



Zorba The Greek, by Michael Pastore

From a book review of 'Zorba The Greek':

The plot of Zorba is deceptively simple: a bookwormish writer (called in the novel "the boss"), who sleeps with a pocket edition of Dante's poems, travels to Crete to gain more direct experience of life. At the very beginning of the journey the writer meets a man who has only read one book (Sinbad the Sailor) but has lived life with all the passion and intensity that this writer desperately seeks. On a small town on the Cretan coast, the two men hire local workers and open up a lignite mine. But the work, the boss soon explains to the delighted Zorba, is just a smokescreen so that the locals don't get suspicious about their true purpose. And what is this real work they are devoted to? It is the enjoyment of life and the living to the utmost. As Zorba succinctly says: "I live each moment as if it were my last."

Between the two men, the boss and Zorba, we find the entire wealth of human experience. Zorba is the man of earth: Dionysus, body, work, women, wine, struggle, celebration, flesh. The boss in his best moments is the man of heaven: Apollo, spirit, ideas, saints, water, peace, sacrifice, words. There is wisdom in Zorba's fearless following his desires and intuitions, but no less wisdom in the boss's sacred awe and rapturous contemplations. The boss is more timid than Zorba but in his own way he is enlightened. Kazantzakis writes, in this summation of his personal philosophy:

"Everything in this world has a hidden meaning, I thought. Men, animals, trees, stars, they are all hieroglyphics; woe to anyone who begins to decipher and guess what they mean. ... When you see them you do not understand them. You think that they are really men, animals, trees, stars. It is only years later, too late, that you understand." [...]

The great genius Goethe remarked: "Love yields in one moment what years of efforts can hardly attain." ... Like Zorba, Goethe grasped the great secret: Life at its best is experienced directly, lived with complete sincerity, and loved as passionately as the human heart can love.

--Michael Pastore (more [1])

Links:

[1] <http://www.zorbapress.com/epweekly/reviews/zorba.htm>

