

Zorba the Greek

Erofilis meets Zorba somewhere on Psiloritis, near the cave where Zeus was born. It is sunny and there are no clouds in the sky. Zorba looks like a demigod to her. She seems to like Zorba, but hesitates. First, she wants to learn more about him, his cultural background, his family, his beliefs. She interrogates him, seeking answers to her questions.

Zorba leaves his abrupt manners aside. With a soft, philosophically relativistic tone in his voice, he encourages Erofilis and advises her not to be so worried, but to learn to accept people as they are. He reminds her of the labyrinths and how identity is shaped by socio-cultural ideas. Expounding on Henry Glassie's idea, Zorba goes on to say that for him, there is hardly any ethnic tradition; instead, over the years, this has been replaced by regional traditions that invariably contain influences from other regions as well.

Zorba continues: "I was born a long time ago. My identity is time oriented. It grows up like a child. It is nurtured with memories and habits of the past, approaches and performs in the present by socially and culturally selected behaviors. Simultaneously, it also builds a future by making use of both past and present idioms. To give you a concrete example, an illustration, our conversation takes place now, at a specific point in time. This is what people who will read one of its many possible transcriptions and translations should keep in mind. At the same time, what we say now is not merely what was in our hearts and minds when we were born or grew up." Erofilis is even more confused now. At the same time, she is more in love with Zorba. Why do complicated and hard tasks always attract her? Why can't she take the easy road? She yearns to listen to him more. She sits on a stone, on the plains of Psiloritis, prepares mountain tea on a small wood fire and serves Zorba and herself a cup; she is all ears.

"I do not wish to perceive myself as part of the so-called Greek classical heritage that folklorists adopt and use as a path to European identity. Viewed from many aspects, my national identity is ambiguous."

"Although I definitely feel Greek, I cannot identify myself with all the characteristics that Greece shares with the so-called West as part of a European geographical and political entity. For example, I guess my ability to dance with another man in a spirit of uninhibited camaraderie — throwing pain and care into a passionate dance — is something lost to Europeans. Through dancing, I express ecstasy, sure of my manhood.¹⁵⁸ My father nurtured me based not on the

western dream of organizing and governing a renewed Byzantine Empire. Instead, he urged me to favor and listen mostly to my heart, rejecting the mind.”

“I have many brothers and sisters. One of them is Buddha.¹⁵⁹ With his own words, he investigates two forms of human dignity — the oriental and the western — as everyone and everything in his life is overwhelmed by an inexorably destructive fate. He questions much: What is Greekness? How can we be patient? How can Greece have a nationalism rooted both in her ancient heritage and in her contemporary reality? How, at a time when the entire world seems to have lost its humanity, can we act humanely? What does being human mean? I listen to my brother’s ideas and decide to act in a way that is self-validating and therefore unaffected by fate’s destructiveness. This is my secret; this is, I believe, what has glorified Greece and enabled her to survive.”¹⁶⁰

Erofili takes her time to meditate on Zorba’s words. Now, it is her turn to talk. She is a bit overwhelmed. She takes a deep breath, looks Zorba in the eyes and starts her monologue.

“Dear Zorba, I do not wish to put borders between the East and the West. For me, names are only external, related to prejudices and other ideas. What I see is that, deep inside, we are all humans.”¹⁶¹

“As you may already know, long ago, through a theatrical play, my father gave birth to me.¹⁶² Having a strong Cretan personality himself, through me, he wished to remind the Cretan and Greek people who they are. With the very first words he wrote, he made me resemble the prominent Cretan school of painting of sacred icons (*ayioграфия*). Simultaneously, he also praised Crete through a hymn, with references to Crete’s Minoan past. In addition, he often asked me to recall the glorious ancient Greek past, from which he believed we originate.”

“In a sense, my father partially shaped what he thought the Cretan identity is or should be. Giving to his work my name and letting my voice sound throughout his drama, he empowered the female presence. His main ideas I also share and identify with. After all, he was my father. As he used to say, ‘Fame is vain, and the good fortune doesn’t last for long, because of fate’s games’.¹⁶³ Freedom is our greatest virtue, and tyranny our worst enemy. More than anything, we should feel and be free to love what we want.”

“Interestingly, however, looking into diaries and other accounts from my father’s life, I can see that the main source of inspiration that gave birth to me is the Italian tragedy *Orbecche*, by Giambattista Giraldi, in 1543,¹⁶⁴ whereas my father himself seemed to be of Asia Minor descent.¹⁶⁵ Thus, my father’s identity and, by extension, my identity — though we both definitely feel strongly Cretan — are shaped by various other idioms than the Cretan one.”

“My father managed to form a lingual instrument of the Cretan literature by denying the use of the mixed language form of the middle- and later-Byzantine tradition of the early Cretan production.¹⁶⁶ Thus, the language he taught me to speak is the everyday Cretan dialect, the language my father himself spoke, a mixture of western and eastern elements on the island of Crete.”

“You may be wondering why I keep talking about my father. Well, as a faithful Cretan daughter, I respect and love him. At the same time, I view his whole life as perfectly fitting with the central dilemma and question of our current



“Ah! If only I were an eagle, to admire the whole of Crete from an airy height!” — Nikos Kazantzakis’s wistful cry

conversation. In other words, I rely on my father's personality in my attempt to understand how someone who has a 'complex' identity comes to defend the identity the region where he lives nurtures him with. Also, because of his powerful words, my father imposed this identity on others, locals and non-locals."

"Now I feel more than anything else the need to talk about my cousin, Erotokritos. My uncle¹⁶⁷ wants him to live in an ideal environment. As a result, he composes a mythical world in the Greek space, a world shaped by the elements that are purposefully and consciously chosen from different historical eras: antiquity, the Byzantium, medieval Peloponese. Scholars notice how "Homeric" the nature of Erotokritos is. For and through him, time confirms an identity based on a glorious past, but also in the present, to give life to a bright future."

"Erotokritos defends his renaissance qualities and spreads a message of freedom in order to reach personal happiness. This is mainly the demand of the young woman he is in love with, Aretousa, who — through psychological and real collisions and through bright images — gives the final solution. In their love relationship, we see — in all its greatness — the triple ideal and eternal passion of bravery, beauty and wisdom. Erotokritos expresses these ideals from the nature of the Greek and the Cretan identity. For example, when Erotokritos fights, Cretans see in his face the symbol of their own battles and freedom."

"My uncle himself, born in Sitia, Crete, in the beginning of the 17th century, comes from a Venetian-Cretan royal family. There is no doubt that the official language of the "Nobili Veneti" is Greek and, more specifically, the Cretan dialect. By choosing to speak that language and teach it to Erotokritos, my uncle again emphasizes his Cretan identity. Thus, though he was born in Venice in 1793, my cousin speaks a language that is a mix of the eastern and western Cretan dialects. In addition, the way my uncle raised Erotokritos was inspired by the French novel *Paris at Vienne*. So I have come to see my cousin as a mixture of Italian, French, Greek, and Cretan elements and qualities."

"Moreover, you know well that I give my name to young women and to places all over Greece. So does Erotokritos. People memorize his words and recite them with the accompaniment of a plain, repetitive melody, not only in Crete, but also elsewhere."

Zorba foresees a very passionate relationship with Erofilii. He is surprised with all the similarities their lives share. He imposed a monologue on her and she replied with another monologue, with even more arguments. The challenge is to see them acting in dialogue. They read and share aloud excerpts of notes from their diaries:

Zorba: "Music itself is a potent symbol of identity; like language, it is one of those aspects of culture that can, when they need to assert 'ethnic identity,' most readily serve this purpose. Its effectiveness may be twofold; not only does it act as a ready means for the identification of different ethnic or social groups, but it has potent emotional connotations and can be used to assert and negotiate identity in a particularly powerful manner." ¹⁶⁸

Erofilii: "Tango is the only place in which I feel comfortable, restless, but at home, especially when not at home. Such is the story of the tango. Such is my story. Tango hurts me and comforts me. Tango is my changing, resourceful source of identity. Tango is my strategic language, a way of talking about, understanding, exercising decolonization." ¹⁶⁹

Zorba: “In a sense, our past has been written in the folk and popular songs. Through these songs — when they are authentic — and through their history, we discover ourselves as well as our ethnic identity. The context of folklore is ethnic: We need a metaphysical analysis and view so that we don’t look for a scientific explanation.”¹⁷⁰

Erofilis: “Our songs are us¹⁷¹ — our music is us — and we are what we dance.”

Zorba: “Speaking of music and identity, Dr. Chris Williams agrees with me that Cretan music has both a local and an oriental aspect that coexists in the same repertoire, yet the two are not fully reconciled.”¹⁷²

Erofilis: “Yes, Zorba. And my friend Jane Cowan¹⁷³ remarks that, ‘classifying Greek music as a branch of Near Eastern and Middle Eastern music makes musical and historical sense.’ For her, ecclesiastical and secular Greek music have become imbued with tonalities that sound ‘oriental’ to western ears, though they may also bear witness to more archaic systems, which predate the separation of East and West. The contemporary array of distinctive folk, classical, popular, and ecclesiastical music reveals the position of Greece in the geographical and ideological crossroads between Europe and Asia.”

Zorba: “To support his aforementioned idea, my friend talks about the rehabilitation of the demotic song in Greece, which has found its parallel in Turkey. He cites the example of Yiannis Markopoulos, a contemporary Greek composer of Cretan origin. He specifically refers to his 1972, ‘Ithageneia’ (“Citizenship”; “Nationality”), with the Cretan singer Nikos Xylouris. Dr. Williams observes that the songs in this recording are suffused with Cretan styles and the whole work arguably anticipates later attempts to combine Cretan and oriental styles, containing, for instance, some interesting use of the saz.”¹⁷⁴

Erofilis: “Your friend is right; I agree with him. Yet, that reminds me of the Turkish composer Livaneli, who moves with the same steps, in very similar paths. Now that we are talking about all this, I think Dr. Williams also e-mailed me the other day. I assume you gave him my address. Among other things, he reminded me that Markopoulos has written a concert for Cretan líra and orchestra.”¹⁷⁵

Zorba: “I recently found on the Internet the Cretan musician Yiorgis Koutsourelis’s web page.¹⁷⁶ It says there that Mikis Theodorakis used the musical piece ‘Armenochorianós Syrtós’ — which Koutsourelis composed between 1949-1950 for solo la o ú t o and vocal — to compose ‘Zorba the Greek’.”

Erofilis: “Whatever the case Zorba, your music sounds Cretan after all, even performed on the b o u z o ú k i , and to me, that’s all that matters.”

Zorba: “Good point, Erofilis, but that confuses me even more. Did you ever think of all these terms that Cretans use? I end up being treated like one of them... I have no idea where exactly I come from... It seems like I am in the age where all the identity and questioning of our origin come into play, up front, suddenly...”

Erofilis: “What words do you mean? I don’t understand you.”

Zorba: “For example, k é f i , g l é n d i , m a n d i n á d a... and many more... I hear people saying that they have Arabic, Turkish or Italian origins... Who is right? Where are the answers?”

Erofilis: "Zorba, clear-cut definitions do not always exist in this life. In the end, we believe what we want to believe, and that is what we know based on our socio-cultural ideas. Come on! It's getting late for such theoretical discussions. The sun is about to set and we have no electricity. I think it's time to get going."

Zorba: "Okay. What about staying in Anoya tonight? We can have a couple of r a k í shots and continue our discussion there."

Erofilis: "That's a great idea! Under one condition, though — will you teach me how to dance?"

Zorba: "Look, Erofilis. This is Nikos Xylouris's theater. In case you don't know, every August, they hold feasts here for a week to honor him. Let's have dinner across the theater at the Skalomata. Till the food comes, we'll have some time to talk. What do you think?"

Erofilis: "Fine, Zorba. Tell me, have you heard of Ross Daly? Do you know him?"

Zorba: "Yes, of course. While in the boat coming to Crete, I picked up the magazine *Welcome Crete*. There, I read Ross Daly's article on Cretan music.¹⁷⁷ Ah! Here, I saved that paper. Take a look, if you wish..."

Erofilis: "Excellent! His words bring to my mind some notes in his record *Ross Daly & Labyrinth: Mitos*. There, in addition to what you just said, Daly supports that Cretan music belongs to 'these great modal systems that are not confined by political and religious boundaries, yet they seem to be linked by a common origin, which might be based quite literally on a single note.'"

Zorba: "Am á n - am á n ! Woe is me! What a mess! We are all a mixture, but yet distinct!"

Erofilis: "Don't act like an idiot! Let's try to unravel the thread... Let's talk with facts..."

Zorba: "I'll pretend I didn't hear what you just said. Cretans imported the violin from Italy during Venetian rule."¹⁷⁸

Erofilis: "Are you jealous? Anyway, let's calm down... Cretans emphasize líra music more. It became the symbol of their culture, their representation throughout the whole world. Its name even evokes ancient, classical Greece. Musicologist Foivos Anoyiannakis believes that the Cretan líra has Byzantine-eastern origins and that it identifies or relates to other similar instruments that exist even nowadays in the East. In Crete, as it seems, it came after the Ottoman conquest, in the 17th or 18th century."¹⁷⁹

Zorba: "Ross Daly, however, plays on the líra the modal music of Greece, the Balkans, Turkey, the Middle East, North Africa and North India. He believes that, despite the difference in terminology, there are distinctive similarities in the way virtually all these cultures approach improvisation and rhythm and in the way they perceive the relationship between tradition and originality."¹⁸⁰

Erofilis: "Yes, and he further argues that Western music has an expressive character. In the West, there is a definite cerebral dimension. In the East, people are concerned mainly with exceeding themselves through music. Often we say 'Eastern music,' but Daly prefers the term 'modal music'. "¹⁸¹

Zorba: "In relation to what you just said, Erofilis, let me again refer to my friend Dr. Williams. According to him,

and I agree, Cretan techniques entail a subtle ornamentation that is not dissimilar to certain virtuoso guitar techniques. It resembles, and is fundamentally similar to, the *polítiki líra* (type of *líra* mainly performed in the Istanbul region), which is associated with high levels of performance in Greek music of Asia Minor, as well as Turkish classical music.”¹⁸²

Erofilis: “Certainly, Zorba, the *líra*, the *la oút o*, and the *bulg ar í* provide to Cretan musicians easier access to ‘oriental’ instruments like the *polítiki líra*, the *saz*, the *baglamás*, the *oúti*, and so on.”¹⁸³

Zorba: “Ah! You just said *la oút o*! Of course, you know that the Venetians introduced it. Also, it became the most popular instrument in Crete at that time. Even your cousin, Erotokritos, performs exceptionally well and sings with it. Contemporary Cretan musical ensembles also use it.”

Erofilis: “Today Cretan ensembles use the *toubelék i* as well — you know, that Eastern instrument my other ‘dear’ friend, Laodikis, plays...”

Zorba: “What’s wrong, Erofilis? Why are you like that?”

Erofilis: “I’m teasing you, Zorba... Anyway, we are here, next to Nikos Xylouris’s theater, having dinner at his birthplace. Do you know that with his *líra*, he introduced Cretans to the so-called ‘European’ pieces, such as waltzes? Do you know that he also composed his own songs, which did not always belong to the traditional Cretan repertory?”

Zorba: “I don’t see anything wrong in that. Whatever the case, our songs always express our sorrow, our fights and the agonies of our people. And this is true not only for Cretans, but for all Greeks, and for all our neighbors as well.”¹⁸⁴

Erofilis: “You are right... I’m thinking of the *rizítika* songs that, especially in the 20th century, became a strong symbol of identity for all Cretans.”

Zorba: “Yes, but we should also remember that Cretans, at that time, co-existed with the Turks. Thus, their singing and dancing repertories merged Greek and Turkish elements. In the past, this was very conscious. It is mostly recognizable in Rethymnon in the 1920s and 1930s, and especially to three musicians: Andreas Rodinos, Harilaos Piperakis, and Stelios Foustalieris.”¹⁸⁵

Erofilis: “I would imagine that what you are talking about is also the case with the *tabachaniótika*, that urban type of Cretan music played at that time in coffee shops and restaurants in the harbor districts of Chania and Rethymnon. Dr. Williams told me that many of the *tabachaniótika* can be traced to Foustalieris and, more generally, to the post-Lausanne period. Interestingly though, some of these tunes are termed as ‘*Palaióí skopoí tis Krítis*,’ or ‘Old tunes of Crete.’ In general, the whole process of adaptation and adoption of ‘oriental’ features into Cretan music is very interesting.”¹⁸⁶

Zorba: “Indeed! In one case, Foustalieris did adapt the Turkish song ‘*Ada sahillerinde bekliyorum*’ (‘I Am Waiting at the Coast of the Island’),¹⁸⁷ usually performed at the Pringiponisa near Constantinople, to the Cretan song ‘*Everybody Asks Me Why I Cry*’.¹⁸⁸ I asked my Turkish friend to sing it for me, and I could not believe my ears. I was shocked by the similarities in their melodies!”

Erofilis: “What a coincidence! Ross Daly e-mailed me recently about this song. In Crete, the musical piece you just mentioned is also called ‘Halepiános Amnés.’ He has found two more songs that share the same melody with this musical piece. One is an old song of Adonis Diamandidis performed by Dalgas called “My Eyes,” and the other is a Syrian song called ‘Qadduka ’al-mayyas’ (‘Your flirtatiously swaying figure’).¹⁸⁹ Daly also informed me that, in general, even the Turkish musicologists agree that this musical piece originates somewhere in the Arab world.”¹⁹⁰

Zorba: “Aha! I begin to get it... That song has various elements that make it sound not exactly like a typical Turkish song. Now I understand that this is due to its Arabic roots.”

Erofilis: “Yes! Moreover, Daly explains¹⁹¹ that this Arabic song belongs to a group of songs called muwashshahat. These are regarded as the oldest Arabic songs, and today they are preserved mainly in the Syrian city of Halab — Halepi in Greek, Aleppo in English. Obviously, Cretans, by naming their version ‘Halepiános Amnés’ refer to the Halepa, a region in Chania. However, it is really an interesting and intriguing coincidence that this piece comes from Aleppo of Syria and not from Chania.”

Zorba: “Now I add Dr. Williams’s point about the *taxími*, which appears in a varied form in Crete at this time. Previously, Cretan musicians learned fixed introductions to tunes. Now, a freer introduction is played. However, it is not quite like the *taxími*, being less an exploration of the mode than a kind of stage setting for the tune to come. It is often theatrical in spirit and would rarely involve modulation”.¹⁹²

Erofilis: “Our whole discussion reminds me also of the song ‘Black Sea,’ that Ross Daly composed. You may find it in *Dreamlands* (1982), but also in many of his other recordings. In a meeting we had a few days ago, Daly told me that, for this composition, he used ‘the melody of Ali,’ traced somewhere in the prefecture of Lassithi. Cretans say that Ali was a Turkish violin performer. Daly, however, believes that he was not a Turk, but a local Cretan who had converted to Islam”.¹⁹³

Zorba: “‘Black Sea’ in Asia Minor... Doesn’t your friend, Maria Fasoulaki, the one who performs with Vasilis, sing that Asia Minor song called ‘Tis triandafilías ta fíla’ (‘The Rose Bush Leaves’)?”

Erofilis: “You are right...”

Zorba: “Going back to Ross Daly and his recordings, you have made me realize that he likes ‘playing’ with these sounds. He often performs, for instance, Ottoman compositions along with the Cretan ones, am I wrong?”

Erofilis: “No, not at all. But let me ask you something else, not irrelevant to our conversation topic: What exactly do you know of the Cretan song ‘Filedém’?”

Zorba: “Well, I think I have some stories about it: The Cretans gave to Patrick Leigh Fermor — the British agent in Crete during the German occupation — the nickname Filedém, because of his love of this song. An American movie, *Meeting over Midnight*, about the kidnapping of the German general Kreipe by Fermor — has as its soundtrack the music of ‘Filedém’”.¹⁹⁴

Erofilis: “So, dear Zorba, you are not the only one to become famous through a soundtrack...”



A natural embrace, a philosophical invitation

Zorba: “That’s not funny at all, okay? Anyway, to share with you more of what I know on this particular musical piece, Stelios Foustalieris noted that he learned that song himself from the Turkish crew of a ship that was in the port of Rethymnon. The song refers to a Turk whose name was Edem and was invoked as ‘fíle Edem’ (‘friend Edem’). Foustalieris gave other lyrics to the song — which he considered to be very serious — while later, Skordalos made a recording of it, and still later, Xylouris, recorded it with the well-known verses.”¹⁹⁵

Erofilis: “File dém, file dém, file dém, file dém, file dém, oh! Amán - amán! I’m in love with a Turkish girl in the mosque. . . and so on. . .”

Zorba: “Exactly!”

Erofilis: “By the way, Zorba, do you remember the Turkish-Cretans we met at the Alatsatianoi¹⁹⁶ Cultural Club in the summer of 2000?”

Zorba: “Of course I do...”

Erofilis: “Do you know that their dances and songs are Greek and Cretan?¹⁹⁷ Do you know that they use the líra, the la oút o, and the boulgarí, and that they dance the same dances we Cretans perform as well? Also, their songs are very similar to our melodies, and many among them are distinguished dancers and famous líra and la oút o players.”¹⁹⁸

Zorba: “That’s amazing! But let’s go back to these 465 years of Venetian occupation, which precedes the Turkish one. The word m a n d i n á d e s, our improvised couplets of fifteen syllable lines, comes from the Italian *mattinate*. At the same time, isn’t it strange, that to be considered a worthy Cretan, you have to know m a n d i n á d e s?”

Erofilis: “Not to mention that many of these m a n d i n á d e s used to have an Islamic context in the past. Now, instead, Cretans have ‘purified’ them, using words such as, ‘my Christian,’ and so on.”¹⁹⁹

Zorba: “Of course, and this denotes not only Greek, but local Cretan identity as well. Ah! Here comes the food... Wonderful!”

Erofilis: “Good, because ‘a hungry bear doesn’t dance’...”²⁰⁰ Speaking of dance, teach me to dance, “Come on my boy!”²⁰¹

Zorba: “Erofilis, let me digest the food... Stop this game!”

Erofilis: “Why? Dance is part of our identity. Cretans believe that we are a geographical part of Greece that still profoundly supports and embellishes its traditional identity, especially in regard to our music and dance. Our people, since antiquity, have managed to leave their own traces, everywhere.”

Zorba: “Hey! Hey! What a chauvinist! Especially in places such as this village of Anoya, the repertoire of music and dances is strictly and mostly — with few exceptions — Cretan, in opposition to other Cretan or Greek regions, where the variety of music and dances performed may include many other categories as well, such as Greek folk dances, popular Greek music, and so on.”

Erofilis: “Yes! In Anoya, moreover, there are several dancing idioms, for example, the local leaping dance called

Ανογιανός πιδιήτός. Through their dancing, the people of Anoya, show that their performances on Crete continue and will continue as a viable means of social interaction as long as the essence of being Cretan is conveyed: For them, dancing is being Cretan. In this context, social processes, those based on a dialectic relationship between individual and society, form their identity: For the people of Anoya, dancing is an illustration of ‘Cretanness.’ It also expresses group continuity, linking past, present, and future generations. Through their dancing, they experience their cultural identity as members of a traditional society: theirs.”

Zorba: “Hey! Erofilis... Do you have a degree in Cretan dances?”

Erofilis: “Let me continue; don’t interrupt. Dance is important to Cretans, because to dance is to be Cretan. Dance, for Cretans, takes high priority in terms of our successful adaptation to our culture as a whole. Through dancing, Cretan people show what we are.”

Zorba: “Excellent! Are you ready for a shot of rakí?”

Erofilis: “Yes, but before that, let me answer your last question... I am working on an ethnomusicological study on Cretan music and dance...”

Zorba: “Ethnomusicological? What’s that?”

Erofilis: “It’s all Greek to me. Come on, Zorba! Ethnos for nation, people, and music+(o)logy for the ‘conscious’ study of music... which brings us back to the beginning of our discussion on music and identity... As you can see, all this moves in a circle... as a dance... Go ahead, you may treat me now! Yiá mas! (To our health!)”

Psiloritis stands tall no matter what we do. Erofilis and Zorba will always be a very interesting couple. Up to now, we have been moving mostly in Crete, in Greece and in neighboring areas. It’s time to dance all over the world. Fourth step: present and future step.

