

Ecstasy as a Path to Freedom in Nikos Kazantzakis' Zorba the Greek: A Nietzschean Interpretation

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Abstract. *The present article examines the concept of ecstasy as a pathway to existential freedom in Zorba the Greek through a Nietzschean philosophical framework. It argues that Nikos Kazantzakis constructs the character of Zorba as the embodiment of Friedrich Nietzsche's ideal of life-affirmation, transcending conventional moral constraints through instinct, creativity, and joyful self-overcoming. By embracing dance, labor, sensuality, laughter, and suffering as interconnected expressions of existence, Zorba achieves a form of ecstatic consciousness that liberates the individual from fear, dogma, and social conformity. In contrast, the intellectual narrator, known as the Boss, represents the tension between rational restraint and the desire for authentic self-realization, highlighting the transformative potential of Zorba's philosophy of lived experience. Drawing on Nietzschean concepts such as the Übermensch, the will to power, Dionysian affirmation, and the transvaluation of values, this scrutiny demonstrates that ecstasy in Kazantzakis' novel is not merely emotional exaltation but an existential mode of being that enables spiritual autonomy and creative freedom. Ultimately, the paper contends that Zorba the Greek reimagines Nietzsche's philosophy in literary form, presenting ecstasy as an ethical and ontological practice through which individuals affirm life in all its contradictions and attain genuine freedom.*

Keywords: Nikos Kazantzakis, Zorba the Greek, Friedrich Nietzsche, ecstasy, existential freedom, Dionysian philosophy, will to power, übermensch, life affirmation, existentialism, self-overcoming, modern Greek literature

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Nikos Kazantzakinin “Yunan Zorba: Nitsşe təfsiri” əsərində ekstaz azadlığa aparan yol kimi

Samir Ərəb 

Xülasə. *Bu məqalədə Nitsşe fəlsəfi cərcivəsi vasitəsilə Yunan Zorbasında ekstaz anlayışı ekstaz anlayışını varoluş azadlığına aparan bir yol kimi araşdırılır. Burada iddia edilir ki, Nikos Kazantzakis Zorba xarakterini Fridrix Nitsşenin həyat təsdiqi idealının təəcəssümü kimi qurur, instinkt, yaradıcılıq və sevincli özünüdərk yolu ilə ənənəvi əxlaqi məhdudiyyətləri aşır. Rəqs, əmək, həssaslıq, gülüş və əzabı varoluşun bir-biri ilə əlaqəli ifadələri kimi qəbul etməklə, Zorba fərdi qorxu, dogma və sosial uyğunluqdan azad edən ekstaz şüuru formasına nail olur. Bunun əksinə olaraq, Boss kimi tanınan intellektual rəvayətçi, rəşadətçi və orijinal özünüdərk istəyi arasındakı gərginliyi təmsil edir və Zorbanın yaşamış təcrübə fəlsəfəsinin transformativ potensialını vurğulayır.*

Fövqəlinсан, hakimiyyət iradəsi, Dionis təsdiqi və dəyərlərin transqiyətləndirilməsi kimi Nitsşe konsepsiyalarına əsaslanan bu araşdırma, Kazantzakis romanındakı ekstazın sadəcə emosional yüksəliş deyil, həm də mənəvi muhtariyyət və yaradıcı azadlığı təmin edən bir varlıq tərzı olduğunu göstərir. Nəticə etibarilə, məqalədə iddia edilir ki, yunan Zorba Nitsşenin fəlsəfəsini ədəbi formada yenidən təəvvür edir, ekstazı fərdlərin həyatı bütüün ziddiyyətlərində təsdiqlədiyi və həqiqi azadlığa çatdığı etik və ontoloji bir təcrübə kimi təqdim edir.

Açar sözlər: Nikos Kazantzakis, yunan Zorba, Fridrix Nitsşe, ekstaz, varlıq azadlığı, Dionis fəlsəfəsi, hakimiyyət iradəsi, fəvqəlinсан, həyatın təsdiqi, varlıqçılıq, özünü aşmaq, müasir yunan ədəbiyyatı

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Introduction

Greek mythology is an essential element of modernist Greek literature. It serves as a powerful source of inspiration which provides writers with a rich cultural and symbolic heritage through which they explore contemporary issues. Greek writers usually revisit mythology, interpret ancient myths, and transform mythological figures and stories into metaphors for identity, exile, and the struggle of modern life. Writers such as George Seferis and Odysseas Elytis drew upon mythological themes to connect Greece's past with its present to question history, identity, and human existence. Hence, Greek myths remain relevant as timeless symbols of conflict, resilience, and becomes a bridge between tradition and innovation enriching literature with depth, universality, and cultural continuity.

Nikos Kazantzakis (1883–1957) is one of Greece's most influential twentieth-century writers whose works are the most translated into English. Born in Heraklion, Crete, Kazantzakis is a novelist, poet, playwright, and essayist. His works deal with themes of freedom, faith, and the search for meaning. His best-known works include *Zorba the Greek*, *The Last Temptation of Christ*, *Christ Recrucified*, and *The Odyssey: A Modern Sequel*, which reflects his creative reinterpretation of Greek mythology and classical tradition.

Nikos Kazantzakis is one of the most controversial and debatable figures in modern Greek literature, appreciated by some critics and regarded as a visionary literary giant and dismissed by others as excessively grandiose. His fictional writing often divides readers because of its intense rhetoric, sweeping philosophical issues, and dramatic treatment of human existence. To begin with, Nabokov (1973/1990), for instance, considered Kazantzakis as "second-rate, ephemeral, puffed-up" (p. 207), while Vidal (1960/1993) harshly described *The Last Temptation of Christ* as "a marvellously dead landscape of a book in which not even a weed could grow" (p. 172).

Out of this critical hostility, Karalis (2014) argues that Kazantzakis struggled constantly with language and that his novels could either impress or frustrate readers through their "gothic grandiosity" and "romantic extremism" (p. 2). Other critics, however, regarded precisely these qualities as the source of Kazantzakis's greatness and uniqueness. His admirers believe that his novels possess a rare ability to portray the intense struggle between the spiritual and physical sides of human life, as well as between reason, passion, and faith. Mann (1954, as cited in Bien, 1989) called *The Greek Passion* "what is beyond doubt a masterpiece" (p. 18). Similarly, Wilson (1962/1988) acclaimed Kazantzakis as "a writer of the highest rank" who could play with words to create a fictional world that was distinctly his own while still remaining recognizable to readers (p.

114). Moreover, his English translator, Friar (1958), portrayed him in similarly exalted terms, calling him “a giant who stood at the crossroads of East and West, ancient and modern, passion and intellect” (p. xxxvii). Essentially, the divided views of Kazantzakis reflect different ideas of literary greatness. Some value restraint and formal control, while others appreciate emotional depth and the exploration of human questions. Thus, Kazantzakis remains controversial for his passionate focus on faith, freedom, suffering, identity, and existence.

Of all his works, *Zorba the Greek* is most notorious novel and one of the most celebrated works of Modernist Greek literature. Published in 1946, the novel revolves around the friendship between the intellectual narrator named the Boss and the free-spirited Alex Zorba, whose passion for life challenges traditional understanding of happiness and human existence. Throughout the novel, the writer explores themes of individual freedom, the conflict between instinct and reason, and the pursuit of a meaningful life. Combining philosophical depth with vivid storytelling, *Zorba the Greek* has successfully achieved international acclaim and remains a timeless literary classic.

Methods

In *Greek and Roman Mythology: The Age of Fable*, Thomas Bulfinch argues that mythology is the key to unlocking and enjoying the beauty, meaning, and hidden richness woven into much of our literature (p. 7). Similarly, in *The Educated Imagination*, Northrop Frye puts forth the assumption that literature grows from mythology, drawing on its timeless stories, symbols, and beautiful imaginative patterns (p. 110). *Zorba the Greek* is glaring example of the interconnectedness between philosophy and literature.

The writer employs his characters and narrative to explore complex existential ideas in a vivid human context. Instead of presenting philosophical ideas as abstract arguments, Kazantzakis embodies them through the contrasting lives of the Zorba and the intellectual narrator. Through juxtaposition, the novelist examines questions regarding freedom, identity, and search for meaning; thematic issues associated with existential thinkers like Henri Bergson and Friedrich Nietzsche. The writer transforms philosophical inquiry into an emotional and accessible narrative showing how literature can serve as a potent medium for testing philosophical ideas.

The novel weaves the spirit of the German existentialist Friedrich Nietzsche into every page, making philosophy breathe through the pulse of narratology. Morton Levitt believes that if Nikos Kazantzakis had to identify the individuals who left the deepest mark on his soul, he would have included both Nietzsche and Zorba among them. In *Zorba the Greek*, Kazantzakis honors his friend and philosophical inspiration, Friedrich Nietzsche, by reflecting many of Nietzsche's ideas and values. The novel also embodies Nietzsche's concept of "true art", as it is shaped after the model of the classical pre-Socratic Greek tragedies. Nietzsche's voice in the novel's celebration of life over doctrine, instinct over restraint, and becoming over being.

Obviously, Kazantzakis was highly influenced by Nietzsche, particularly his concepts of nihilism, the will to power, the Übermensch (Overman), and the tension between the Apollonian and Dionysian modes of existence. Through the contrast between the intellectual narrator and the life-affirming Zorba, Kazantzakis transforms these Nietzschean ideas into lived experience, making philosophy the driving force behind the novel's characters, conflicts, and vision of human freedom.

In *The Last Temptation of Christ: A Study of Kazantzakis's Novel and Its Adaptations*, Darren J. N. Middleton claims that *Zorba the Greek* embodies the Apollonian-Dionysian tension through the narrator's quiet restraint and Zorba's wild spirit of freedom and vitality (p. 167). Within this context, this paper is an attempt to analyze *Zorba the Greek* through Friedrich Nietzsche's concept of the

Apollonian–Dionysian dichotomy, examining how the tension between reason and instinct, order and passion, shapes the novel's characters, themes, and philosophical vision.

The paper places the novel within its mythological context and tackles the notion of ecstasy to philosophically answer the following questions:

1. To what extent is Kazantzakis influenced by Friedrich Nietzsche?
2. What is the cultural significance of the Apollonian-Dionysian dichotomy in the story?
3. In what ways do Zorba and the narrator embody opposing yet complementary philosophical worldviews?
4. What role does ecstasy play in the novel as a mode of self-transcendence, freedom, and authentic existence?

This paper is organized into three main sections. It begins with setting the theoretical through an explanation of the Apollonian–Dionysian dichotomy. The second section examines the defining characteristics of Apollo and Dionysus to demonstrate the extent to which the Boss and Zorba embody these mythological archetypes, while also situating the novel within its broader cultural context. As the paper moves toward examining the theme of ecstasy through Zorba's Dionysian spirit, this scrutiny gives the novel a philosophical interpretation from Nietzsche's point of view to argue that ecstasy is a step toward freedom, and that Dionysian principle is not only complementary to, but also indispensable for, the Apollonian.

According to Nietzsche, any artistic development must be regarded as a mere result of an interplay which takes place between two contending elements of the creative life of man; the Apollonian and Dionysian. He believes that these two mythological figures are more personifications of the opposing tendencies in human-being. By constant opposition, each simulates the other to further efforts. Hence, the growth of art is the result. Nietzsche believes that the two tendencies have also a certain dependency on each other.

In terms of affinities, Nietzsche believes, the Apollonian and Dionysian are both "art impulses of nature", representing two fundamental creative forces that shape human existence and artistic expression. He relates these natural impulses to hidden forces that operate beneath conscious thought, resembling what later thinkers would describe as the unconscious. The Apollonian is associated with order, harmony, reason, clarity, and individuality, giving form and structure to experience through images and dreams.

The Apollonian tendency is closely related to dreaming which is a good means by which life can be interpreted. The dreamer takes a deep delight in the myriad forms and shapes of the dream images which could be perceived by the artistic sense (Stanley, p. 9). According to this perspective, dreams are not merely illusions but expressions of the human desire for clarity, balance, and aesthetic perfection.

The Apollonian tendency imposes rational form and order upon the world by emphasizing clarity, harmony, balance, and self-control. It epitomizes the human desire to organize experience into meaningful patterns, transforming the chaos of reality into something understandable and beautiful. Through reason, logic, and artistic discipline, the Apollonian spirit creates structure and gives shape to emotions and experiences. Accordingly, it permits individuals to perceive the world as an ordered and coherent whole, where beauty and truth are achieved through moderation, proportion, and intellectual insight.

In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche argues that Apollo represents "the spirit of individuation", the principle which allows human beings to develop a distinct identity and identify themselves as separate individuals. Apollo symbolizes reason, self-awareness, order, and moderation, enabling people to establish clear boundaries between themselves and the external world. Through the Apollonian spirit, individuals attain clarity and self-control, creating meaning and stability in the face of life's uncertainty. Therefore, this principle of individuation is essential because it protects people from being overwhelmed by chaos while encouraging artistic creativity, intellectual reflection, and the appreciation of beauty.

Nietzsche argues that Dionysus represents the destruction of individuality, and that if Apollo is associated with the concept of dream, Dionysus is related to the concept of intoxication. However, for Nietzsche, the destruction of individuality does not mean the literal destruction of the person; rather, he refers to the temporary collapse of the principle of individuation—the feeling that we are detached, alienated, self-contained beings. Physical intoxication is analogous to glorious transport of "Dionysiac rapture" (Stanly, p. 9). Thus, Dionysus holds the position in which the boundaries between individuals are broken. In such state, the boundaries dissolve and allow participants to experience a profound sense of unity with one another and with nature. Dionysus represents the force that breaks down the barriers of individuality and transcends the principle of individuation.

For Nietzsche, the art of music is the purest manifestation of the Dionysian impulse. He argues that "melody gives birth to poetry again and again" (Stanley, p. 12). Through music, individuals transcend the limits of their separate identities and experience a state of ecstatic unity with others and with the primordial essence of life. Music is the spirit of Dionysus as it reflects his spontaneous living. Folk song is a means by which Dionysus reaches his moment of being and therefore liberation.

In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche presents primitivism and beauty as conflicting yet inseparable forces that shape the essence of art. Primitivism finds its legitimacy in the Dionysian spirit, where instinct, ecstasy, and intoxication dissolve the boundaries of individuality and reconnect humanity with the primal energies of existence. Beauty, by contrast, is associated with the Apollonian realm, where order, harmony, and luminous form transform the chaos of life into meaningful images. Rather than existing in conflict, these two impulses complete one another: the Dionysian provides art with its passionate vitality, while the Apollonian gives that vitality shape and expression.

Their creative union, Nietzsche argues, reaches its highest realization in the enduring power of Greek tragedy. Within this context, the aim of this paper, through examining Kazantzakis' *magnum opus*, is to argue that Apollo and Dionysus, despite their apparent opposition, should not be understood as conflicting figures. Rather, they function as complementary principles whose energetic interplay shapes the human quest for transcendence. Ecstasy emerges as the bridge that unites the Apollonian and the Dionysian, leading both toward a state of oneness and, ultimately, to freedom.

Results

Zorba and the Spirit of Dionysus: Ecstasy, Instinct, and the Dance of Life

Written by Nikos Kazantzakis and published in 1946, *Zorba the Greek* is a deeply philosophical novel disguised as an adventure. It explores the clash between the life of the mind and the life of the body, and what it truly means to be free. The novel tells the story of a young intellectual narrator named the Boss who travels to Crete and suddenly meets Alexis Zorba, a passionate and free-spirited worker. Although they have very different personalities, they become close friends. The narrator successfully learns from Zorba to enjoy life, accept suffering, and value experience over mere ideas. Through themes of freedom, friendship, and the celebration of life, the novel shows that true wisdom comes from fully living rather than only thinking.

In many ways, Zorba and the Boss can be seen as embodiments of Dionysus and Apollo. Within its Greek mythological context, the novel reflects the philosophical ideas of Friederich Nietzsche. While the narrator represents the Apollonian principle and the spirit of rationality, order, and reason, Zorba has all features and traits of Dionysus including fancy, disorder, passion, ecstasy, and spontaneous will to live. Both of them seek to change their lives. The Boss is victim of his routine order. It seems that he is confined within a life governed by intellectual discipline.

Despite being a "bookworm", he finds no solace in the countless volumes he consumes, for knowledge alone cannot satisfy the deeper longings of the human spirit. Seeking an escape from the sterility of his contemplative existence, he ventures into the vast world of business, hoping that the journey will offer the meaning and vitality that books have failed to provide. Zorba is a sixty years old man who embodies Nietzsche's notion of the will to power; an uncontrollable force which drives him to deny social conventions and embrace life in its ultimate intensity. Guided by instinct rather than conformity, the protagonist refuses to submit to rigid moral codes or societal expectations, choosing instead a life of freedom, passion, and self-affirmation.

Zorba becomes the Boss's true teacher, imparting the wisdom that no book could offer. Through his unrestrained embrace of life, he teaches the Boss lessons that all the books he had devoured failed to convey—that genuine knowledge is born not only from thought, but from experience, passion, and the courage to live fully. Essentially, Zorba is a philosopher not in the conventional sense of abstract speculation, but through what he learnt from his previous experiences. His philosophy is forged in action rather than theory, teaching that life must be embraced with passion, freedom, and unwavering intensity rather than merely contemplated from a distance.

Unlike the Boss, he gives madness a philosophical interpretation. He believes that madness is not a condition to be cured, but a philosophy to be highly embraced. It implies liberation from the tyranny of convention and reason, permitting the individual to live with spontaneity, fearless passion, and ecstatic freedom. In the movie, as in the novel, he pleasantly asks the Boss to be mad when he says: "Boss, everything is right in you, only one thing is missing—a little bit of madness". He admits that living a completely logical life misses the true joy and freedom of existence. Therefore, Zorba's "madness" becomes the highest form of wisdom—a defiant affirmation of life in all its beauty, chaos, and unpredictability.

A sign of Zorba's madness, is his act of pleasantly cutting his finger to reach his personal freedom. He informs his Boss that he has chopped off his finger when he was a potter and that he endured all that pain and carried on his work: "I told you I had been in every trade. Once I was a potter. I was mad about that craft... That's what you might call being a man: freedom... Well, one day I was making a nice water-jar, and my finger got in the way and spoiled the shape. I got angry. I took a hatchet and chop! off with it!" (p. 18). It seems that this act highlights his impulsive temperament, his conviction that passionate creation outweighs practical concerns, and certainly enduring—often destructive—cost of a life overseen by unrestrained freedom.

Dance is another important point which suggest that Zorba is Dionysian by nature. For him, dance is more than a form of expression; it is a celebration of life, an ecstatic release of passion, and a spontaneous affirmation of freedom that transcends the limits of language and reason. More than a physical movement, it is an ecstatic affirmation of life, freedom, and the unity of both the 'body' and the 'spirit'. As the second profound philosophical lesson the hero imparts to the Boss, dance teaches that certain truths cannot be grasped through reasoning system alone but must be experienced through the total surrender of the self to the rhythms of existence. Dancing and singing in Kazantzakis' writing occupy an elevated and prominent place. Zorba informs his Boss about the conditions that

pave the way to dancing: "If I'm in the mood, I'll play. I'll even sing. And I'll dance the Zeimbekiko, the Hassapiko, the Pentonzali, but, I tell you plainly from the start, I must be in the Mood" (p. 9).

For Nietzsche and the ancient Greeks, dance is the highest expression of the Dionysian spirit. Unlike words or visual art, which belong to the rational, orderly world of Apollo, dance bypasses the mind to speak directly through the body. Zorba's refusal to dance without 'the mood' is clear sign of his rejection of societal performance in favor of existential authenticity. This means that human expression must arise as an honest, visceral response to the raw experience of being alive. By fiercely protecting his inner state, Zorba bridges the gap between the animal and the divine, choosing to exist as vital philosophical blueprint. His commitment to personal boundaries offers a powerful philosophical lesson: living authentically requires respecting the unique rhythm of one's own spirit and understanding that life's most meaningful dances arise from sincere, unrestrained passion.

From a strict Freudian perspective, Zorba's refusal to dance without "the Mood" represents a fierce defense of the Id against the hyper-intellectualized, repressive demands of the Superego. While the Boss remains paralyzed by social conformity and mental censorship, Zorba operates under the Pleasure Principle, fiercely protecting his autonomy so that his artistic expressions never become transactional or forced. When confronted with the overwhelming forces of Libido (the life instinct) or the trauma of Thanatos (the death drive), Zorba uses his body as a physical release valve, channeling dammed-up psychic energy into a vital abreaction. Instead of repressing these intense emotions, Zorba prevents them from developing into psychological neurosis or hysteria by channeling his instinctual energies into dance. Accordingly, he transforms raw, chaotic, and potentially destructive impulses into a dynamic, life-affirming artistic ritual, illustrating Freud's concept of sublimation through the creative redirection of primal drives.

In the novel, music is not a leisure activity; it is the raw, auditory manifestation of the Dionysian spirit. In Zorba's world, music is a primal current and a vital means that bypasses the rational mind to connect directly with the chaotic essence of existence. Unlike the Boss who relies on logic and literature to understand the cosmos from a distance, Zorba finds in melody a way to dive headfirst into the terrifying beauty of reality. He has a specific instrument called the santuri which is treated as a sacred, volatile entity that cannot be forced to perform on command. It requires its own mood as the hero says: "For the santuri you must be in good form.

You must be pure" (p. 8). Indeed, the santuri demands total emotional surrender, until a genuine surge of existential passion awakens its voice. Music steps in as Zorba's ultimate language, shattering social conditioning to articulate what Friedrich Nietzsche termed the "primordial unity". Zorba tells the Boss that music is his means of consolation, and that it changed his life: "When I'm hard-up, I go round the inns playing the santuri. I sing old Klephtic tunes from Macedonia... Since I learnt to play the santuri, I've been a different man" (pp. 7-8)

Zorba's songs absorb this existential anguish, transforming raw suffering into a defiant, rhythmic celebration of survival. His musical instrument is a Dionysian tool for existential liberation. It allows him to transform material poverty into spiritual freedom. Zorba informs that the santuri is "a wild animal" which "needs freedom" (p. 8). Ultimately, the music acts as a form of catharsis, turning the raw suffering of existence into an ecstatic celebration of the present moment and healing his soul when words fail.

Zorba tells the Boss that playing the santuri makes him totally disconnected from the world: "when I'm playing, you can talk to me, I hear nothing, and even if I hear, I can't speak. It's no good my trying. I can't" (p. 8). This state represents the dissolution of the ego. In playing the santuri, Zorba gradually enters a profound "flow state" where rationality disappears, embodying Arthur

Schopenhauer's idea of losing oneself entirely in art to escape worldly suffering. Thus, his failure to speak proves that music begins where words fail; for Kazantzakis, intellect is a rigid cage, whereas the non-verbal music of the santuri is the only pure way to express the raw, chaotic depth of human existence. The primal rhythms of Zorba's music become transformative force that shatters the Boss' psychological detachment. His words awaken in the Boss emotions long suppressed and compelled him to abandon passive contemplation and embrace life with spontaneity and passion.

Zorba's passion for women is another trait that reflects his Dionysian nature. This is revealed through his countless sexual experiences. During his life, he experienced one true marriage and several night stands. He considers love and desire as expressions of life's creative energy and vitality. He spontaneously approaches women and refuses to suppress his instincts in the name of reason or social norms. He embraces love as an authentic experience that must be lived rather than contemplated. His relationships with women reveal his belief that true existence lies in surrendering to the fullness of human experience, where passion becomes a path to freedom and self-realization.

Kazantzakis presents this Dionysian passion with complexity, suggesting that while it liberates the individual from rigid conventions, it can also lead to suffering and moral ambiguity. Zorba's lust is indiscriminate, making him desire women regardless of their age, whether young or old. He derives great pleasure from his sexual relationship with Madame Hortense despite her old age. His attraction suggests that his desire is driven more by instinct and sensuality than by youth or physical appearance. This is evident when he says, "If you close your eyes, you'd think you had a girl of twenty in your arms. She is twenty, I swear, when you're in the act and put out the light" (p. 44).

Zorba's claim that Madame Hortense becomes a twenty-year-old girl in the dark attractively bridges Nietzschean and Freudian thought through the deliberate rejection of objective reality. From a Nietzschean point of view, Zorba acts as a supreme artist of his own existence; by shutting out the light, he willingly substitutes the harsh, decaying truth of old age with a vibrant, life-affirming illusion that fuels his Dionysian vitality. This act exemplifies Nietzsche's belief that humans need myth and creative untruths to survive and taste true joy. In chorus, Sigmund Freud would perceive this darkness as a literal descent into the Id—a primal psychological space where linear time does not exist. By blinding his conscious Ego to the physical signs of aging, Zorba releases a timeless libido that experiences the sexual act as eternally young, using the raw power of Eros to temporarily surmount human decay and the terror of mortality.

Throughout the novel, Alexis Zorba urges his Boss to abandon his abstract books and throw himself into the raw, unapologetic current of human existence. For him, the ultimate sin is not the violation of religious dogmas, but the cowardice of self-denial and the failure to comfort another human being in their vulnerability. He shatters the Boss' morality by reframing salvation around the courage and eagerness to connect, fiercely warning him: "Boy, if a woman calls you to share her bed and you don't go, your soul will be destroyed! That woman will sigh before God on judgment day, and that woman's sigh, whoever you may be and whatever your fine deeds, will cast you into Hell" (p. 58).

This passage delivers a powerful Dionysian: to reject a call for intimacy out of fear or moral hesitation is to choose a state of spiritual death long before reaching the grave. In this respect, the novel advocates a bold, life-affirming moral vision in which emotional authenticity and the satisfaction of fundamental human desires take precedence over the rigid, detached principles of conventional morality.

Despite his conviction that women are weak creatures created for men's happiness, Zorba treats them with care and concern. His care for women is the product of empathy rather than political ideology. For him, the measure of a society was not its laws or its grand ideals, but the dignity and respect it

afforded to ordinary people. It seems that he had little patience for customs that reduced one human being beneath another. His wisdom was rough, instinctive, and often paradoxical, yet beneath it lay a profound respect for freedom and the fullness of human life. In that spirit, he declares: "Just go now and teach them that women have equal rights with men" (p. 35).

Zorba's Dionysian spirit shines brightest through his divine madness, ecstatic dance, music, and passion for women. Rejecting sterile intellect, Zorba embraces a liberating, frenzy-driven mania that shatters societal illusions to live in raw emotional truth. His wild, unrestrained dancing and his soul-stirring playing of the santuri serve not as mere entertainment, but as sacred, non-verbal rituals that connect life's chaotic beauty and tragic joy. Equally, his devotion to women is purely elemental—a complete, sensual surrender to the divine erotic energy of Nature. Through every ecstatic dance, musical performance, emotional outburst, and romantic encounter, Zorba surrenders completely to the primal rhythms of life, embodying the Dionysian victory of instinct, passion, and vitality over reason and restraint.

Apollo's Disciple: The Boss and the Burden of Consciousness

In *Zorba the Greek*, the figure of the Boss is an embodiment of Apollonian consciousness, governed by reason, restraint, and the relentless pursuit of intellectual meaning. Unlike Zorba, who embraces life with Dionysian spontaneity, the Boss remains burdened by self-consciousness, moral reflection, and the desire to impose order upon existence. He has devoted much of his life to collecting and reading books in the pursuit of knowledge and intellectual refinement, becoming the archetypal "bookworm" whose identity is grounded in rationality and contemplation.

Yet, despite years of education and the accumulation of learning, he experiences a profound sense of despair, dissatisfaction, and inner emptiness. From a Nietzschean perspective, this condition reflects the limitations of a life dominated by abstract thought and excessive self-awareness. Rather than bringing fulfillment, the Boss's intellectual pursuits distance him from the immediacy and vitality of lived experience.

The Boss experiences an existential crisis which reaches its zenith as he recognizes how his Apollonian existence has fundamentally isolated him from reality. Sitting alone, he laments his sterile intellectualism, thinking, "My life is wasted. If only I could take a cloth and wipe out all I have learnt, all I have seen and heard, and go to Zorba's school and start the great, the real alphabet! What a different road I would choose" (81). This longing to unlearn his academic conditioning highlights a bitter realization: his carefully organized thoughts are merely "made of paper", safely detached from life and "scarcely splashed by a spot of blood". By contrasting his cerebral paralysis with Zorba's visceral, Dionysian immersion, the Boss acknowledges that true wisdom cannot be found in books, but must be felt directly through the body.

The Boss' intention to enter Zorba's "school" requires a total sensory reawakening, a process where the rigid boundaries between intellect and instinct finally melt. He explicitly connects this new "alphabet" to a desire to keep his "five senses perfectly trained" so that he might finally "fill (his) soul with flesh" and "fill (his) flesh with soul". Thus, this confession offers a compelling critique of the modern intellectual, who chooses detached observation over direct engagement with life. It implies that genuine existence demands the courage to break free from the security of pure rationality and embrace the uncertainty, spontaneity, and dynamic flow of lived experience.

The Boss' journey with Zorba has been very beneficial for him. It makes him understand that happiness is not in the pages of the books he read, rather it is in "a glass of wine, a roast chestnut, a wretched little brazier, the sound of the sea. Nothing else. And all that is required to feel that here and now is happiness is a simple, frugal heart" (87). This realization marks a significant shift in his

perspective, as he learns to value the present moment and appreciate the ordinary joys of life over intellectual pursuits alone.

Discussion

Beyond the Apollonian Veil: The Dionysian Will to Live

The aim of this paper is to unveil and explore the relevance of Dionysian Zorba in the story. From a Nietzschean perspective, Zorba matters to the Apollonian boss because he represents everything that disciplined leadership risks forgetting. The Apollonian leader excels at planning, organizing, measuring performance, and maintaining order, but these very strengths can harden into excessive control, making work mechanical and reducing people to functions rather than living individuals. Zorba interrupts this tendency by embodying the Dionysian spirit: spontaneity, emotional openness, courage in the face of uncertainty, and an unreserved affirmation of life.

In the novel, it is Zorba who proposes his services to the Boss. Rather than being recruited into an orderly, Apollonian world, the Dionysian force enters it on its own initiative. From a Nietzschean perspective, this symbolizes the spontaneous emergence of instinct, vitality, and lived experience into a life dominated by intellect and abstraction. He offers himself not because he possesses formal qualifications, but because he embodies practical wisdom, confidence, and an intense engagement with life: "Well, take me, shall we say, as cook. I can make soups you've never heard or thought of..." (7).

Zorba demonstrates that not all valuable outcomes can be predicted, measured, quantified, or managed through rational calculation. Creativity often emerges from experimentation, innovation requires the willingness to embrace risk and failure, and meaningful relationships depend on authenticity rather than procedure. In Nietzsche's philosophy, the highest form of human flourishing is not achieved by eliminating instinct in favor of reason, but through allowing reason to give form to the energy and vitality of instinct. Hence, Zorba does not undermine the boss's authority; he humanizes it. He reminds the leader that organizations thrive not only through efficient systems but also through passion, imagination, resilience, and joy. A boss who integrates Zorba's Dionysian vitality into an Apollonian framework becomes more than an efficient manager—they become a life-affirming leader capable of inspiring others while remaining grounded in purpose and discipline.

During the village's Easter celebration, Zorba encourages the narrator to join the festivities in town. When the narrator refuses, Zorba remarks, "If I had two sons, one quiet, careful, moderate and pious, and the other rascally, greedy, lawless and a woman-chaser, my heart would go out to the second one. Perhaps because he'd be like me?" (235). This declaration clearly reveals Zorba's admiration for the uninhibited, passionate way of life and highlights his embodiment of the Dionysian spirit.

After Zorba leaves for the Easter celebrations in town, the Boss unexpectedly experiences a powerful urge to act. At that moment, the surrounding landscape becomes vividly personified: "The whole beach came alive", and "in the west the evening star began to dance merrily" (235). These images, linking the earth and the heavens, symbolize the Dionysian dimension of the mythic and Nietzschean duality. The narrator also observes that "The earth smelled of camomile" (235), with camomile traditionally representing vitality and action. He then reflects, "My mind had made no decision, it was my body that had leaped up. My body alone was deciding and was not consulting me" (235).

This epiphanic moment marks the triumph of the narrator's Dionysian instincts over rational restraint, as his inner drive compels him to follow his desires and ultimately leads him to the widow's house. In the novel's closing moments, the narrator reconciles mind and body through an overwhelming impulse to immortalize Zorba, allowing memory and writing to become one final act of union after his friend's death.

Conclusion

Nikos Kazantzakis' *Zorba the Greek* strongly reflects the author's Nietzschean philosophy. Drawing heavily on Friedrich Nietzsche's concept of the tension between the Apollonian and Dionysian forces within human nature, the novel presents its two central characters as embodiments of these opposing ideals. The narrator represents the Apollonian qualities of reason, order, and restraint, while Zorba exemplifies the Dionysian spirit of passion, instinct, and spontaneity. Rather than suggesting that either perspective is sufficient on its own, the novel emphasizes the importance of balancing both. Through this contrast, Nikos Kazantzakis expresses his Nietzschean view of human purpose and the important role of art in achieving a fuller, more meaningful existence.

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