers lodging so that they may avoid the scandal associated with staying in a woman's home. Zorba and the narrator refuse. At dinner, Zorba sets the table for three people so that Dame Hortense may join them. Here, Zorba begins to romance her in earnest. Madame Hortense reveals her great loves, four admirals from England, France, Italy, Russia. The greatest of these, the Italian Canavaro, has been immortalized in the speech of Hortense's parrot, and Zorba offers to take on Canavaro's role in the innkeeper's affections.

Chapter 3 Analysis

In this chapter, Kazantzakis gives some background history to the island of Crete, and how the recent battles have affected the culture. Dame Hortense herself is a living testament to the wars, finding herself entangled in affairs with generals from four of Europe's major powers. The violence underlying the villagers' lives foreshadows the senseless murders later in the book.

The theme of proper freedom and manliness is again revisited. Zorba tells a story of an old man who lives as if he will never die, while Zorba lives like every day is his last; neither he nor the narrator offers an answer as to which method is best. Also, when the travelers refuse the elder's hospitality, he does not try to persuade them but instead remarks that they are free, implying that men will choose their own way.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

Zorba begins his tryst with Madame Hortense. When the narrator awakens the next morning, he smokes a pipe and relives memories of his absent friend. The narrator's friend credits any great feat he may one day perform to Rembrandt's *Warrior*.

Zorba awakens, and admonishes the narrator and himself for laughing at Dame Hortense, and further rebukes the speaker for not praising the innkeeper's beauty before retiring for the night. Soon, work begins in the lignite mine, Here, Zorba takes command, but the narrator takes some time to get to know the workmen. As he learns more about the workers' lives and conditions, the narrator is filled with empathy and begins speaking to them about socialist ideals. Zorba puts his foot down, and throws his boss out of the mines for good. Zorba explains, "Don't go telling them we're all equal ... or they'll go straight and trample on *your* rights!" Maintaining cruel authority, he believes, is the key to making men work efficiently.

The narrator ends this chapter by setting two goals: to rid himself of Buddha, the representation of esoteric philosophy; and to ground himself in the world of men

Chapter 4 Analysis

Several parables appear in this chapter, each illuminating one of the book's key themes. Zorba tells of his 80-year-old grandmother yearning to be serenaded, while the narrator recalls a young woman closed in by the hand of God and his own grandfather demanding stories from his guests, living vicariously the adventures of other men. Zorba's story is meant to illustrate how a man should behave toward a woman, professing her beauty no matter the lady's age or appearance. The boss's grandfather, however, is remembered in the context of the narrator's own situation, relying on Zorba to experience the world. The speaker does not find anything wrong with this approach, but this is another example of the differences between a man who lives for ideas and a man who lives for the flesh. The episode of the woman and the copper hand seems to be another examination of the boundaries of freedom.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Old uncle Anagnosti invites everyone in the village for a meal to celebrate the castrating of the pigs. The old man relates the tale of his birth, and hushes Zorba and the narrator when they do not show enough reverence toward God and the Holy Virgin. Zorba is made to squirm, though, when Anagnosti relates the pigs' misfortune to human terms. The thought of castration leads Zorba on another tirade against his employer's socialist ideals, saying that preaching equality of the sexes to men like Anagnosti will only disrupt their way of life without accomplishing any real change (61). Worst of all, Zorba believes, would be to cast down Anagnosti's religion, which is at the center of his whole way of life. Unless one is prepared to usher in a better way of doing things, it is better that he leave others to their own devices. Late at night, in response to the restlessness caused by his inability to compose a better world, the narrator begins work on his manuscript of *Buddha*.

Chapter 5 Analysis

Zorba's clearheaded sureness of purpose is compared to Alexander the Great's slicing through the Gordian knot, as once again the narrator idealizes the man of instinct over the man of intellect. The nature of God is again questioned, as Zorba seems to view religious feeling as integral to an ordered life, yet he does not himself believe in a higher power. The irony that the atheistic Zorba continually campaigns for God's existence while the spiritual narrator tries to rid himself of esoteric thoughts will recur time and again.

When the narrator yearns passionately to create a perfect world, he begins a manuscript on Buddha, and works on it all through the night. As the story progresses, the significance of this manuscript will shift until it is an object the narrator discards as folly.

Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

The narrator begins to share some of Zorba's pleasure at eating, and Zorba sets out his idea that there are three types of men: the first turns his food into "fat and manure," others turn it into "work and good humor," and the last into God (67). Zorba counts himself in the second group, while he believes the boss is striving for the holiest tier but doesn't quite qualify. Before the conclusion of their meal, Zorba has taught the value of dance as communication, expressing through movement what words cannot convey. While understanding immediately the value of such expression, the boss is unable to speak the language himself.

In the morning, Zorba relates his great plan, one that will either make them more money than mining lignite ever could or ruin the pair altogether: he proposes to set up an overhead cable to bring timber from the top of a nearby mountain to the town. The boss agrees to this idea, and while Zorba continues working in the mines and plotting this new adventure, the narrator returns to writing on *Buddha*.

Chapter 6 Analysis

Another system by which to categorize men is established, with Zorba representing the hearty, sensualistic branch and the narrator taking up the abstract, esoteric column. With this system in mind, Zorba warns the narrator through a parable about the dangers of trying to be something he is not. Of course, several times throughout the novel Zorba encourages his boss to become more like he is. The conflict between what the narrator is and what he strives to be drives the story, and while he is never able to match Zorba's raw manliness, he does find some happiness trying.

Readers may notice the irony in this chapter, if not before, that Zorba is quite misogynistic despite his love of women. In telling the story of his daughter, Zorba describes how his brother nearly murdered the poor girl for disgracing the family name by carrying a child out of wedlock but then relents when she agrees to marry the father. Zorba does nothing to interfere in his brother's plan, but he is neither surprised nor relieved when his daughter's doom is averted. Zorba readily admits that he does not take women seriously, but he also reveals that he feels much the same way about men. In Zorba's view, both sexes are victims of predictable calamity, and neither can be blamed for its transgressions.

The work of the narrator and Zorba is contrasted when Zorba, excited over his new project, runs off to the mines while the speaker, also energized, picks up his *Buddha* manuscript and begins writing his way to freedom.

Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

The narrator asks Zorba if he's ever been married, and Zorba goes into a litany of the different relationships a man may have with a woman. He says he's been married "honestly" once; he counts himself twice wedded "half-honestly," by which he means serious but informal relationships; and he's been married a thousand times "dishonestly," a category comprising every sexual adventure he's ever experienced. Zorba doesn't have much to say about his "honest" marriage, and he says he once kept track of all his trysts by clipping a lock of each woman's hair but soon abandoned the project.

For the two "half-honest" lovers, though, Zorba goes into extensive detail, relating his intense feelings for Sophinka and Noussa. Zorba stayed 3 months with Sophinka, living in a small cottage with her grandmother; 10 days after leaving Sophinka's village, he meets Noussa. Zorba is invited to a feast at her home, and after Zorba gives the toast, the lights go out, and an orgy commences. Zorba can't find Noussa, but he does not remain unsatisfied. The next morning, after extricating himself and Noussa from the tangled mass of bodies, Zorba and his woman escape to more a more private room. He lives with her for 6 months, until Noussa elopes with a soldier.

Chapter 7 Analysis

For the first and only time in the novel, Zorba speaks of his heart's being broken. Although he says very little about his relationship with Noussa following the orgy, Zorba does indicate that this was one of the happiest periods in his life, and it can be argued that Noussa was the only woman Zorba ever truly loved. Considering his unflattering comments about his "honest" wife and the lack of emotion he displays toward any of his "dishonest" conquests, there are not many other contenders for Zorba's affection - certainly not poor Sophinka. This does not cast an encouraging light on his betrothal to Madame Hortense later in the novel.

Zorba's curious misogyny flares up again as he explains why he bears no ill will toward Noussa for abandoning him. He suggests that laws and rules do not apply to women because women lack the moral strength to abide by set customs. Of course, Zorba still concludes by lifting his glass to womankind and drinking to the prospect of further conquests.

Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

The narrator writes a letter to his friend, relating how the seaman's chiding vexed spurred him to adopt a life of action. He also tells of Zorba, with his tales and dancing and *santuri* playing. He tells his friend that he is happy, and speaks of his new ideas on the nature of mankind. The narrator ends the letter by expressing his love for his friend, since neither man is able to show his emotions openly when they stand face to face.

After finishing the letter, the narrator and Zorba walk to the village. It is raining, and Zorba asks what the books say about the natural world. The narrator replies that the books don't hold nature in much esteem, at which point Zorba suggests that the scribe ought to burn his library. The narrator agrees that this would be an excellent idea, but he cannot bring himself to do it.

Eventually, the pair reaches town, but it is raining harder, so they duck into a cafy. While inside, a beautiful widow runs past the shop. The narrator is enchanted, but a man named Manolakus curses her bitterly. Several patrons of the cafy tell bawdy jokes until the effeminate Mimiko enters, soliciting aid on the widow's behalf. He says she has lost her sheep and is offering a reward for anyone who can help her recover it. Zorba urges his boss to pursue this widow. They take a stroll with Mimiko toward the widow's garden. When the time comes, though, the narrator cannot approach the widow, to Zorba's great disappointment.

Chapter 8 Analysis

In this chapter, the narrator is given two chances to become like Zorba, and in each case he fails to act. This relates back to Zorba's parable in Chapter 6 of the crow who tried to walk like a pigeon - one must stay true to his own nature. Thus, however much the narrator admires Zorba and comes to disdain his own education, he can never overcome his learning to become a complete man of instinct and action. This inherent obstacle does not deter Zorba from instructing his boss as he recalls an episode from his own life at which he failed to sleep with a ready woman and counts himself damned for it.

Whatever his manly failings, the narrator's letter to his friend reveals that he is contented. Living with Zorba has enlivened the speaker's days, and Zorba comments as they walk to town that these feelings are reciprocated.

Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

Zorba strikes upon some very good lignite in the mines and begins dreaming of the adventures he and the boss may undertake with the profits. One night he questions the narrator on the existence of God. When he does not receive an answer, Zorba explains that he believes God is a wilder, crazier version of himself, and that he wipes away a man's sins without prejudice - "Because God, you know, is a great lord, and that's being a lord means: to forgive!" (105). What Zorba cannot forgive, though, is that his boss will still not sleep with the widow, and since God is like Zorba, He will not, of course, let the narrator off the hook, either.

The next day, calamity strikes as the mine collapses. Thanks to Zorba's warning, the men escape with their lives. Unwilling to accept his workers' thanks, though, foreman Zorba berates them for failing to recover their picks before the leaving the crumbling shaft. The narrator, who had been visiting the mine at the time of the disaster, plays peacemaker and calls a lunch break.

Chapter 9 Analysis

This chapter provides more speculation on the nature of God. Although Zorba professes atheism, frequently he appears very concerned about divine justice. He often remarks on how man is to be pitied - but who can pity him if not God? Woman, on the other hand, has her champion in Zorba. He cannot abide that the widow should sleep alone; not for his own sake (Zorba makes it clear he has no interest in this widow), but for the sake of her frail female nature Zorba watches the woman's home to make sure someone joins her in bed. When this fails to happen night after night, Zorba grows furious with his boss and lays blame at his feet for the widow's loneliness. It is also notable that this is the one sin that Zorba's jolly God cannot forgive.

The first half of the chapter can be seen as Zorba in the narrator's world as the two discuss the ways of God. Of course, even on the speaker's territory, Zorba is the dominating force. In the second half of the chapter, the narrator travels to Zorba's turf, the lignite mine, where he barely makes an impression. Still, these two episodes comment on each other through the connecting device of a priest who crosses Zorba's path. Zorba counts this a terrible omen, and he is left with an uneasiness that proves founded when the mine collapses. Men of God, like philosophers, are destructive to manly enterprise; the only God Zorba can believe in is a rake like himself, who would never endeavor to be worshipped.

Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

The narrator's brush with death intensifies his yearning for the widow. He compares these feelings to the temptation of Buddha by the Evil One, and resolves not to succumb. The narrator channels his restless sexual energy into the composition of his manuscript, *Buddha*. Zorba tries again to persuade the narrator to go to this woman. Although it is Christmas Eve, Zorba says God would prefer that the boss visit the widow rather than church, since that's what He would have done. If God had not approached Mary, he reasons, Jesus could not have been conceived. In the end, they both go to church, and the celebration of Christ's birth lifts their spirits. After the service, Zorba and the narrator enjoy a festive dinner with Dame Hortense. On leaving the lovers, the speaker again reflects on his happiness.

New Year's Eve arrives with more merriment for Zorba but restlessness for the narrator. He begins to feel that his life has lacked purpose and that he must make amends. Before heading off to church, Zorba mentions the widow, and the narrator perks up. He is still restless, but now his energy has direction again. He walks down to the beach. The narrator's mood is again tempered when he accidentally kills a butterfly, so he sits on a rock to meditate.

Chapter 10 Analysis

When the narrator is agitated in the flesh, he takes refuge in esoteric thought. Buddha is more comforting to him than woman. This first gives the narrator a sense of euphoria because he believes he is happy when he has "no ambition and [can] work like a horse as if you had every ambition," to need nothing and enjoy his present state (118). However, less than a week later on New Year's Eve, this system of thought has left him anchorless, floating aimlessly in lofty thoughts. Zorba, who is no Christian, reminds his boss that the act of celebrating is more crucial than the object of celebration.

There are two more reminders in this chapter that one should force something to go against its nature. First, the narrator tells Zorba not to yell at him for not going to the widow because acting so impulsively is against his nature. The speaker fails to take his own advice, though, since the chapter ends with his forcing a butterfly to emerge early from its cocoon, thus killing it. This action weighs greatly on his mind, and sends the narrator's thoughts back down esoteric paths. Ironically, even though he has just recovered from the morning's yearning to know the future, the narrator now wants the butterfly to guide his actions.

Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

A new year begins, and immediately, the narrator is confronted by the widow's presence. They exchange a few glances, but the storyteller is unable to take the next step. He feels his spirit lighten as he rests under a fragrant almond tree where Zorba finds him. The men return to Madame Hortense's inn for lunch while Zorba goads the narrator with his encounter with the widow at church the previous night. To further his own amorous pursuits, Zorba presents Hortense with a painting of the innkeeper as a siren leading the battleships of England, Russia, France, and Italy. Reminded of her past glories and soon quite drunk on wine, Madame Hortense begins recounting still further affairs she's carried out across the world. This annoys Zorba, and he storms off to leave the woman to her dreams. Eventually, though, Zorba again comes to the conclusion that Madame Hortense's promiscuity is not her own fault but that the blame lies ultimately with God (if He exists).

Chapter 11 Analysis

With the widow before him in the flesh, there is no possibility for the narrator to spin her into some abstraction - he must deal with her as she exists or not at all. For the moment, he chooses retreat. When Zorba tries to excite the narrator's passion toward the widow, the best he can get is a half-joking dismissal of the wisdom of books. It is interesting that for all of Zorba's flippancy toward the female sex, he is shown to be very kind to women, in particular. The narrator continually comments on Madame Hortense's comically unflattering appearance, referring to her as "the old siren" and comparing her thickly-painted makeup to a ship's figurehead.

Although Zorba's New Year's gift sets Hortense in a similar position, in his eyes she becomes an alluring mermaid leading the greatest powers of Europe. While he conducts his affairs with a bit of irony, he is very thoughtful toward Madame Hortense and knows exactly what will flatter. It is interesting, though, that when Dame Hortense cannot get past her former glories to embrace Zorba's present company, he becomes irate. Zorba has no problem celebrating Hortense's lovers, but when more are heaped on the Four Great Powers and the woman will still not recognize the man now with his arms around her, it's too much to bear.

Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

The narrator begins this chapter with the shocking realization that all the poetry he once cherished no longer holds any value for him since it does not relate to the true human experience. He also equates Buddha with the Void and the end of civilization. The narrator's *Buddha* manuscript becomes "a real war, a merciless hunt" to expose the prophet's true nature and excise him from the writer's soul (134). The narrator writes all day, and when Zorba comes in late at night he finds that both men have found success: the narrator has made progress in his battle against the Void, and Zorba has discovered the correct slope for the timber rail. The next day, Zorba resolves to travel to the nearest town to purchase supplies. He promises to return in 3 days' time. Dame Hortense is distraught at her departure and begs him not to go.

In Zorba's absence, the narrator receives two letters, one from his friend and one from Karayannis, an old acquaintance and fellow teacher. He reads Karayannis' letter first, saving his friend's correspondence for the calm evening hours. Karayannis proves a sour old intellectual, a Greek thoroughly disgusted with his own nation and race. As his letter goes on, it becomes apparent he doesn't have much regard for the natives of his new African home, either. He invites the narrator to visit him. The speaker strongly considers taking his colleague up on the offer, wanting to experience more of the world but decides he is happy in Crete for the moment. He then opens the second, dearer letter from his friend. This friend fights for the salvation of the Greeks.

Chapter 12 Analysis

The narrator seeks to free himself from the sway of abstract ideas by outmaneuvering Buddha's crafty traps of the mind, foreshadowing a binge-and-purge process that will be more fully explored in later chapters. At this point, however, the narrator is still engaged in nothing but exercises of intellect without any of the practical, manly purpose he has come to admire - he will not even use his vast wits to help Zorba find the correct slope for the timber rail. Zorba sorts it out, though, and this will have its own set of consequences.

In the two letters, one colleague has fled the Greeks in disgust while the other puts his life on the line to protect his countrymen. There is not much to admire in Karayannis, yet the speaker yearns to visit him because he recognizes the greater experience that comes with traveling the world. Once again, the narrator fails to go to Africa, and thus remains the inferior to this wretched human being. It can be said, though, that Karayannis is the same type of man as Zorba, i.e., a man who turns his food into work and lives for manly pleasures; but whereas Zorba rejoices in all he sees and treats women with a certain respect and admiration, Karayannis is twisted by hate and scorns everything he sees. When the friend's missive follows immediately after Karayannis'

rant, the contrast between these two types of men is obvious. The friend is not like the narrator, nor is he kin to Zorba and Karayannis. He speaks of "duty" and the Greeks as a race of people, both abstractions, but he is also living in the world and acting his will upon it.

Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary

After the sixth day of the Zorba's proposed 3-day voyage, the narrator receives a letter from his truant foreman. Zorba writes that he's got a devil inside him who is exactly like the true Zorba, except that this imp refuses to grow old. He says he's unhappy, and then goes into an account of how he's met a young woman and is staying with her for a time. Zorba has yet to purchase the supplies. The narrator is angry, of course, but he can also find humor in Zorba's irresponsibility and admire the man's zeal to do what pleases him most. He writes back instructing Zorba to return right away.

Chapter 13 Analysis

Zorba lets the sensual take over without much of a fight, which is in keeping with the man led about by his passions. The narrator takes on the role of confessor, and Zorba pours out his heart in the letter. Unlike the storyteller and his friend, though, Zorba would be just as likely to express his love in person; it is only the distance from his boss that compels Zorba to write. Zorba feels restless and depressed, because he realizes he is aging. He fears becoming dependent and no longer being able to enjoy the pleasures of women and work. Zorba's girlfriend in Candia, Lola, refers to him as "Grandad," which both vexes and excites Zorba. Although he essentially squandering the narrator's time and money, Zorba holds no detail back, because he identifies the narrator as a man "like me ... only you don't know it" who will "hold a damp sponge, like God" and wash away his sins (146, 150).

Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Summary

Dame Hortense asks whether there is a letter from Zorba, prompting the narrator to invent kind words for her in Zorba's voice. Enraptured by the news but still not sated, Hortense prods the narrator with cries of "Nothing else?" until he proposes marriage on behalf of the absent Zorba. She immediately lays out instructions on what her betrothed must bring from Candia for the ceremony. Soon after, there is a commotion in the village: Pavli, Mavrandoni's son, has drowned himself for unrequited love of the widow. A woman calls for the widow's death, but the narrator shouts that Pavli's death is not her fault. Old Anagnosti regards Pavli as blessed because he could not have lived happily with the widow or without her, and now he is at peace. As the narrator strolls home, Mimiko approaches with a basket of oranges from the widow to thank him for publicly defending her.

Chapter 14 Analysis

The narrator is forced to adapt Zorba's demeanor in inventing correspondence for Madam Hortense, and it could be said that he must imagine the best in her to do so convincingly. He even uses some terms of endearment that he could not possibly have known. The narrator even guesses Hortense's ultimate desire for marriage. Zorba might have followed through with the proposal, because the man himself remarks that all men fall into "the trap" from time to time.

When Pavli commits suicide, the villagers blame the widow for his death. This is a thematic inversion of Zorba's principle that women are not responsible for the woes they cause men; both paradigms are exaggerations, but the mob's point of view will prove deadly in chapters to come. As with Karayannis, Zorba is shown in a favorable light among people with a similar temper. It is interesting to note that the narrator's first real progress toward romancing the widow is made through a proclamation of abstract principles - he does not suggest that Pavli's death was his own doing, but rather that all that happens is fated, and thus, no one is responsible.

Chapter 15

Chapter 15 Summary

On a stroll down a mountain path, the narrator comes to the ruins of a Minoan city. A shepherd pesters him and will not return the narrator to his solitude with a cigarette for his toll. The speaker grows tired of him and leaves. The narrator walks by the sea with no particular agenda until an old man meets him and asks whether he is going to the convent. The narrator realizes that this is exactly where he was headed. The traveler tells the story of the convent's statue of the Martyred Virgin, which bleeds from its chiseled wound once every year.

Chapter 15 Analysis

In searching the Greek countryside in meditation, the narrator meets travelers of his "type," men who seek God in one form or another. The shepherd counts himself lucky except for the lack of a cigarette, supporting the Buddhist precept that one must rid himself of all desires to find peace. The old man on his way to the convent is more overtly religious, and he proposes that it is sinful to establish a preference in food or other pleasures when people exist who lack even the essentials. While the narrator may appreciate this wisdom, he cannot agree with the subservient manner in which he holds his wife - the speaker has established before that he supports equality in the sexes, though Zorba has convinced him not to say so aloud. Also, the old man begrudges his wife her lost beauty, which runs contrary to Zorba's opinions on how a woman should be treated; it is not clear whether the narrator has come around to this opinion.

On reaching the convent, conversation with the Mother Superior invokes a discussion of eternity. This leads the narrator into solipsistic terror, likening himself to his prior description of Buddha as the terrible Last Man. He compares the experience to nearly falling into a well, With "eternity" conquered, the narrator believes Buddha is his last obstacle to freedom - but he also must acknowledge that this is the way one feels after each successive challenge is conquered, and there is always another.

Chapter 16

Chapter 16 Summary

Zorba returns, and the narrator breaks the news that he is now expected to propose to Dame Hortense. Zorba is angry at his boss for pulling such a cruel joke on his "Bouboulina" but does not object for his own sake - he appears ready to fall into the "trap." Zorba dispenses gifts from his travels, and then tells the narrator they'd better make haste on the timber rail project. Never mind that Zorba's the one who left for 15 days and spent all their money. While away, Zorba dyed his gray hair black, and he believes the new, youthful appearance has made him stronger and healthier. In the evening he plays the *santuri*, and all their cares melt away. The next night, after Zorba's first day back in the mines, the narrator speaks of the power of a mind concentrated upon one thing. Zorba is at first agitated, and then he jokes that his boss wants to build a monastery, This saddens the narrator, because he realizes this is not far from the truth, but the dream is obviously a subject of scorn for men such as Zorba. The foreman lightens the mood by offering to stand as doorman at the narrator's monastery, and the two enjoy dinner together. Hortense arrives to disrupt their revels, and the narrator leaves the lovers to their devices.

Chapter 16 Analysis

Again Zorba stands up for womankind in his patronizing manner. He is also no longer plagued by questions of God and woman's humanity - is it possible that the narrator's presence prevents his unwanted esoteric thoughts, returning Zorba to ruddy manhood? Zorba does what he can for himself, and he does well, dying his hair to restore vitality. For a man to whom thought and deed are one, it stands to reason that a more youthful appearance should not be far from truth; by appearing to look younger, Zorba becomes younger. Of course, in relating his adventures and urgency for work, Zorba necessarily stumbles over his transgressions, but the narrator dutifully absolves him. Later, the narrator tries his hand at instructing Zorba in meditation in the same manner Zorba has been instructing him in life's pleasures. He tells Zorba that they both have "seen nothing, nothing at all" (183), and the only truly great men are those who accomplish miracles by focusing on one thing to the exclusion of all others. Zorba nearly falls into this abyss but he quickly rebels and saves them both.

Chapter 17

Chapter 17 Summary

Zorba and the narrator wake early to ascend the mountain to lease land for the cable railway from the monks who own the property. On the way up to the monastery, they meet the monk Zaharia, who warns them to turn back. Zaharia speaks of the sinfulness of his fellow monks, but it soon comes out that Zaharia himself has "a devil inside him" as well. The devil, named Joseph, wants to eat meat on holy days, and Zorba feeds Joseph well. Zaharia also tells the tale of the monastery's patron saint, Our Lady of Revenge, whose statue once killed a horde of Algerian invaders. On reaching the monastery, several monks demand to see a newspaper, while another, Demetrios, wants to show the travelers his icon of a clay nun.

The abbot, whom Zorba and the narrator must meet to sign paperwork, is away in town, so they are obliged to wait for his return. Zorba notes that all the monks want something, and he relates the story of how he abolishes his intense longings by stuffing himself so full of the thing that it no longer holds any appeal. Denying pleasures does not work, Zorba says. Before the abbot returns, Zorba notes the homosexual relationship between Demetrios and his pupil, Gavrili, and resolves to escape the monastery before his opinion of both men and women is tainted. Zorba also reveals that he's got a scheme to get them a real deal on the land.

Chapter 17 Analysis

As seen at the end of chapter 16 and continued here, Zorba's affections toward Madame Hortense have soured somewhat since her drunken fantasies of Eastern European lovers. He wakes up the narrator early so that they may get out of the cabin before Hortense knows they're gone. One may speculate about whether Zorba and his boss would ever make it to the monastery if Zorba did not have this need to escape.

Zaharia, the monk, is an interesting character, and while he claims that his greatest sin is eating meat on holidays, he will soon prove much more of a rascal. In many ways he is a Zorba, a man who believes God must have a sense of humor, but Zaharia refuses his own instinct by longing for heaven instead of the earthly pleasures to which he is more disposed. Zorba is correct in his assessment that all the monks seem to have some material desire, and the fact that so many want a newspaper is noteworthy.

Demetrios' clay nun is another interesting artifact, and his belief that there is a precious stone inside seems an apt allegory for the human soul contained in a body of clay. If he breaks the statue, though, and there is no pearl, then he will have ruined his relic with nothing to show for it. The narrator sees the beauty in the object itself, without speculation as to what may be inside - perhaps he is more "of this world" than he would like to believe. One should also note that Zorba's description of binging and purging his

desires is similar to what the narrator has already begun with his *Buddha* manuscript, though he has yet to describe the process according to Zorba's terms.

Chapter 18

Chapter 18 Summary

The abbot tries to extract a higher fee from Zorba than had originally been negotiated, but Zorba resolves to get the best of him. He feels he needs to make up for spending all of the narrator's money in Candia and won't accept less than full atonement for his actions. In the night, the narrator hears a gunshot and is startled from sleep, but Zorba shrugs it off. He's still angry that the abbot has tried to raise the price of land. Presently, the bishop knocks on their door, and the travelers shelter him from the commotion on the grounds. As a token of thanks, the bishop shares his three great theories on religion and asks the narrator's opinion on them. He receives an answer that validates his life's work - "Those theories may save many souls" (204).

Zorba quickly mocks the bishop with banal theories of his own, but the speaker changes the subject to prevent offense. When the visitors are called for matins the next morning, Zorba demands an answer about the revolver shot but is not immediately satisfied. He does, however, become giddy that the incident may strengthen his bargaining power with the abbot. Zorba soon learns that the victim was the novice Gavrili, murdered by his lover, Father Demetrios. The monk Zaharia cries about Sodom and Gomorrah and pledges to burn the iniquitous monastery to the ground. As predicted, the trouble in the night cost the abbot dearly, and Zorba saves enough money to pay off his debts. The narrator won't accept payment, however, so Zorba leaves the 7,000 bank notes with the old monk Zaharia, along with a few pointers on how he may accomplish his holy purpose.

Chapter 18 Analysis

This chapter can be summed up in the narrator's assessment of the monastery: "What a pity ... that such austerity and nobility should be without a soul" (208). In many ways incongruous with the rest of the book, the episode in the monastery relegates both Zorba and the narrator to secondary characters, who find themselves in the midst of an intrigue that cannot be adequately explored in their short stay among the monks. No explanation is offered for Gavrili's murder, and when the narrator asks Zorba about it, his only response is that they should not concern themselves with it. The truth must be quite horrifying because it seems to cause Zorba to reverse his earlier position expressed in this same chapter that he loves to but in where he doesn't belong (??I don't understand this sentence.). Zorba does pass down his own judgment, though, in advising Zaharia how to burn a building.

The bishop's intrusion during the confusion offers another example of the narrator's type of man, one who strives toward God and higher concepts. While the narrator does not think much of the bishop's three theories, he recognizes that it would cruel to dismiss the man's passion. He gives an answer that will satisfy the old zealot, but he does not

offer an overt value judgment on the theories themselves. Again, the distinction between seeming and being comes into contrast because Zorba notes that a bishop in a nightgown is no bishop at all - status comes from attire.

Chapter 19

Chapter 19 Summary

Upon returning to their cabin, Zorba and the narrator are met by Madame Hortense, who rebukes Zorba for his cruelty. She wants to be married as soon as possible and thinks of nothing else. Zorba flatters her with excuses but delays her as much as he can. Hortense presents him with a gift, which he also stalls in opening. Eventually, he must accept the present, which is revealed to be a pair of wedding rings. Zorba agrees to an engagement ceremony under the stars, and in the midst of it all, Hortense swoons with happiness. Zorba refuses to sleep with her or show her the least intimacy, protesting that it is Lent, and they must wait until Easter. When his fiancye has retired for the evening, Zorba speaks candidly with his boss, comparing himself to Zeus as a man who sacrifices himself to make women happy.

Chapter 19 Analysis

Is this Zorba's true assessment of women? His earlier assertion that all women desire praise and flattery has been extended with Zorba attesting that fulfilling these desires is not always pleasant. His portrayal of Zeus as a great martyr to the demands of unhappy women is telling because it contrasts with the traditional view of Zeus as a lecher and rake. The narrator notes that Dame Hortense no longer possesses the strange allure of a widow now that she will be a bride, which may further explain Zorba's waning interest. After all, his opinions on honest relationships have been well established. Confronted, then, with the wedding rings, a physical manifestation of his great fear, Zorba recoils in horror. Yet, after a moment of deliberation, Zorba laughs and decides to go through with the farce of engagement. Hortense's reaction is fascinating, as well; for the first time, the reader hears her thoughts on Zorba, and they are not altogether flattering. To Hortense, he is "a husband," and that is his prime purpose. She expresses some disappointment that he not so exotic as her former lovers, but "he's better than nothing!" (216).

Chapter 20

Chapter 20 Summary

The men head off to sleep after a long and fruitful day (all the events of chapters 18 and 19). The next day, they will begin work on the railway. Before they go to bed, however, the narrator asks Zorba whether he's ever been to war, and it takes considerable prodding to get an answer. Eventually, Zorba tells of his exploits as a warrior, and how he once killed a Bulgarian priest who had been invading Greek villages by night. Zorba felt no remorse in killing this man, who had been guilty of several murders before, but he is brought to tears when he encounters the priest's children in the marketplace. Zorba gives the orphans all his money and quits the army. Now, he says, he is not concerned with a man's nationality, only whether he is "good" or "bad." Zorba tells another story that takes place years before in which a widow saves him from capture but dies the next night when Zorba torches her village. The narrator envies Zorba's full breadth of experience.

The morning begins with a good omen as tiny white flowers bloom outside their window. Villagers gather to watch Zorba christen the timber railway's foundation. Work begins immediately following the ceremony, and at the end of the day, Zorba is exhausted but anxious to see the work completed.

Chapter 20 Analysis

Zorba tells three stories in this chapter, the two about his own experiences in the war being most memorable. The third, though, is notable for its continuation of the theme of appearance creating reality. In it, Zorba's grandfather gives an old soldier a carved piece of wood and tells him it's part of the True Cross, which will protect him from harm. The soldier then becomes a fearless warrior. Zorba suggests that this soldier became invincible because he believed he was. The other two tales illustrate why dedication to an idea, such as nationality or God, is a dangerous thing. Zorba's patriotism led him to murder a woman who had saved his life and orphan the children of a Bulgarian, who had orphaned many more from his own national pride.

Chapter 21

Chapter 21 Summary

On Easter Sunday, the men prepare a holiday feast in honor of Madame Hortense. A messenger soon arrives to inform Zorba that his fiancye is ill. Zorba checks in on her, and then returns to the beach to enjoy the meal he and the narrator have prepared. After dinner, Zorba insists on going into the village to enjoy the Easter festivities, but the narrator abstains. Eventually, the storyteller walks into town alone. On the way, he meets the widow. This time, with Zorba's free-spirited lyric in his head, the narrator finds the courage to pursue the widow and does so successfully. The narrator feels joyful contentment, and his companion, Zorba, is quite proud of his boss. In the morning, too, the narrator realizes he has finished his *Buddha* manuscript and can forget about the Enlightened One forever. With Zorba working on the railway, the narrator pays the fast-fading Madame Hortense a visit. He lifts her spirit by talking about her impending wedding, but, seeing the lady's true situation, sends for a doctor to come immediately.

Chapter 21 Analysis

The reader will be relieved to witness, finally, real progress for the narrator as he sleeps with the widow and exorcises Buddha all in one chapter. In his drive to go to the widow, the narrator states that his body was acting independently of his mind, and after consummating the courtship, he realizes that "the soul is flesh as well" (237). It would, of course, naturally follow that *Buddha* would be complete at this exact moment since this book is the symbolic representation of his disembodied thought. The episode of finishing off his manuscript is a satisfying conclusion as the writer seals the book with his name and binds it with string. Of course, the narrator is not done with lofty thoughts, but this, paired with the sexual affair, marks his reintegration with the physical world. Perhaps because of this, the narrator is able to care for Dame Hortense as Zorba could not, wooing her with Zorba's words but also recognizing her peril.

Chapter 22

Chapter 22 Summary

The Easter celebration continues, as the narrator joins the paschal dance after seeing to Dame Hortense. The party stops abruptly when Androulio the verger reports that the widow has entered the church. The villagers blame her for the death of Pavli, Mavrandoni's son, and the constable Manolakas leads a mob to the church to bring the widow to justice. Before she knows what's happening, the widow is surrounded as she emerges from the church, and Mavrandoni himself bars the way back to sanctuary of the cathedral. The mob throws stones at the woman and some of the men show knives, but Mavrandoni claims the right to pronounce judgment. He tells Manolakas to kill the widow. The narrator tries to intervene, but trips on a rock and is pushed away from the action.

Luckily, Zorba arrives and fights Manolakas to prevent him from carrying out the death sentence. In the course of the struggle, Manolakas bites Zorba's ear but is ultimately defeated. As the widow collects herself, though, Mavrandoni leaps upon her and cuts off her head. Zorba and the narrator retreat to their hut, and Zorba shouts about the great injustice of the world. He speaks for the first time about his own son, Dimitri, who died at 3 years old. In bed at night, the narrator manages to dissolve the horrific event into abstraction, which consoles him. Zorba, though, will not forget the brutal murder, even as his own widow, Dame Hortense, lies dying. While walking in the village, Manolakas surprises Zorba near the widow's garden and challenges him to a knife fight. Zorba counters with an offer to fight without weapons, but the narrator arrives to make peace between them and they all drink together.

Chapter 22 Analysis

No sooner does the narrator find the world of human passions than that world finds him as well. The widow's gruesome death provides a challenge to the narrator's newfound manliness, and it is a challenge he is not immediately able to meet. He lapses into his old ways, reasoning that his lover's death was her destiny, the murder "changed into a symbol" (248). Symbolism, of course, is a great enemy in this novel, and when a human being is supplanted by a thought merely representing a human being, a great sin has been committed. Zorba quickly shames him, his own rich feeling an example of true manhood. Though Zorba was not on intimate terms with the widow, he knows well enough the tragedy of death, particularly premature death. The narrator's perspective does, however, allow him to patch up the feud between Zorba and Manolakas, bringing in arguments of chivalric honor to prevent further bloodshed. He is now able to talk to the men in their own terms, posing explanations they will find meaningful but would have overlooked in their fury.

Chapter 23

Chapter 23 Summary

Zorba has a portentous dream, and on waking learns that Madame Hortense is dying. Zorba and the narrator tend to her as dirge singers wait impatiently for the old woman to pass, so they can loot her possessions. When the time comes, Zorba gently closes his fiancye's eyes and goes outside to be alone. As the festival season continues, though, he meets with well-wishers, who try to cheer him up. Zorba joins them in feasting but refuses to be consoled. Meanwhile, Anagnosti brings officials to inventory Madame Hortense's goods to be distributed to the poor and must chase off the dirge singers and other thieves. Zorba adopts Hortense's parrot, and he and the narrator watch as her body is taken away.

Chapter 23 Analysis

Chapters 22 and 23 display the effects of Zorba's mode of life on more serious situations. Though he is no longer the holy buffoon, his behavior here is perfectly in keeping with the virtues and beliefs expressed throughout the novel. In this chapter, Zorba is shown to care genuinely for Madame Hortense. In spite of all the nasty epithets he bestowed upon her during the course of their relationship, the death of his "Bouboulina" moves him deeply. Zorba even keeps her pet bird, though it was of little use to him before.

Chapter 24

Chapter 24 Summary

When the men return to the beach, Zorba asks the narrator about death and why people die. The narrator replies that he does not know, and Zorba grows furious. Surely, the answer would be in his boss's books; why else would he read them? In a later conversation, Zorba says that he was Hortense's greatest lover because he was able to forget all else but her when he came to call. Soon, the monk Zaharia arrives with the news that he's burned down the monastery on a mission from the Archangel Michael - but the method was all Zorba. Having killed his demon, the monk dies peacefully, but Zorba's not done with him yet.

Chapter 24 Analysis

Zorba's questioning on death causes the narrator to solidify his own theories on its meaning, and he comes up with the concept of "sacred awe" (269). In trying to explain it, he nearly uses the word "poetry" but hesitates and instead says "great danger." The narrator fails to express his idea to Zorba properly, but he experiences a change within himself. This could be considered as a more final truce between body and spirit. This is the closest the novel comes to resolving the theme of body and spirit.

The author states quite bluntly the reason for Zaharia's demise, namely that he had fulfilled his one purpose and passion in life; Zorba, by contrast, has many.

Chapter 25

Chapter 25 Summary

The cable railway is ready for its first test run. Before the momentous occasion can begin, monks ride down from the charred monastery with news of a miracle. The Holy Virgin of Revenge has slain the arsonist Zaharia. The heretic monk was found dead, shaven bald and pierced with the Virgin's spear. Zorba pretends shock, but the narrator struggles to keep from laughing. On the abbot's signal, the first tree is loosed down the railway, rocking the structure violently and splintering to nothing on its way down. The second log does not even make it halfway before shattering. When the fourth timber cargo comes down, the entire cableway collapses into ruin. The villagers flee in terror, but Zorba and the narrator feast on the celebratory roast sheep in spite of the failure. Finally, Zorba teaches his boss the language of dance. Later, the narrator receives a letter from his friend, relating a victory over the Kurds. His friend is happy. The narrator is happy despite his misfortune, but soon a sense of dread overtakes the narrator as he feels his friend is in danger. As promised, he calls out a warning. Presently, though, the speaker dismisses his own fears as foolish superstition and retires to sleep.

Chapter 25 Analysis

Like the Buddha, the narrator loses everything and finds happiness. Unlike the Buddha, however, he does not reach the path of enlightenment through pursuit of nothingness, but rather finds so much pleasure in the company of men that success and possessions become unnecessary accoutrements. The scene of the disaster is one of the most comic moments of the book, from the monks' "miracle" to the shattering of the pylons. Like Zorba, we see that one must work to the best of one's ability, but the end result should be a matter for detached speculation rather than personal anxiety. When one realizes that the quality of human companionship is paramount, the only thing to cause worry is the cessation of those relationships through death. It is also notable that the narrator's friend, Stavridaki, is not named until the moment of his death. Does this foreshadow the realization of the storyteller's fear? The narrator, who survives the final chapter, is never named.

Chapter 26

Chapter 26 Summary

Zorba and the narrator part, and the narrator promises to stuff himself to surfeit with books so that he no longer needs them. One day, he says, they will together build the monastery of free men. Arriving in Candia, the narrator receives confirmation that his friend Stavridaki is dead. Years go by, and the narrator receives an occasional postcard from Zorba with his latest news, including a new marriage. When Zorba invites his former boss to Germany to see a beautiful green stone and the narrator refuses, the postcards stop. The narrator dreams of his friend and of Zorba and realizes that Zorba will soon die. Soon, this fear is confirmed. A letter arrives describing Zorba's last moments, and informing the narrator that he has inherited the *santuri*.

Chapter 26 Analysis

After all their experiences together, Zorba tells his boss that the narrator is still not quite free - to attain freedom he will need folly. Zorba, though, has also repeated frequently that the narrator is still quite young and may yet overcome what's holding him back. Despite all the sincere admiration that the narrator has for his companion, is a pure Zorba the ideal one should long for? It's been shown more than once that an even mixture of their two temperaments proves beneficial to all. Indeed, Zorba appears to rely on the narrator even more than the boss relies on his foreman; when Zorba went to Candia, he poured his heart out in letters, and now at their parting he is on the verge of tears. Of course, Zorba would say that living both by books and by passions is living "by half measures," but perhaps he is not the final word on the subject. Zorba is entirely himself, but the narrator is a work in progress and may find the correct alchemy of spirit after the closing pages of this book. Zorba, for his part, dies exactly as he as wished he could, laughing and howling like an animal.

Characters

The Narrator

Unnamed throughout the book, the narrator is scholar who is constantly chastised by his friends for valuing books over first-hand experience. With his closest friend at sea fighting for the Greek cause, this narrator resolves to create his own active destiny. He leases a lignite mine on Crete, and, before leaving for the island, hires Zorba to act as foreman based on a zesty first impression made in a bar. He comes to admire Zorba for his passionate, instinctual approach to life, unencumbered by the learned and esoteric thoughts that hold the narrator's life in check. Throughout the book, as the narrator witnesses Zorba in action, he holds this character in greater awe and reverence, yet he can never fully emulate this friend's behavior. As he matures, though, he comes to incorporate some of Zorba's lessons, filtering them through his own nature as a man given to lofty thoughts.

Aside from carousing with Zorba, the narrator also busies himself with writing a manuscript entitled *Buddha*, detailing the life and enlightenment of the prophet. This begins as a meditation on the divine, but soon becomes a method of purging the narrator's strong but unwanted drive toward what he calls "the Void." When he finally completes the book, the narrator believes he is done with abstract thought forever, but soon backslides when his lover, the widow, is brutally murdered.

The narrator also corresponds with a friend, who is not named until the final chapters. This man, Stavridaki, is a Greek soldier who fights for patriotic ideals and noble heroism. Though the narrator's memories of their times together are often rife with gentle teasing of the bookworm's habits, their letters are affectionate and prove that both men take benefit from the relationship.

Because the narrator survives the end of the book, he is the only character capable of becoming more than he is at present. Zorba, the man who lives for himself, and Stavridaki, the man for mankind, face deaths appropriate to their lives, but the narrator has the potential to absorb the best traits of both to truly ascend to the state of being he could not reach through intellect alone.

The Friend (Stavridaki)

The narrator's friend represents the man who lives for mankind, who believes in such abstractions as Nation and Duty but also lives and acts in the world. Though both he and the narrator are intelligent, educated men, the storyteller spends all of his time reading about the exploits of others while Stavridaki experiences his own adventures. He and the narrator share a strong bond of friendship, though, such that their promise for one to warn the other if he senses danger succeeds in spanning the miles and

fathoms between them. Stavridaki dies after the greatest military success of his life, and thus, having performed his great duty, the narrator's friend dies happy.

Zorba

Zorba has engaged in the full scope of human experience, working hard, going to war, loving women, and living each day as though it may be his last. When he cannot find words to express himself, he will dance out a story or play on his *santuri*. Although Zorba is a professed atheist and not much given to esoteric thought, he gives a lot of consideration to the nature of God, believing He is most like a man without the normal limitations and thus able to forgive any sins.

Ostensibly, Zorba comes into the narrator's service just to find work, and lands the job when he discerns correctly that his prospective employer would enjoy a good soup. Zorba is expert at reading people, a fact that never ceases to astound his new boss. He romances Madame Hortense to secure their lodging and continues the courtship in both fun and earnest. Zorba is never truly devoted to the innkeeper, and of course he finds a new girlfriend during his time away from the village, but faulting Zorba for not taking Hortense seriously would be to diminish his nature: he takes nothing seriously, not in the end. Zorba works hard and won't brook interruption in the mines, but when his scheme of investing all their money in a pulley rail system falls to pieces, he is readily able to laugh the whole thing off.

Eventually, Zorba and the narrator come to share a symbiotic relationship. Zorba relies on his boss as a type of confessor, a man to keep him honest, while the narrator admires Zorba for his free spirit and longs to live life passionately. They become friends, and their parting is a difficult affair. Zorba keeps up an enigmatic correspondence, mailing postcards to his former employer when something notable occurs in his life. When Zorba invites the narrator to see a beautiful green stone and his old boss doesn't come, however, Zorba believes the narrator is lost forever in the realm of books. Nevertheless, Zorba leaves his precious *santuri* to the narrator upon his death.

Madame Hortense

Variously referred to as "my bouboulina," "the old cabaret singer," "tattered banner," and other epithets, Dame Hortense is Zorba's beloved widow for his time on Crete. Her best days behind her, she enthusiastically welcomes Zorba's flattery and affections. Madame Hortense frequently speaks of her former lovers, captains of the four great powers of Europe - Italy, France, England, and Russia. Chief among these is the Italian Canavarro, whose name Hortense's pet parrot squawks loudly every few moments. Zorba makes a game of celebrating these past glories but becomes restless when Hortense begins reminiscing about still more former lovers. While Zorba is away in Candia making love to a younger woman, the narrator is forced to invent stories of affection in Zorba's letter, which eventually leads to a proposal by proxy. Upon returning, Zorba agrees to the plan, thus granting Madame Hortense her greatest wish: to be an

honest woman. Unfortunately, she falls ill and dies before they can perform the wedding.

Anagnosti

Anagnosti is a wise old sage, set in his ways and set toward God. He first appears when he holds a feast celebrating the castrating of the sheep and tells the story of his birth. In this tale, Anagnosti repudiates a Turkish woman who calls on the Virgin Mary to aid her in childbirth but also warns the faithful against the slightest words against the Virgin's divinity. Of course, he doesn't treat his own wife terribly well, and gives little thought to the mortal suffering - such as the sheep's pain at being castrated, and how anxious that thought might make men feel. When Pavli dies, Anagnosti counts him blessed since now he won't have to deal with all the trouble that comes from women.

Mavrandoni

Mavrandoni is a village elder that offers lodging to Zorba and the narrator upon their arrival and, although they refuse, shows hospitality through a welcoming gift. When his son, Pavli, commits suicide because a village widow will not accept his courtship, Mavrandoni leads a mob to exact vengeance on the woman. He pronounces judgment on the widow, and orders the constable Manolakas to execute her, but Zorba prevents this from taking place. Mavrandoni carries out the death sentence himself, cutting off the widow's head. Soon after, he goes into exile.

Manolakas

As village constable, it is Manolakas's duty to execute the widow when Mavrandoni passes judgment. However, Zorba arrives and bests him in a fight. Believing he's been humiliated in front of the entire town, Manolakas seeks out Zorba for revenge. He wants a fair fight, and when Zorba refuses to get his knife, Manolakas throws his own weapon aside. Before either can attack, the narrator steps in and makes peace between them. There is still some uneasiness, but the men drink to seal their brotherhood.

The Widow

The unnamed widow is the narrator's principal love interest, and the device by which he is permitted to reintegrate himself into the world of flesh. A highly sexualized character, the widow excites passion in all the men of the village. Most men are content make light of her beauty and the universal tendency to fantasize about making love to this woman, but for sullen Pavli, Mavrandoni's son, pursuing the widow is a deadly serious business. When Pavli drowns himself, the villagers blame the widow, and a mob surrounds her and cheers for her death. Zorba interferes, but Mavrandoni manages to kill her anyway. This begins a period of morose introspection for Zorba and forces the narrator back into abstraction.

Mimiko

The people of the village, who regard him as their special idiot, generally dislike attendant to the widow, effeminate Mimiko. In reality, he is more a Shakespearean clown, spouting the wisdom that no one else might be permitted to speak. Of course, he has other aspects of the clown about him as he needlessly steals a pair of shoes from Madame Hortense after the innkeeper has passed away.

Zaharia the Monk

Banished from the mountain monastery, Zaharia seeks revenge on the sinful monks. Zorba sees Zaharia's own dark secret and encourages him to burn down the monastery. Having done so, Zaharia dies, having fulfulled his great purpose in life. Thematically, Zaharia can be viewed as a man who tried and failed to integrate striving for God and living for himself, as he relegates all earthly pleasures to his "demon," whom he's named Joseph. When Joseph dies, though, having burned the monastery, there is nothing left in Zaharia to carry on.

Objects/Places

Crete

Crete is a Greek island, recently recovered from a series of civil wars. Most of the book takes place on Crete, where the narrator has rented a lignite mine.

Zorba's santuri

The *santuri* is a musical instrument that Zorba will play only on happy occasions. He is never without it, and he bequeaths this treasure to the narrator at the end of the story.

The hut on the beach

The hut on the beach is Zorba and the narrator's home on Crete, provided by Madame Hortense.

Buddha manuscript

The *Buddha* manuscript is the narrator's meditation on the divine and eventually an exorcism of unproductive thought. This book marks the speaker's own progress.

Madame Hortense's Parrot

This pet keeps Hortense's memory of her lover Canavaro alive by shouting the captain's name as his only method of communication.

The Lignite Mine

Zorba works in the mine all day, overseeing workers. While the narrator is responsible for the mines, his ignorance of physical work and laborers' conditions causes Zorba to ban him from the mines. He doesn't always comply, though, and on one visit he witnesses one of the galleries collapse. Zorba saves the miner's lives but will not accept thanks.

The Church

Although not examined much in the course of the book, the church is mentioned several times in regard to holidays and festivals. Also, the widow is murdered outside the church.

Candia

Candia is the nearest town, where Zorba purchases supplies for their cable railway. He promises to be gone for only 3 days but stays in Candia for more than 2 weeks with a young woman.

The Widow's Garden

The Widow's Garden is where the widow grows oranges and other fragrant fruits and distills these into essences and scents to give to friends. The narrator is twice tempted in these gardens; the second time, he gives in.

The Monastery

The Monastery is a beautiful shrine housing every manner of sinner. All the monastery's monks are corrupt, and his master and lover shoot a young apprentice to death during Zorba and the narrator's visit. The monk, Zaharia, burns the monastery down to punish his brothers for their sinfulness.

Statue of the Holy Virgin of Revenge

The patron saint of the monastery, the Holy Virgin, protects the monks from harm. Once, her statue came alive to rout a whole army of Turks after they'd burned down the monastery. Zorba plays a prank involving the dead Zaharia to make the surviving monks believe the miracle has repeated itself.

Timber railway

The timber railway is Zorba's great scheme to make his and his boss's fortune. He agonizes over the correct slope, but during the inaugural run, everything goes to pieces. Not a single log makes it to the bottom of the hill, and on the last try, the whole structure crumbles.

Social Sensitivity

As a rule, Kazantzakis is more concerned with exploring questions of philosophy in his novels than he is with specific social issues. Nevertheless, in Zorba the Greek he takes several opportunities to comment on contem porary situations. Of greatest significance is the political background against which the story of the narrator and Zorba is set. While the two men engage in what some may consider escapist adventures on Crete, the narrator's friend Stavridaki is helping Greek partisans in the Balkans evacuate endangered countrymen from that region, where they face almost certain massacre. The uneasiness the narrator feels at times about his abandonment of his friend stems from his recognition that men have a social responsibility — and that he is avoiding his.

Kazantzakis also uses the novel to lambaste organized religion. The monks with whom Zorba and the narrator negotiate for logging rights near their mountain retreat are portrayed as sodomists and crass materialists more concerned about affairs of the flesh than about those of the spirit. They live in relative comfort while the villagers in the valley below eke out an existence.

Themes

Themes

As he does in virtually all of his novels, Kazantzakis uses his story as a means of dramatizing philosophical issues. His characters openly explore the existentialist predicament: man, confronting a meaningless universe, must choose to create ends for himself or drift aimlessly toward a meaningless death.

In Zorba the Greek, Kazantzakis examines this situation through a series of contrasts, established primarily in the characters who populate the story. The narrator, known affectionately as "the Boss," is an ascetic who has sought to escape the harshness of the world by retreating to a study of Buddhism. He is linked through strange coincidence in a business partnership with the flamboyant, excessive, earthy, womanizing jack-of-all-trades Alexis Zorba.

Their contrasting approaches to almost every crisis that confronts them, and their conversations about man's duty toward himself and others, provide Kazantzakis a forum for discussing conflicts of spirit vs. flesh, involvement vs. withdrawal, and similar themes.

The novel can also be seen in more classical terms as a contrast of the Apollonian and Dionysian world views. The Boss is cerebral; Zorba acts from visceral impulses. While not openly advocating adoption of the Dionysian principle, Kazantzakis does suggest strongly in this novel that asceticism is insufficient as a way for man to achieve a full appreciation of his humanity. To be really human is to embrace one's body as well as one's mind; but one must be in control of both if one is to confront with dignity the terrible truth that life is only what one makes of it.

The Nature of God

While the narrator is the man most concerned with esoteric thought, he does not invoke God nearly as often as the atheistic sensualist, Zorba. To Zorba, God is a man like himself, given to every bit of mischief and ready to forgive any transgression. He also suggests more than once that God and the devil are, in fact, the same person. Zorba also places the blame for woman's wily nature at God's feet, as well as the responsibility to pity man for his folly. There are several moments when Zorba asks the narrator point-blank whether there is a God (Note: Zorba doesn't ask whether the narrator *believes* there is a God, but if there actually *is* one), and the answer never satisfies him. It seems as though Zorba does not believe in the traditional Christian deity but requires a god of some sort and frames him in the Christian terms with which he is most familiar.

Other characters speak of the Catholic God directly though not always to flattering effect. Old Anagnosti is deeply religious, but tradition leads him to abuse his wife. The monks at the monastery believe they are doing God's will, but even if they were not as

sinful as they later prove, the mere fact that they desire a newspaper shows that they have missed the point of living away from the world. Also, Dame Hortense holds a crucifix as she lies dying, even though she had never paid much heed to religion in her life.

The narrator's *Buddha* manuscript can also be viewed as a meditation upon God. When the narrator realizes that Buddha leads to nothingness, he resolves to purge the prophet from his system. There are other instances, though, when the narrator regards this dangerous mode of thought useful, as when it helps invoke a sense of "sacred awe."

Manly Virtue

This whole adventure begins because the narrator is persuaded that he needs to live a more active life. He takes Zorba on as a type of tutor in the passionate life. Zorba strikes the narrator as incredibly wise because he has learned from experience what the narrator has sought in books. Zorba has fought in wars, killed, raped, romanced, and robbed, learning good and bad and right and wrong by comparing his own instances of each. This perspective has also given Zorba an appreciation for the useful over the morally desirable - he won't listen to the boss's socialist ideas that employers and laborers, men and women, are all equal, because to grant this would wreck many lives and bring their livelihood into ruin.

As much as the narrator admires Zorba, Zorba also looks to his boss for answers. Zorba observes early on that one cannot change his own nature, and thus, men such as Zorba and the narrator must learn from each other what they cannot discover on their own. One important difference is that while the narrator strives to be more like Zorba, Zorba would never want to be like the narrator. Zorba sees his existence as one fraught with beauty and debauchery, one for which he has no regrets. He works hard all day and dallies with women all night; this is what a man does. A bookworm like the narrator should be encouraged into this behavior, even if his nature cannot sustain it.

The Role of Women

Zorba loves women, but his love is patronizing. Nevertheless, he never wants for romance. He is able to discern what different types of women want and give them exactly that. His relationships end without bitterness because Zorba cannot blame women for what he sees as their treacherous nature. Can a man who shows women such pleasure and never has an unkind word for his past loves truly be said to have a low opinion of the fairer sex? Zorba claims to know women well, yet he is completely dismissive of them. If Zorba is right that all women really want is to be told they are beautiful, this is not a very flattering portrait, and casts a rather ugly light on Zorba's romantic history. With Madame Hortense, surely, Zorba courts in jest, passing the time with his widow on Crete just like the widows he has seduced on any number of islands. Hortense, however, is happier with Zorba than she has been since her youth, and

despite the dubious origins of their engagement, Zorba is willing to grant her heart's desire by making the old siren his wife.

The narrator's perspective on women, by contrast, is detached and disinterested. He wants women to be treated as equals to men, but he doesn't interact with many actual women on any meaningful basis. He struggles to ignore Hortense's faults even as Zorba crawls all over her. He retreats from the widow's affections, abstracting her into a demon sent to tempt his soul. When the narrator finally does approach the widow, he does so with Zorba's mantra in his head.

Style

Points of View

An unnamed narrator tells the book from the first person point of view. As such, the reader sees only those things that the narrator finds of interest, and every event is colored by the narrator's perspective. Zorba is admirable because the narrator finds him so. Thankfully, this speaker is keenly observant and skilled at describing the world around him. What is curious, though, is that while he can describe Zorba's emotion with acute precision, the narrator rarely relates his own feelings. His thoughts, yes; there are plenty of meditations on Buddha and the Void, but very rarely does the narrator convey his emotions in any real depth. Occasionally he is "happy" (or he observes that he is happy), and sometimes he believes he should be angry with Zorba, but he never gives himself the same attention he bestows on his subjects. This is particularly noteworthy when his lover, the widow, falls victim to the mob.

This first-person point of view also limits the details of the story to what the narrator can personally know. The episode at the monastery is never adequately explained, and while Zorba appears to have more information than the narrator, it seems clear that neither has the full story. Similarly, there is certainly more to widow's back story than what is conveyed in the novel, but the reader will never know since the guide is new to town.

Setting

The novel is set in Crete, a Greek island with a violent history. Zorba has fought for Crete in several of its wars, and has learned better than to trust in patriotism. He remembers the liberation of the island and counts it as one of his happiest moments. The Greek Orthodox Church is a strong influence on Cretan culture, and foreigners are regarded with suspicion, particularly if they belong to the Roman Catholic branch of the church.

Madame Hortense, a French woman, is a relic of the wars, left behind after having great affairs with the four world powers. She rents the narrator and Zorba a hut on the beach that serves as their base of operations on the island. Here, the two men get to know each other and have some of their most important conversations. The travelers also visit the village regularly where they interact with the larger cast of characters. The village is small enough that everyone seems to know each other, and gossip spreads quickly. This does, however, allow Zorba and the narrator to blend in quickly with their surroundings since it takes little time for everyone to recognize their faces. When Zorba believes he has found the proper slope for the timber railway, the men venture up a mountain to lease land from a monastery.

Language and Meaning

A few repeated phrases give insight into the characters' personalities. The narrator remarks more than once that Zorba looks at everything as if he is seeing it for the first time, implying a child-like innocence augmented by the man's knowing experience. Zorba has a few favorite phrases, as well, including "The devil take them!" which the narrator picks up from time to time. Zorba also comes back time and again to the question of God and the mystery of women, varying his language only slightly. Several times he swears that if a certain event transpires, everything will fall to pieces and "I'll be done for!"

The narrator's tone is one of subtle wonder. He asks everyone questions and is frequently thrilled with their answers. He interrogates everyone from Mimiko to the random shepherd he meets in his walks. Much of his dialogue revolves around question and answer, call and response. This leads to a style of shorter sentences (except where Zorba takes over for a speech), many of which are fragments. The fragments often imply wisdom by their simplicity. Because he takes in the world rather than imposing himself upon it, the narrator's observational tone allows him to spin easily into his meditations. The influence of the natural world and environment on his thought is also apparent since most chapters begin with a new day beginning or a description of the weather.

Structure

The plot progresses in linear fashion with only occasional flashbacks to the narrator's memory of his friend. Zorba also tells many stories and parables concerning his life, but these are all in service of the continuing action of the story. Most chapters begin on a new day though many include the action of several days' time. One day that Zorba describes as "full," when the men return from the monastery, and Zorba promises to marry Madame Hortense, takes three chapters to tell, but this is a unique example.

Although there are small intrigues among the villagers, there are really not any significant subplots in the novel. The main thrust of the book is the narrator's quest for an active life and the lessons he learns from Zorba. This is wrapped around the plot of their work in the mines and their attempt to construct a timber railway, but these events are largely beside the point. What holds reader interest are the relationships among the characters and the contrast provided by individual villagers to the man of passion, Zorba, and the man of the mind, the narrator. Thus, the murder in the monastery and the controversial widow are significant only insofar as they illuminate the narrator's development.

Quotes

"Look, one day I had gone to a little village. An old grandfather of ninety was busy planting an almond tree. 'What, grandad!' I exclaimed. 'Planting an almond tree?' And he, bent as he was, turned around and said: 'My son, I carry on as if I should never die.' I replied: 'And I carry on as if I was going to die any minute.' Which of us was right, boss?" (Chapter 3, page 35)

"Tell me what do with the food you eat, and I'll tell you who you are." (Chapter 6, page 67)

"You can say what you like, woman is something different, boss ... something different. She's not human! Why bear her any grudge?" (Chapter 7, page 88)

"He speaks and the world grows bigger." (Chapter 8, page 90)

"For, having seen, I have also collaborated in the work in which I am acting on God's stage." (Chapter 8, page 91)

"I shall go to Hell because one night in Salonica a woman waited for me on her bed and I did not go to her." (Chapter 8, page 103)

"In another life," I murmured, smiling bitterly, "in some other life I'll behave better than this!" (Chapter 11, page 123)

"In religions which have lost their creative spark, the gods eventually become no more than poetic motifs or ornaments for decorating human solitude and walls." (Chapter 12, page 133)

"HERE LIES A GREEK WHO HATES THE GREEKS." (Chapter 12, page 138)

"I said: 'If I save this entire circle, I am saved; if I do not save it, I am lost!' Well, inside that circle there are five hundred thousand Greeks!" (Chapter 12, page 140)

"I think only people who want to be free are human beings. Women don't want to be free. Well, is woman a human being?" (Chapter 13, page 151)

"'What are ten or fifteen years?' asked the Mother Superior severely. 'Think of eternity!'" (Chapter 15, page 173)

"The day's for working," he said. "Daytime is a man. The nighttime's for enjoying yourself. Night is a woman. You mustn't mix them up!" (Chapter 16, page 181)

"How do you expect to get the better of a devil, boss, if you don't turn into a devil-and-a-half yourself?" (Chapter 17, page 196)

"'Those theories may save many souls,' I answered. The bishop's face lit up. That was the justification of his entire life work." (Chapter 18, page 204)

"I'm a Sinbad the Sailor... I don't mean that I've wandered all over the world; not at all! But I've robbed, killed, lied, slept with heaps of women and broken all the commandments. How many are there? Ten? Why aren't there twenty, fifty, a hundred? So I could break them all? Yet, if there is a God, I shan't be afraid to appear before him when the time comes." (Chapter 20, page 234)

"I felt deep within me that the highest point a man can attain is not Knowledge, or Virtue, or Goodness, or Victory, but something greater, more heroic and more despairing: Sacred Awe!" (Chapter 24, page 269)

"[...]there are three kinds of men: those who make it their aim, as they say, to live their lives, eat, drink, make love, grow rich, and famous; then come those who make it their aim not to live their own lives but to concern themselves with all men - they feel that all men are one and they try to enlighten them, to love them as much as they can and do good to them; finally there are those who aim at living the life of the entire universe - everything, men, animals, trees, stars, we are all one, we are all one substance involved in the same terrible struggle. What struggle? ... Turning matter into spirit." (Chapter 24, page 278)

"I have exhausted myself somewhat, I admit, but what does it matter? We have fought, my dear sir, and won. I am happy." (Chapter 25, page 294)

"Men like me ought to live a thousand years. Good night!" (Chapter 26, page 310)

Adaptations

English-speaking audiences know Zorba not only from the translation of the novel, but also from the highly successful motion picture (1964) popular during the 1960s; Anthony Quinn starred in the title role. Lila Kedrova won an Academy Award for best supporting actress for her performance in the motion picture; Walter Lassally won an Academy Award for his cinematography. The story also served as the basis for a Broadway musical in the early 1980s, with Quinn recreating his screen role on stage.

Key Questions

Like most of Kazantzakis's novels, Zorba the Greek is dominated by a single character whose story dramatizes the struggle of "the existential hero" trying to create meaning in his life in defiance of evidence that life itself is meaningless. Zorba's exuberance is contrasted with that of the narrator, who practices a studied detachment from the hustle and bustle of ordinary life. It is easy for readers to be captivated by the title character, but Kazantzakis seems as interested in the narrator as he is in Zorba. Hence, the true starting point for discussion of this complex novel lies in understanding the contrast between men who, despite their widely disparate views of life, become fast friends.

1. The narrator of Zorba the Greek rarely engages others or participates in what might be called zany activities. In what ways is he symbolic of modern humanity? What is Kazantzakis saying about the contemporary world through his portrait of the narrator?

2. Instead of falling into despair when his scheme for making his fortune through the sale of lumber falls apart, Zorba responds with an attitude so gleeful that the narrator becomes extremely annoyed with him. What is Kazantzakis trying to illustrate through his title character's behavior? Is Zorba really as optimistic as he appears?

3. The woman with whom the narrator falls in love is brutally murdered.

Why does Kazantzakis include this violent episode? What is its effect on the narrator? On readers?

4. In Freedom or Death, Kazantzakis tells the story of Captain Michales, a hero whose great zest for life parallels that of Zorba. In what ways are these figures different? By comparing and contrasting Michales and Zorba, what might readers learn about the ways humans respond to spiritual and political crises?

5. The narrator is well read, especially in philosophy; Zorba, on the other hand, does not seem to be familiar with sophisticated intellectual systems. How does Kazantzakis use this contrast to illustrate his own belief in an existential view of life?

Topics for Discussion

Recast this story with Zorba as the narrator, keeping in mind the different aspects of the events that would stand out in Zorba's mind, and the fact that there are certain episodes for which Zorba and the narrator hold completely different experiences.

Compile "Zorba's Gospel," all of his thoughts on God. In what ways does he contradict himself? To what degree are his beliefs compatible with conventional beliefs? By Zorba's own standards, does he achieve salvation?

Based on his statements about women and past relationships, speculate on the progression of Zorba and Hortense's marriage if she had lived.

Zorba's life is made up of the good and the bad, and he has committed some atrocious acts - among them, the self-confessed burning of a village and the casual mention of rape and robbery. Yet the narrator sincerely admires his perspective on life and ability to act on his desires. Is Zorba a man worthy of admiration? Consider both sides of the argument.

Compare Zorba with the narrator's friend, Stavridaki. In what ways are they similar? Different? Why could the narrator's beloved friend not inspire him as Zorba does?

Imagine you are one of the villagers calling for the widow's death after the Pavli's suicide. Justify your position, and describe the scene at her execution.

Research the life of author Nikos Kazantzakis. How well does he fit into the role of the narrator? What might Kazantzakis learn from creating Zorba? Does it appear that he's accomplished his goal?

Literary Precedents

The character of Zorba is reminiscent of several of the major comic characters in Western literature. He has been compared to Shakespeare's Falstaff, and to Cervantes's Sancho Panza. The latter comparison is inadequate, however; much of Zorba's idealism recalls the admirable "fool" who is Sancho's "boss," Don Quixote. Zorba is also an embodiment of philosopher Henri Bergson's elan vital. The novel as a whole depends much on the philosophical tradition of existentialism, and much of the dialogue has its source in the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche and his followers, thinkers who influenced Kazantzakis early in his life.

Related Titles

Captain Michales in Freedom or Death (1953) is but another representation of the Existential Hero whose story is central to all of Kazantzakis's important works. Like Christ in The Last Temptation of Christ (1955), Zorba in Zorba the Greek, and especially like Odysseus in Kazantzakis's The Odyssey: A Modern Sequel (1938), Michales is a man torn by the conflicting impulses of spirit and flesh. He is not blinded by false hopes; he knows he will fail, yet he pursues his dream of freedom.

Kazantzakis manages to make his story both interesting and tragic by creating him as a man of great passion — not always good, not always right, but always sympathetic. Like a classical tragic hero, he suffers from hubris, but gains the readers' sympathy, largely because of his unswerving commitment to ideals.

The other characters in the novel are largely dramatizations of the various alternative lifestyles which Captain Michales must reject if he is to succeed in asserting his own tragic humanity.

Some, like the Turkish woman Emine, are mere representations of temptations of the flesh. Others, such as Michales' father Captain Sefakas, are developed more fully. One, Michales' friend Captain Polyxigis, serves almost as a dramatic foil for the main character, a yardstick against which the reader can measure Michales' heroic stature.

The bloody revolution of 1889 provides the backdrop to this novel. The story of Captain Michales' rebellion against the Turkish rule has its foundation in the life of Kazantzakis's own grandfather. The struggle of Cretans to gain freedom from the Turks (the cause of three major rebellions in the nineteenth century) is one that would be familiar to everyone in Kazantzakis's immediate audience. Long subjugated to various foreign powers, the Cretans earn the readers' sympathy in their doomed efforts to throw off the yoke of the Turks, whose culture and religion are reprehensible to those who cling fast to the traditions of this island nation.

Action and setting serve as metaphor for the philosophical issues that are at the heart of Kazantzakis's story in Freedom or Death (1953). Through Captain Michales, and in a lesser way through the other freedom fighters, Kazantzakis dramatizes the struggle every man must undertake to free himself from conventions and oppressions that prevent him from achieving his personal self-fulfillment. Forces of the flesh — beautiful women, sensual pleasures, fear of dying, even friendships and family ties — tug at Michales, causing him to anguish over his decision to fight against insurmountable odds. The battle is couched in existential terms; Michales, knowing that he faces certain defeat, nevertheless chooses to make something of his life rather than acquiesce to the forces that wish to subjugate him.

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