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Kazantzakis the Cretan: versions of the Minoan past from the author of *Zorba the Greek**

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The most famous book by Nikos Kazantzakis has become known throughout the world by its translated title, which was also the title of the film based upon it: *Zorba the Greek*. To what extent that book, whose original title can be rendered as *Life and Opinions of Alexis Zorbas*, really does present an idealised type of the “modern Greek” is a discussion for another time. That is the way the book has been read, at least outside Greece; and its author

* This paper is intended to complement and extend my earlier discussion of aspects of the subject, treated in a different context: “Minoans in modern Greek literature”, in: G. Hamilakis and N. Momigliano (eds.), *Archaeology and European Modernity: Producing and consuming the “Minoans”* = *Creta Antica* 7 (2006) 183-95. In order to avoid overlap between the two papers I have included here no more than a summary of my fuller discussion of Kazantzakis’s *Odyssey* in the earlier paper. Unavoidably I have had to give some consideration here to passages from *Report to Greco* that were also discussed in the earlier paper; but here the conclusions reached are considerably amplified, and in some respects have had to be modified by research carried out in the meantime.

Lectures based on this paper were given in the autumn of 2007 at King’s College London, the University of Cambridge, and the Edinburgh Scottish Hellenic Society, while earlier versions were tried out on audiences at the University of East Anglia (March 2007) and at an international conference on Kazantzakis held at Würzburg in July. I am grateful to participants in discussion on all these occasions for much stimulating advice and commentary.

All quotations from Greek are given, in the main text, in my own translation, while the original can be found in the notes. Where published English translations exist, page references to them are also given in the notes.

was beyond question a fiercely loyal champion of the Modern Greek national identity, at least during long periods of his life.

But Greece's only internationally recognised novelist had another identity as well. Kazantzakis had been born and spent most of his formative years in the island of Crete, which did not become part of the Greek state until 1913, when he was thirty years old. Throughout the nineteenth century, long before Kazantzakis's time, the Christian Orthodox population of Crete had been engaged in a relentless and violent struggle to bring an end to Ottoman rule in the island; a succession of revolts between 1770 and 1896 had all the hallmarks of intercommunal and inter-faith conflict, as these phenomena are known in parts of the world today. In nineteenth-century Crete, the struggle was not just between Christian subjects and Muslim rulers, as it has usually been portrayed, but between Christian and Muslim communities, numbering approximately sixty per cent and forty per cent of the population respectively. These two communities shared a common language, the Cretan dialect of Greek, and each had a deep historic attachment to the island that was home to both of them.

From his upbringing, Kazantzakis had a consciousness of Crete as different from other parts of what would soon become the enlarged Greek state. It was not just its recent history and the fierce attitudes that had been shaped by more than a century of intercommunal tension and violence that made Crete different. In 1878, five years before Kazantzakis's birth, the first discoveries had been made of a prehistoric civilisation to which archaeologists were beginning, even then, to give the name "Minoan", after Minos, the legendary king of Crete.¹ Systematic excavation at

¹ On the 1878 excavations at Knossos, see K. Kopaka, "Μίνωος Καλοκαιρινού, ανασκαφές στην Κνωσό", *Παλίμνηστον* 9-10 (1990) 5-69, summarised in English in J. A. MacGillivray, *Minotaur: Sir Arthur Evans and the archaeology of the Minoan myth* (London: Cape 2000), pp. 92-6. Credit for coining the neologism "Minoans" is often erroneously given to Evans, who popularised it after 1900. On this see N. Karadimas and N. Momigliano, "On the term 'Minoan' before Sir Arthur

Knossos and other sites could not begin, for political reasons, until after the island had been granted a precarious independence under the guarantee of four European powers. This happened in 1898, and the “Cretan State” (Κρητική Πολιτεία) would last until the island was incorporated into Greece in 1913, in the aftermath of the Balkan Wars.

By March 1900, the hill of Kefala, near Heraklion, which was generally believed to be the site of ancient Knossos, had been acquired by the British amateur archaeologist of Welsh extraction, Arthur Evans. As well as being a brilliant archaeologist (and lucky), Evans was also a supreme publicist. The previously little-known Minoan civilisation that emerged from the Kefala site was quickly sensationalised in the world’s press; it soon came to be forgotten that the actual discovery had been made twenty-two years before, by another Minos, Minos Kalokairinos. Meanwhile, from other sites all over the island, excavated by French and Italian archaeologists, came confirmation that Crete in the late Bronze Age had enjoyed a level of civilisation previously unsuspected. The popular imagination was especially fired by evidence for artistic tastes among the newly discovered Minoans that uncannily seemed to anticipate the current *fin de siècle*, as well as by evidence for their great wealth and signs of luxurious living (such as baths and drainage). Even before Evans began his controversial partial restoration at Knossos, enlisting the talents of the Dutch architect Piet de Jong and the Swiss artists Emile Gilliéron and his son, it had become clear that the ancient civilisation of Crete had been quite different from anything found in the Middle East, and more different still from the classical Hellenic civilisation that had reached its peak a millennium and more after its heyday. Evans in particular, during his time as Curator of the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford, had acquired considerable animus against the prevailing attitudes among the classical scholars of his day, and delighted in emphasising every characteristic that seemed to drive a wedge between his Minoans and the revered civilisation

of the classical period. Minoan society and religion, according to Evans, had been matriarchal; in language and race the Bronze Age inhabitants of Crete had nothing in common with the later Hellenes. Almost from the beginning, Minoan civilisation came to be associated in the popular mind with its most exotic aspects. These included: the strange ritual of bull-leaping depicted on frescoes and seal-stones; the bare-breasted women known from figurines, sometimes with snakes twining up their arms; the mysterious hieroglyphics preserved on the Phaistos Disk; the supposed cult of the Goddess, the supreme mother.²

All this affected Kazantzakis greatly. We know this because he gave prominence to his putative Minoan ancestors in at least four of his works, and returned to the subject, giving it a surprising new twist, at the very end of his life in his fictionalised autobiography, *Report to Greco*. Undoubtedly the discovery of Minoan civilisation encouraged Kazantzakis in his belief that there was such a thing, in the modern world, as a distinct Cretan identity. In different works, at different points in his life, he explored the possible implications of this in contrasting ways.

* * *

The fullest, though not the final, statement by Kazantzakis on how he viewed his Minoan heritage comes in an open letter published in the Athens journal *Nea Estia* in 1943. At the time, Greece was under military occupation by German, Italian and Bulgarian forces; all publications were subject to censorship. Kazantzakis, holed up on the island of Aegina, had just finished writing *Zorba*. The context for his remarks, and the subject of the open letter, is a

² On all of the issues touched on in this and the preceding paragraph, see more fully G. Hamilakis and N. Momigliano (eds.), *Archaeology and European Modernity: Producing and consuming the "Minoans" = Creta Antica* 7 (2006).

long defence of his monumental epic poem, *Odyssey*, which had been published in 1938, against its critics.³

At the end of this defence, Kazantzakis draws on a long-established and somewhat stereotypical distinction, that goes back to antiquity: between the Hellenic and the “Oriental” modes of thought. The “world-view” that animates his epic poem, Kazantzakis insists, is neither the one nor the other; this, he implies, may be why so many Greek readers have been unable to understand it, or even to give it the benefit of the doubt. He even thanks his interlocutor for giving him this opportunity for “confession”: “to explain how I connect my soul with the primeval ancestral soul and how from those roots emerges my world-view”.⁴

Crete, Kazantzakis goes on, is for him the “synthesis” of [ancient]⁵ Greece and the Orient, and has equipped him with an outlook that is also a synthesis of those stereotypical opposites. He defines this outlook like this: “the ego gazing on the abyss without disintegrating; on the contrary, this gaze full of composure, pride and manly courage”.⁶ For the first time in his writing, at the age of sixty, Kazantzakis sums up this distinctively Cretan way of looking at the world in an expression that has since become a catchphrase, almost a cliché, in the secondary literature: the “Cretan glance”.⁷

The origin of this “glance”, which is really more of a stance, Kazantzakis explicitly attributes to the Minoans, whom in this way he tacitly claims as his own spiritual ancestors:

³ Nikos Kazantzakis, “Ένα σχόλιο στην *Οδύσεια*”, *Νέα Εστία* 34 (1943) 1028-34.

⁴ “[...] να ξηγήσω πώς συναρτώ την ψυχή μου με την παμπάλαιη προγονική ψυχή και πώς από τις ρίζες αυτές βγαίνει η κοσμοθεωρία μου” (Kazantzakis, “Ένα σχόλιο”, 1033).

⁵ For this important distinction, not explicitly made in the text, see note 11 below.

⁶ “[...] το εγώ ν’ ατενίζει την άβυσσο χωρίς ν’ αποσυνθέεται το εναντίον, η ενατένιση αυτή να το γεμίζει συνοχή, υπερηφάνεια κι αντρεία” (Kazantzakis, “Ένα σχόλιο”, 1033).

⁷ “Και τη ματιά τούτη που ατενίζει έτσι τη ζωή και το θάνατο, την ονομάζω *κρητικά*. ... Την ηρωική χωρίς ελπίδα και χωρίς φόβο, παιχνιδιάρια ματιά [...] τη λέω: *κρητική ματιά*” (ibid.).

In the Minoan civilisation the Cretan glance was like that. Minoan Crete, with its terrible earthquakes that were symbolised for them by the Bull, and with the games that the Cretans made directly with the Bull himself, achieves what I call the supreme thing: Synthesis.⁸

In a passage that would later be elaborated and refined in his autobiography, *Report to Greco*, Kazantzakis goes on to explain how he saw this synthesis being achieved in the Minoan frescoes that depicted the ritual bull-leaping: “In this way the Cretan transformed horror into a sublime game. [...] He defeated, without obliterating it, the hideous Bull, because he did not consider it an enemy, but as a fellow-worker.”⁹

Finally, in the open letter of 1943, Kazantzakis refers to the harsh times that Europe is enduring, times which need exceptional courage and far-sightedness. Under conditions of censorship he does not, of course, refer to the world war that is going on; but in any case the German or Italian censors in Athens would have found nothing to object to in what he says, which chimes with earlier statements by Kazantzakis that can be read as endorsing, if not Fascism or Nazism itself, then certainly the cathartic effect of the violence these movements were unleashing on the world at this time.¹⁰ In any case, the qualities that Kazantzakis claims are most needed in the midst of the turmoil of a world war are *not*

⁸ “Στο μινωικό πολιτισμό τέτοια ήταν η κρητική ματιά. Η μινωική Κρήτη, με τους τρομαχτικούς σεισμούς της που τους συμβόλιζε ο Ταύρος και με τα παιχνίδια που κάνουν οι Κρητικοί ίσια ίσια με τον Ταύρο αυτόν, πραγματοποιεί αυτό που θεωρώ το ανώτατο: τη Σύνθεση” (ibid.).

⁹ “Κ’ έτσι ο Κρητικός μετέτρεψε τη φρίκη σε υψηλό παιχνίδι [...] Νικούσε χωρίς να εξαφανίζει τον αποτρόπαιο Ταύρο, γιατί δεν τον θεωρούσε οχτρό, παρά συνεργάτη” (ibid.). See also Nikos Kazantzakis, *Αναφορά στον Γκρέκο* (Athens: Ekdoseis Kazantzaki 1982), p. 481 = Nikos Kazantzakis, *Report to Greco: An autobiographical novel*, trans. P. A. Bien (London: Faber 1973), p. 486.

¹⁰ For a number of telling instances, drawn from Kazantzakis’s travel books of the late 1930s and early 1940s, with commentary, see Christos Alexiou, “Ιδεολογία και πραγματικότητα στον Καζαντζάκη”, *Θέματα Λογοτεχνίας* (Νοεμ. 1996-Φεβρ. 1997) 121-49 (see pp. 140-1).

those traditionally associated with the ancient Hellenic achievement, but rather that achieved by those ancient Cretans, the Minoans. In his own way, and rather like the archaeologist Evans, Kazantzakis is struck by how *contemporary* the lost Bronze Age civilisation of Crete now seems, and how alien, by comparison, is that of the classical age.

A few months later this distinction came to be clarified further in the pages of the same periodical, when the novelist and dramatist Giorgos Theotokas published an extract from a letter that Kazantzakis had sent him. The latter had been at pains to emphasise that, while his “Cretan” glance was different from that of Greeks from other parts of Greece, all these together formed part of a composite “Modern Greek soul”. The vital distinction he had wished to draw, Kazantzakis now emphasised, was not with other contemporaries, but with the “ancient classical glance”.¹¹

So, shortly after completing the novel *Zorba*, Kazantzakis emerged with a conception of the ancient Minoan civilisation of Crete as something fundamentally at odds with the universally admired civilisation of classical Hellas, but at the same time as a fundamental, even formative, aspect of his own identity as a Cretan and as a writer.

* * *

This is consistent with the way in which the Minoans are presented in *Zorba* itself. In a little-noticed chapter near the middle of the novel, the narrator takes a break from lignite-mining and the company of his mentor Zorba, and goes for a long solitary walk. His goal is a “small Minoan city” that has recently been excavated.¹² The description of the abandoned ruins, against a

¹¹ “[...] δεν εννοούσα τη νεοελληνική παρά την αρχαία κλασική ματιά”, [Kazantzakis cited in] Giorgos Theotokas, “Η ‘κρητική’ ματιά”, *Νέα Εστία* 34 (Οκτ. 1943) 1263.

¹² “[...] μικρή μινωική πολιτεία [...]”, Nikos Kazantzakis, *Βίος και πολιτεία του Αλέξη Ζορμπά*, 6η έκδ. (Athens: Ekdoseis El. Kazantzaki 1969), p. 203 = Nikos Kazantzakis, *Zorba the Greek*, trans. Carl Wildman (London: Faber 1961), p. 170.

background of intense sunlight and the narrator's own instinctive response to the resurgence of spring in nature all around him, reminds us of poems by Sikelianos and, more surprisingly perhaps, also by Seferis.¹³ The narrator's somewhat trite thoughts about human insignificance in the face of the long sweep of history are interrupted by a young shepherd boy, who rudely tries to bum a cigarette. It is the boy, suddenly elevated in the narrator's imagination to become the guardian spirit (στοιχειό) of the place, who sums up the lesson of the experience: "That lot are dead, we're alive; push off and good luck to you!"¹⁴

At the heart of the Minoan city, the narrator identifies "the shrine of the Great Goddess, with the exposed overflowing breasts and sacred snakes on her arms".¹⁵ Despite the categorical nature of the description, it is evident that neither the shrine nor the effigy is actually visible to the narrator; the Mother Goddess of the Minoans is present only to his imagination. Later in the chapter, disconcerted by his encounter with the shepherd boy, he acts on an impulse and pays a long-deferred visit to a nunnery nearby. Here he learns about an effigy of the Virgin Mary that has become the focus of local legends and an object of pilgrimage. Implicitly, the ancient Minoan Mother Goddess continues to be worshipped in the twentieth century by pious Christians, in a transformed guise. And the lesson of the chapter comes full circle in its conclusion. Back home on the deserted Cretan shore that he shares with Zorba, Kazantzakis's narrator experiences a moment of elation. It is as though he has escaped a great danger, and now,

¹³ Michael Paschalis, "Η κρυφορία του Ζορμπά και οι τέσσερις μαιές του: Όμηρος, Πλάτωνας, Δάντης και Σαίξπηρ", *Νέα Εστία* 1806 (2007) 1114-91; see pp. 1162-3. Paschalis suggests that the then recently published "King of Asine" by Seferis might lie behind aspects of this description; on the other hand Kazantzakis's account, in some intriguing aspects, seems to be taken up by Seferis, later, in the poem "Engomi" (1955).

¹⁴ "Αυτοί πεθάνανε, εμείς ζούμε· άε στο καλό!" (*Βίος και πολιτεία*, p. 205 = *Zorba the Greek*, p. 172).

¹⁵ "Και στην καρδιά της πολιτείας [...] το ιερό της Μεγάλης θεάς, με τ' ανοιχτά ξέχειλα στήθια και τα ιερά φίδια στα μπράτσα" (*Βίος και πολιτεία*, p. 204 = *Zorba the Greek*, p. 171).

plunging naked into the sea he believes that he “had once again clung fast to the breast of the Mother that nourished me”.¹⁶

So the spirit of the ancient, primitive Minoan Mother Goddess is alive and well in Crete in the first half of the twentieth century, and still has the power to sustain Kazantzakis’s earnest pilgrim in search of the meaning of life. In keeping with what he would shortly write in his open letter to *Nea Estia*, Kazantzakis here seems to acknowledge the primitive, atavistic source of his own world-view, and to affirm the existence of an unbroken continuity of belief and experience from ancient times to the present. What is absent from *Zorba*, on the other hand, is the insight summed up in the term “Cretan glance”, that had perhaps not been minted then,¹⁷ and perhaps more strikingly the *contrast* between the Minoan and the classical legacies, that Kazantzakis would make in the open letter of 1943.

To explain these discrepancies we have to look a little more closely at the passage from *Zorba*.

The first thing to notice is that the site visited by the narrator of *Zorba* is not the famous palace of Knossos excavated by Evans. This is evident from the description of “grey stones, ironstones, brilliant nakedness”,¹⁸ the spectacular partial restoration of the Palace of Minos at Knossos, which Kazantzakis describes elsewhere and admired, is wholly absent here. Nor can this be one of the other well-known sites described by Minoan archaeologists as

¹⁶ “[...] μου φάνηκε πως είχα γλιτώσει από ένα μεγάλο κίντυνο, κι είχα πάλι αρπαχτεί σφιχτά από το βυζί της Μάνας και βύζαινα” (*Βίος και πολιτεία*, p. 213 = *Zorba the Greek*, p. 179).

¹⁷ In a letter to Prevelakis dated April 1936, Kazantzakis had referred to Crete and ended with a drawing of an eye in the centre of a huge circle, below which is the comment: “Αυτές τις μέρες, αυτό το Μάτι που βλέπει ακέραιο τον κύκλο βρήκα να εκφράζει απλά και άρτια την ψυχή μας. Σας υποβάλλω το έμβλημα αυτό”, Pantelis Prevelakis, *Τετρακόσια γράμματα του Καζαντζάκη* (Athens: Ekdoseis Kazantzaki 1984), p. 457. It has been suggested that this, implicitly, and not the open letter of 1943, marks the earliest recorded appearance of the “Cretan glance” (Alexiou, “Ιδεολογία και πραγματικότητα”, p. 136).

¹⁸ “Πέτρες γκριζες, σιδερόπετρες, γύμνια όλο φως” (*Βίος και πολιτεία*, p. 203 = *Zorba the Greek*, p. 170).

“palatial”: Kazantzakis is at pains to point up the maze of little streets, the workshops of the artisans. The site is called a “town” or “city”, certainly not a palace; within it, and presumably on a similar scale, is “the king’s palace”, placed next to the market-place with what Kazantzakis rather ambiguously calls “democratic consent”.¹⁹ Probably Kazantzakis had in mind a pre-palatial Minoan site, of which the best known is the town of Gournia (plausibly a three-hour walk from the part of the south coast where Zorba and the narrator are supposed to be mining lignite, as the text has it). These Minoans, exemplified by the industry of their craftsmen and their devotion to the Mother Goddess, are imagined as a humble collective, the whole town is compared more than once to an ant-heap. There is nothing here of the spectacular palace-culture that came to dominate Crete in the last centuries of the Bronze Age, and would result in the great palace complexes excavated at Knossos, Phaistos and Mallia and (perhaps) the enduring legends of Minos and the Minotaur.

Those had already earned a place in Kazantzakis’s imagination, and the way he recreated the “high” culture of Minoan civilisation at its peak is very different from what we find in this minor episode from *Zorba*.

* * *

In his monumental *Odyssey*, written between 1925 and 1938, Kazantzakis had given an important place to his native island. The action of books 5-8, of the twenty-four that make up the whole poem, is set there. Crete is the first landfall that Odysseus makes after leaving mainland Greece, and the second stop on a trajectory that will take him across the length of Africa, to end up in the vicinity of the South Pole. In this early part of the narrative, Kazantzakis’s sequel to Homer is still fairly action-packed; its early books are often reminiscent of the historical novels based on the same archaeological record, written a little later, for example

¹⁹ “[...] με δημοκρατικιά συγκατάβαση” (*Βίος και πολιτεία*, p. 204 = *Zorba the Greek*, p. 171).

by Mary Renault. Minoan Crete, in the final, decadent phase of its “palace culture” as depicted by Evans, is ripe for destruction. The palace of Knossos is depicted as a hothouse of depravity. The bull-leaping ritual, far from inspiring a balanced perspective on life and death, as Kazantzakis would later describe it when he came to define the “Cretan glance”, here becomes an outlet for bloodlust, thwarted incest, and ritual murder; its sequel includes a night-long orgy of sex, intoxication, and the frenzied consumption of raw flesh. Of all the exotic and disturbing practices that have been attributed to the Minoans since the rediscovery of their civilisation in 1900, only child sacrifice and ritual cannibalism are absent from Kazantzakis’s picture, although in some details he comes pretty close even to those. We can be sure that had the evidence for these things, that would come to light in the early 1980s, been available to Kazantzakis, he would have exploited their imaginative possibilities to the full.

As depicted in the *Odyssey*, the advanced and sophisticated civilisation of the Minoan palaces, in their final phase, stands as a memorable and powerful reflection of the decadent civilisation of his own day. The hero, the Greek Odysseus, plays a leading part in the timely destruction of this ghastly excrescence, mobilising the forces of internal disaffection and allying them with the external threat of the blond-haired newcomers, the Dorians, whose ships are massing just over the horizon. Crucial to the violent overthrow of the rotten palace of Knossos is the exploitation of new technology: with the Dorians comes the secret of forging iron. On top of everything else comes the superior intelligence of Homer’s hero, now remoulded by Kazantzakis to become, for a time, the necessary agent of historical change. It is Odysseus who exploits all these possibilities and draws them together. Before book 8 is over, the palace of Knossos has become a smoking ruin; Odysseus, for the time being accompanied by Helen of Sparta, is ready to move on.

Kazantzakis’s depiction of the palace society of Minoan Crete in the *Odyssey* (published in 1938) is the most negative that he ever produced. But even here there are indications that the hot-

house society of Knossos during the last days of the palace is not to be taken as the whole story. In vignettes Kazantzakis gives us glimpses into the lives of the humbler people of Minoan Crete, who seem much more like the Cretan peasants of his own day. The civilisation of the palaces may be a doomed outgrowth of the native Cretan spirit, as surely condemned to violent destruction as Kazantzakis believed that the bourgeois world of his own day was condemned; but in the pages of his *Odyssey* can also be found traces of a belief in a bedrock of little-changing human nature and experience, which perhaps is meant to imply a bond of continuity between those distant times and his own.

This view of Minoan civilisation as irrevocably alien to the later Hellenic spirit would change significantly towards the end of Kazantzakis's life – and, as I believe, for a very specific reason. But before that, during the 1940s, he would devote two whole works to revisiting the last days of the Palace of Minos, and to re-interpreting, in modern terms, the enduring legend of the Minotaur.

* * *

Neither of these works is at all well known. The novel for children, *In the Palace of Knossos*, was written in 1940 to be serialised in the magazine of the Metaxas youth movement [*Η Νεολαία*], but the publication was shelved because of Greece's entry into the Second World War, and the book did not see print until 1981.²⁰ The other is the verse drama *Kouros*, written during

²⁰ Nikos Kazantzakis, *Στα παλάτια της Κνωσού* (Athens: Ekdoseis Kazantzaki 1981). The English translation renders the title with irritating over-literalness: Nikos Kazantzakis, *At the palaces of Knossos*, trans. Theodora and Themis Vasils (London: Peter Owen 1988). The translators declare that they have worked from an early typescript of the book, which appears not to be identical to the version published in Greek; they have also re-edited it in ways which seem overall to be coherent but make it difficult to match the two texts in detail.

“a few days” in 1949 and first performed, in translation, on Swedish radio the following year.²¹

The novel for children, like its companion piece on the life of Alexander the Great, has been ignored by criticism, no doubt on the grounds that is not “serious” literature; the play is serious to the point of sententiousness, and has provoked some high-minded discussions.²² But nobody has so far thought of looking at these two works together, as variations on a common theme, that of the reinterpretation of Minoan civilisation by a Cretan writer shortly before the midpoint of the twentieth century.

In the Palace of Knossos begins with a young stranger spying out the palace of the title. It soon transpires that this is Theseus, son of the king of Athens. Athens is a backward place compared to Crete at this time, and (as in the legend) subject to the overlordship of Minos, king of Crete and ruler of the waves (as Evans believed about the historical Minoans). Soon the younger of the king’s two daughters, Ariadne, who is portrayed as a flighty schoolgirl, will be half in love with the handsome foreigner. A fast-moving intrigue soon develops, involving Ariadne’s slave and confidante Krinó, a fictional child-exile from Athens called Haris, and Minos’s chief of police, the thuggish Malís. There are walk-on parts for Daidalos and his son Ikaros, and tacked rather awkwardly on: the Minotaur. Neither the mythical monster nor King Minos had appeared in the Cretan episodes of Kazantzakis’s *Odyssey*, because according to Homer and tradition, Odysseus’s contemporary in Crete was Idomeneus, younger by two generations than the more famous Minos.

²¹ Nikos Kazantzakis, *Θέατρο, Α΄* (Athens: Ekdoseis Kazantzaki 1964), pp. 269-379. There is no English translation of this play. For a French translation see Nikos Kazantzakis, *Théâtre. Melissa, Kouros, Christophe Colomb*, trans. Liliane Princet – Nikos Athanassiou (Paris: Plon 1974). On the date and speed of writing see Kyriaki Petrakou, *Ο Καζαντζάκης και το θέατρο* (Athens: Militos 2005), p. 461.

²² See Peter Bien, *Nikos Kazantzakis: Politics of the spirit*, vol. 2 (Princeton: Princeton University Press 2007), pp. 356-62. Petrakou (*Ο Καζαντζάκης*, pp. 461-85) gives a full and well documented account of older interpretations.

But with that difference, the story that Kazantzakis tells in *In the Palace of Knossos* is essentially the same as he had told earlier in books 5-8 of his *Odyssey*. The place of King Idomeneus is taken by Minos himself; that of Odysseus by Theseus. The real meat of the story concerns the power-struggle between a top-heavy, indolent and corrupt Cretan civilisation and its up-and-coming vassal Athens. The encounter with the Minotaur is sidelined, and placed about two thirds of the way through: even the fabled monster is too miserable and exhausted to want to fight. Theseus is a thoroughly Aryan hero, cutting a swathe through the ranks of the Cretans whose palace he gleefully puts to the torch before fleeing with Ariadne and the survivors of their friends. As also in the *Odyssey*, great significance is given to the restless barbarian tribes from the north, who become the allies and helpers of Theseus as they had previously been for Odysseus, and also to the new secret weapon, iron. Together these historical forces make inevitable the overthrow of the bloated and overweening civilisation represented by the Palace of Minos. And at several points the novel looks forward to the future glory of Athens as chief representative of the Hellenic ideal of the classical period, which of course at the time of the action lay many centuries in the future.

In the Palace of Knossos is a surprisingly good read, and a case could even be made for it as Kazantzakis's first work that succeeds in telling a well-organised, well-paced fictional story in prose. In those respects the play *Kouros* could not be more different.

This is a verse drama in an uncompromising modernist mode. Like the contemporary dramas of T. S. Eliot in English, it strictly observes the classical unities of time, place, and action; all the action takes place off stage; verse is used to convey the most profound thoughts of characters who are the embodiments of abstract concepts, and the verse itself is modernist free verse, which in effect is little different from prose, divided arbitrarily into very long lines.

The central characters are only three: Theseus, Ariadne, Minos; what joins them is the monstrous Minotaur, an invisible

but heard presence throughout, but who only appears in the play's very last lines.

Theseus is once again an Aryan hero, muscle-bound and impetuous, but also a dreamer; before coming to Crete he has experienced a homoerotic vision of a new god whose day has not yet dawned, but who will be the embodiment of an ideal of male beauty and harmony – an ideal that the reader can already recognise as that realised in the statues of the classical period, of which the earliest are the so-called *kouroi* (youths) dating from the seventh and sixth centuries BCE – hence the play's title, *Kouros*. Theseus is therefore a man of the future; and this future, with its strong element of homoeroticism, is explicitly predicated on sexual abstinence, at least where women are concerned. Ariadne in this play appears in the guise of temptress; but she also embodies the dark forces of the declining civilisation of Crete, with its atavistic ritual of bull-wrestling, at which she excels, and its cloying, outmoded matriarchy and devotion to the Mother Goddess. Theseus contemptuously rejects Ariadne several times; the labyrinth is at one point redesignated as “woman”, her blood-line is condemned as “tainted”, since Ariadne is also the half-sister of the Minotaur.²³

Theseus will do business only with the male. King Minos this time turns out to have learned a degree of wisdom in his old age, and recognises in his young adversary the graft of vigorous, healthy growth that will be needed if the bloodstock of his people is to outlast him (a perennial preoccupation of Kazantzakis). In the end, Minos is prepared to recognise Theseus as his heir, a solution that had also been proposed, only to be brushed aside as unworthy, in the more swashbuckling world of the novel for children. The struggle with the Minotaur takes place; in the course of it the palace is shaken to the foundations. But when Theseus emerges from the labyrinth, his riddling words suggest that

²³ ΑΡΙΑΔΝΗ: ... φοβάσαι ... το σκοτεινό, δροσερό λαβύρινθο του κορμιού μου (*Θέατρο, Α'*, p. 298). ΘΗΣΕΑΣ: Το αίμα το δικό σας είναι ανακατεμένο με θεούς και με ζώα, μολεμένο, ξεπνεμένο, δεν μπορεί να να θρέψει υγιούς και θυγατέρες – (*Θέατρο, Α'*, p. 297).

writing system – not even the relatively common linear scripts of the Knossos clay tablets but one modelled on the enigmatic Phaistos disk.²⁸

The same antithesis is maintained, if anything even more strongly, in the drama. Theseus's speeches early in the play give prominence to many archaeologically attested details, but do so through the eyes of a visitor to whom this whole world is uncompromisingly alien. Theseus scornfully dismisses the whole of Minoan society as: "a great empire, much-indulged, mounted by the bull, all make-up and ornament and perfumes, to cover up its stink".²⁹

On the other side stands Athens, or as a minor character puts it, "the unfettered soul of lean-boned Hellas".³⁰ Athenians, according to Theseus, are "peasants, we wear sheepskins, we sleep on the ground, we eat with our hands".³¹ But theirs, it is quite clear, is to be the future. Athens is associated with masculinity, its new god is provocatively to be a nude male; Crete with femininity, with the cloying pleading of Ariadne, with "incomprehensible spells" addressed to a female deity.³² An even stronger contrast is between light and dark: the Cretans are repeatedly described as dark-skinned and contrasted with the "fair-haired" Theseus, his fellow-Athenians, and their barbarian allies.³³ Ariadne, like the rest of Minoan civilisation, is strongly associated with the moon; by implication that leaves the sun for the emblem of the Greeks. When the word "Hellene" and its derivatives are

²⁸ Language: *Στα παλάτια*, p. 214 = *At the Palaces*, p. 97. Writing: *Στα παλάτια*, pp. 159-60 = *At the Palaces*, p. 66.

²⁹ "[...] μια μεγάλη αυτοκρατορία, πολυφιλημένη, ταυροπηδημένη, όλο φκιασίδια και στολίδια κι αρώματα, για να σκεπάσει τη βρώμα της" (*Θέατρο, Α'*, p. 272).

³⁰ "Είσαι η λεύτερη ψυχή της λιανοκόκαλης Ελλάδας" (*Θέατρο, Α'*, p. 277).

³¹ "Είμαστε χωριάτες, φορούμε κριαρίσιες προβιές, κοιμούμαστε κατάχαμα, τρώμε με τα χέρια μας" (*Θέατρο, Α'*, p. 303).

³² ΘΗΣΕΑΣ: Χόρευαν γύρα μου, βαταλαλώντας τ' ακατανόητα ξόρκια τους (*Θέατρο, Α'*, p. 269).

³³ See e.g. *Θέατρο, Α'*, p. 279 for the terms *μελαχρινοί*, *ξανθοί* that recur throughout.

used in the play, they always refer to the inhabitants of the mainland. In both the children's book and the play, the Minoans are presented as wholly un-Hellenic, in language, culture, and religion – exactly as Evans had insisted that they should be, and as Kazantzakis would claim too, in his open letter of 1943, in which he would claim kinship with them.

* * *

But this is not the end of the story. Before his death in 1957, Kazantzakis would return to the topic of Minoan civilisation and its archaeological traces one more time. The autobiographical novel, or fictionalised autobiography, *Report to Greco*, was written between 1955 and his death in 1957, although as Peter Bien points out, it also recycles a good deal of material that had been written before this.³⁴ Towards the end of the book, a visit to the excavated and partially restored archaeological site of Knossos becomes the occasion for an epiphany.³⁵ Kazantzakis in his autobiography was notoriously negligent about facts and dates; supposedly this moment of epiphany was one of the events that triggered the entire composition of his *Odyssey*, and must therefore be placed at the time of his return visit to Crete in 1924, shortly before he began work on the poem. But what he says he learned from the frescoes, in which lithe Minoan acrobats confront the brute force of the bull, Kazantzakis seems not to have put into words until almost twenty years after that, when he wrote his open letter for *Nea Estia* in 1943. His actual opinion of the Minoan inhabitants of his native island, at the time when he began writing his *Odyssey*, is revealed in the poem itself as much more negative.

More revealing still of the change in Kazantzakis's attitude towards the Minoans over time is a passage that comes earlier in *Report to Greco*. There he writes:

³⁴ Bien, *Politics*, vol. 2, pp. 537-42.

³⁵ *Αναφορά στον Γκρέκο*, pp. 479-82 = *Report to Greco*, pp. 484-7. See also note 9 above.

Crete was the first bridge to link Europe, Asia, and Africa; Crete was the first place to be enlightened in Europe, that was then totally dark. And here the *spirit of Greece* [my italics] accomplished its fateful mission: it brought god down to a human scale. The giant immovable statues of the Egyptians or the Assyrians here, in Crete, became smaller, acquired grace, the body began to move, the mouth to smile; the expression and stature of the god took on the expression and stature of man. A new form of humanity lived and played on Cretan soil, something original, distinct from the Hellenes who would come later, something svelte and graceful and full of oriental luxury.³⁶

The prominence given to sculpture is reminiscent of the play *Kouros*; but there the decisive, humanising step in art history was still imagined as being far in the future, foreshadowed only by Theseus's vision and the miraculous transformation of the Minotaur. In first putting into words his concept of the "Cretan glance", back in 1943, Kazantzakis had ascribed already to the Minoans what he called a "synthesis", something that lay midway between the ancient Hellenic and the "Oriental". But there he had placed the emphasis on the vital *difference*, as he had then perceived it, between that Minoan "synthesis" and the later Hellenic spirit, with which (echoing Evans) the Minoans had nothing in common.

Now, in *Report to Greco*, it is *Minoan* art itself that first effects the evolution from the monumentalism of Egypt and the Middle East towards the human scale of the later Hellenic. Nothing of this can be found in anything written by Kazantzakis on the subject earlier. In ascribing the workings of the "spirit of

³⁶ "Η Κρήτη στάθηκε το πρώτο γιοφύρι ανάμεσα Ευρώπης, Ασίας κι Αφρικής· η Κρήτη φωτίστηκε πρώτη σε όλη την κατασκότεινη τότε Ευρώπη. Κι εδώ η *ψυχή της Ελλάδας* [η έμφαση δική μου] εξετέλεσε τη μοιραία της αποστολή: έφερε το θεό στην κλίμακα του ανθρώπου. Τα τεράστια ασάλευτα αιγυπτιακά ή ασσυριακά αγάλματα έγιναν εδώ, στην Κρήτη, μικρά, χαριτωμένα, το σώμα κινήθηκε, το στόμα χαμογέλασε, και το πρόσωπο και το μπί του θεού πήρε το πρόσωπο και το μπί του ανθρώπου. Μια ανθρωπότητα καινούρια έζησε κι έπαιξε στα κρητικά χώματα, πρωτότυπη, διαφορετικά από τους κατοπινοούς Έλληνες, όλο ευκινησία και χάρη κι ανατολίτικη χλιδή..." (*Αναφορά στον Γκρέκο*, p. 151 = *Report to Greco*, p. 151).

Greece” already to Minoan Crete, Kazantzakis has tacitly allowed himself to do something that Evans had always stood out against: he has domesticated the “exotic”, “alien” Minoans as *Greek*.

So, what had happened since the 1920s, and even since the late 1940s, to bring about such a change in Kazantzakis’s attitude? The answer, I believe, lies in the decipherment of Linear B that had been announced in 1952. Thanks to the work of Michael Ventris and his collaboration with the classicist John Chadwick, since that year we have known that the language inscribed on clay tablets, found in large numbers from the final phase of the Bronze Age palace at Knossos, is Greek.

The decipherment of Linear B does not in itself mean that the *builders* of the Minoan palaces were Greeks. The earlier Minoan script, known as Linear A, remains largely undeciphered, as do several other forms of picture writing known from Crete during the Bronze Age, including most famously that used on the Phaistos Disk. But psychologically, for Kazantzakis, as for many others after him, the breakthrough seems to have changed his whole perspective on the Minoans. Certainly, when one looks more widely at the Greek literature of the second half of the twentieth century, it is from the 1950s onwards, and not before, that Minoans and Minoan civilisation begin to become naturalised in the Greek literary imagination.³⁷ Kazantzakis is not the only modern Greek writer, though I believe he was one of the first, to have begun to accept the Minoans, after 1952, as part of the continuity of Hellenism. But it was a very different story back in the 1920s, and even in the 1940s, when Kazantzakis was writing his children’s books, *Zorba*, and the strange drama *Kouros*.

From being the simple antithesis of everything Hellenic, the Minoans in Kazantzakis’s literary imagination have become assimilated to an expanded composite sense of Hellenism. Kazantzakis’s Minoans, at the very end of his life, have come to be woven into an imagined diachronic synthesis of Hellenism –

³⁷ See Beaton, “Minoans”.

which is pretty much where they remain today in the communal imagination of Crete in the early twenty-first century.

How much, finally, does all this matter? I think it matters in two rather different ways. First of all, I believe that the imagination of influential writers, such as Kazantzakis, has an important part to play in shaping the communal sense of identity of nations and, perhaps in this case, also of regions. To explore the twists and turns through which Kazantzakis negotiated an identity for himself in relation to what was known during his lifetime about the Minoan past of his native island, may help to explain the continuing process by which a distinctive regional identity has developed in Crete during the last half century or so. It is, for instance, indicative that even when he came closest to Evans in emphasising the contrast between the Minoan and the Hellenic, Kazantzakis vigorously denied any suggestion that might seem to threaten the perceived harmonious homogeneity of the Modern Greek nation: although Kazantzakis's views changed and developed over time, there is never the slightest trace in his writings of what might be termed "Cretan separatism". And indeed, in the social history of Crete in modern times, this development, that might have been expected, on the analogy of other European states in the late twentieth century, is almost wholly absent.

But the issue of how Kazantzakis defined himself, through his writing, as a Cretan, is an important one for the literary understanding of Kazantzakis as a writer. The quest for identity is an abiding theme of many of his most important works. In *Zorba*, the unnamed "Boss", who tells the story, is an intellectual in search of his own true nature. In *Christ Recrucified* and *The Last Temptation*, a spiritually troubled young man struggles to find the secret of his own identity, and ends by identifying himself with the role of the Saviour or Messiah laid down in sacred scripture.³⁸ And in *Report to Greco*, Kazantzakis's none too truthful autobiography, the semi-fictionalised hero is in search of a mission that will

³⁸ See Roderick Beaton, "Writing, identity and truth in Kazantzakis's novel, *The Last Temptation*", *Κάμπος: Cambridge Papers in Modern Greek* 5 (1997) 1-21.

define him and give meaning to a life that he believes would otherwise be meaningless and contemptible.

Coming to terms with his distinctively Cretan identity, and with the exotic legacy of his Minoan forebears, Kazantzakis, in the works I have been discussing here, grapples with the same question in his own life as an artist: who am I? Where do I come from? Where am I going? To return to the open question with which I began, if Zorba is "*the Greek*", then surely his creator, Kazantzakis, is every bit as much "*the Cretan*".

Erotokritos into music*

Natalia Deliyannaki

Για τον πάλαι ποτέ “Κορνάρο”

The passage of *Erotokritos* into music is certainly only one of many facets of its reception. Two of the intersecting circles into which Kornaros’s romance has spread, namely theatre and folk culture, involve music. We shall not be concerned here either with music written for dramatic performances of the work or with its folk tune, although, predictably enough, we shall come across the latter. We shall further limit ourselves to an attempt to track down individual compositions related to *Erotokritos* by composers who, having studied and worked on classical music, employ various, mostly classical, musical forms. Not being a musicologist, I could not possibly aspire to present these compositions for what they are; it has been disappointing, though, that I have not been able to listen to most of the works in question, as few are available on record – and some of them are lost. Therefore, I can only hope to offer a hint of the extent to which the seventeenth-century Cretan romance has provided a challenge, as in so many other domains, to “learned” music.

It is only fair to begin by mentioning the Phanariot *Νέος Ερωτόκριτος* by Dionysios Photeinos, published in Vienna in

* Preliminary research – and much of the information reproduced here – was based mainly on Aleka Symeonidou, *Λεξικό Ελλήνων συνθετών. Βιογραφικό–εργογραφικό* (Athens: Filippos Nakas 1995). I am indebted to George Tsontakis, as well as to Eleni Karaindrou, for information on their respective compositions on *Erotokritos*; my gratitude also goes to conductor Vyron Fidetzis for his most willing response to my queries on the earlier works in question, those by Katakouzenos, Kalomoiris and Albertis, and definitely not least to Giorgos Kouroupos, who first came to my rescue.

1818. This two-volume work runs to 13,233 lines of an unprecedented metrical variety, more than a quarter of which has nothing to do with the original Cretan text. The major additions, interacting with a great amount of “emphatically lyrical”¹ transformations of chosen passages of *Erotokritos*, are carefully planned to enhance, as well as to renew, the balance of the overall structure: a considerable number of songs and other self-contained passages in the first part, two symmetrical sets of dialogues around which evolves the third part, various laments, of course, and a brand new *finale*, a “Gran Finale” as George Savidis has accurately pointed out.² The songs grafted into *New Erotokritos*, which include some of the “hits” of the period (both oriental and westernising), are combined with various “arias” throughout the adaptation; both the inner structure of these self-contained passages and their position in the work evoke opera. In addition, besides the familiar structure of the dialogues (which, needless to say, are interspersed with “arias”), there are four passages in the central and one in the final part obviously meant as proper “duets”, with their lines or even half-lines rapidly alternating between the lovers. The Poet’s well-known digressions commenting on the plot, to which a few more are added, also stand out as “arias”: called “Παραρτήματα” by Photeinos, they are metrically and typographically distinguished from the narration. There are also “roles” for small groups, such as the defeated soldiers in the first part, which emphatically depart from the narration or the speeches by means of their metre. Another striking feature of *New Erotokritos* is the characterisation of each minor person by his peculiar metrical form, his peculiar “tune”. Last but not least, the very form of the “Gran Finale” (everyone “on stage” together with choruses and semi-choruses) clearly shows that “Photeinos’s

¹ Cf. G. P. Savvidis, “Και άλλη φαναριώτικη διασκευή της «Θυσίας του Αβραάμ»”, in: Κωνσταντίνου Δαπόντε [...], *Η Θυσία του Ιεφθάε και Ιστορία της Σωσάννης*, φιλολογική αποκατάσταση και τυπογραφική ερμηνεία Γ. Π. Σαββίδη (Athens: Istos 1993), p. 188.

² G. P. Savvidis, “Αναλυτικά περιεχόμενα του *Νέου Ερωτοκρίτου* Διονυσίου Φωτεινού του εκ Παλαιών Πατρών”, *Τόμος Τιμητικός Κ. Ν. Τριανταφύλλου* (Patras 1990), p. 418.

musical experience was not confined to Byzantine chant and oriental *makams*, and that his innovative adaptation of *Erotokritos* was not irrelevant to Italian opera”.³ The tastes of the public *New Erotokritos* aimed to satisfy undoubtedly included opera – as well, it seems, as the reading of librettos.⁴

The dramatic qualities of *Erotokritos* – emphasised for the first time not only by the structure Photeinos worked out for his adaptation but also by means of the lavish layout of his book⁵ – have led to an increasing number of stage productions since the first decades of the twentieth century. It should come as no surprise, however, that the Cretan romance first emerged in the nineteenth century – and repeatedly since – as a challenge to the *lyric* theatre.⁶ So it was that the first in a succession of compositions related to *Erotokritos* was a proper opera.

1. Alexandros Katakouzenos, *Η Αρετούσα των Αθηνών* (opera, 1861)

Aretousa of Athens, one of two operas by Alexandros Katakouzenos, appears to have been performed in Odessa in 1861.⁷ Of a notable Smyrna family, grandson of Konstantinos Koumas,

³ Ibid.

⁴ Charisios Megdanis, for example, in his *Καλλιόπη παλινοστούσα ή Περί ποιητικής μεθόδου* (Vienna 1819), pp. 45, 47, 62, 63, quotes several examples from operas ([στίχοι] “έκτινος Μελοδράματος του Ορφέως ληφθέντες”, “έκτινος Μελοδράματος ληφθέντες”, “έκτινος Μελοδράματος ανεκδότου”) – in Modern Greek.

⁵ For some details concerning *Νέος Ερωτόκριτος* see Natalia Deliyanaki, “Το Gran Finale της φαναριώτικης στιχουργίας”, *Κονδυλοφόρος* 6 (2007) 11-36.

⁶ Cf. note 10.

⁷ Th. N. Synadinos, *Ιστορία της νεοελληνικής μουσικής. 1824-1919* (Athens 1919), p. 196; however, according to a probably unreliable note by Spyros G. Motsenigos, *Νεοελληνική μουσική. Συμβολή εις την ιστορίαν της* (Athens 1958), p. 313, it was the other opera by Katakouzenos, *Αντώνιος Φωσκαρίνος*, which was performed instead. On Katakouzenos see also Symeonidou, op. cit., p. 182 and Dimitris G. Themelis, “Η μουσική συλλογή από την ιδιωτική βιβλιοθήκη του Όθωνα της Ελλάδας”, *Ελληνικά* 31 (1979) 463-5.

Katakouzenos was born in Trieste in 1824 and studied music in Paris and Vienna. He stayed on in Vienna for seventeen years as the choirmaster of the Greek church (1844-61), contributing in his turn to applying western four-part harmony to Byzantine music; he then took a similar post in the Holy Trinity Greek church of Odessa (1861-70), until he was appointed by Queen Olga as choirmaster of the newly established palace chapel in Athens, with the task of officially introducing polyphony into Greek Orthodox church music. His interest in opera never waned: he encouraged the first attempt to set up an opera company in Greece and translated a number of librettos from the Italian. He died in Athens in 1892, having also composed “a large amount of colourless verse”⁸ as well as many songs and poems for children, including the all-time classic “Το αρνάκι” (“Αρνάκι άσπρο και παχύ...”).

What was it that drove Katakouzenos, in the mid-nineteenth century, to compose an opera based on *Erotokritos*? The fact is in itself remarkable given the “discredit” into which the romance had fallen “in enlightened parts of Greece”, as W. M. Leake put it in 1814;⁹ on the other hand, of course, there had been at least sixteen reprints of the work between 1800 and 1860, not to mention its Phanariot adaptation, already translated into Romanian verse and about to appear in its third Greek edition.

It is worth noting the title of this opera for two reasons: first, because of the way it shifts the emphasis from the hero to the heroine, indicating that the composer and his librettist were aware of Kornaros’s chief interest in Aretousa or, at least, that they were chiefly interested in her; and, secondly, because it projects the name of what had become the capital of the young Greek state. But how did Katakouzenos handle his opera? Which text did he work on, to begin with? Would it have been based on the original in one of its numerous Venetian reprints or might the whole enter-

⁸ K. Th. Dimaras, *Ιστορία της νεοελληνικής λογοτεχνίας. Από τις πρώτες ρίζες ως την εποχή μας* (Athens: Ikaros 1985), p. 301.

⁹ William Martin Leake, “Erotocritus”, *Researches in Greece* (London 1814), p. 116.

prise have something to do with *New Erotokritos* (if we disregard the fact that Photeinos, unlike Katakouzenos, opts for the formal “Areti”)? If Katakouzenos did not employ an Italian libretto (and we simply do not know), then *Aretousa of Athens*, and not Spyridon Xyndas’s *Ο υποψήφιος βουλευτής* (1867), would be the first opera by a Greek composer to have been composed in Greek.

We may never find out anything more about this work. The libretto and its author remain unknown to us,¹⁰ as does the opera as a whole. However, the instrumental parts of its Overture have recently been discovered at the Athens Conservatoire (which Katakouzenos was actively involved in establishing and running); they have been restored and put together, and what remains of the first Erotokritian opera was performed by the Thessaloniki Municipal Symphony Orchestra conducted by Vyron Fidetzis on 29 January 2003. The conductor, who has readily provided information on the fate of this opera, has described its Overture as a composition somewhere between Schubert and Rossini.

2. Manolis Kalomoiris, *Ρωμαίικη σουίτα για μεγάλη ορχήστρα* (1907, revised 1910 and 1936)

Manolis Kalomoiris, the chief proponent of the “National School” of Modern Greek music, also came from Smyrna, where he was born in 1883. He continued his musical studies in Athens, Constantinople and Vienna. Before assuming his long and imposing career in composition and music education in Athens, where he died in 1962, he worked for a time as a piano teacher in Kharkov

¹⁰ Ch. Anninos had heard of the opera but knew nothing about its libretto; see Charalambis Anninos, “Παράστασις του Ερωτοκρίτου (Έθιμον των Απόκρεω)”, *Εστία Εικονογραφημένη* 1 (1890) 119: “Ήδύνατο δεξιός τις εκ των παρ’ ημίν δραματικών συγγραφέων να αρυσθή εξαίρετον ύλην προς καταρτισμόν δραματικού έργου εκ του ποιήματος αυτού και μουσουργός τις επιτυχέστατον θέμα προς συγγραφήν μελοδράματος. Ήκουσα ότι ο κ. Κατακουζηνός επεχείρησε τοιοῦτο τι άλλοτε και συνέθετο μελόδραμα υπό τον τίτλον Αρετούσα, αγνωώ επί τίνος libretto, αλλά δυστυχώς η επικρατούσα αμουσία και η περί τα πάτρια αξιοκατάκριτος αστοργία δεν επέτρεψαν μέχρι τούδε ν’ ακούσωμεν αυτό από της σκηνής του θεάτρου όπως και πολλά άλλα αξιόλογα προϊόντα νεωτέρων Ελλήνων μουσουργών.”

(1906-10), where he had the chance virtually denied to him in musically conservative Vienna to study closely the music of the new Russian School – a main influence on his work along with the German/Wagnerian model. It was during this period that he composed his *Ρωμαίικη σουίτα*.

The *Greek Suite* was first performed on 11 June 1908, dedicated to Psycharis, in an arrangement for two pianos by the composer: “αφιερωμένη του μεγάλου Δασκάλου της Ρωμοισύνης Ψυχάρη (βόλεμα για δυο πιάνο από το συνθέτη).”¹¹ This was Kalomoiris’s first concert in Athens, at the Athens Conservatoire, which also included shorter pieces for piano and song-settings of poems by Malakasis, Palamas, Pallis and himself. A sworn demoticist, Kalomoiris wrote and published the programme in demotic, causing an uproar; as a compromise the programme was eventually handed out in French to a reluctant audience who replied: “Thank you, we have the Greek one.”¹² It contained what is regarded as the manifesto of the “National School” of Modern Greek music:

The composer who today presents, for the first time, a small part of the beginning of his work has dreamt of creating a truly national music, based on the one hand on the music of our pure folk songs, but decorated on the other with all the technical means given to us by the ceaseless work of musically advanced peoples, and first of all of the Germans, French, Russians and Norwegians.

In order to achieve the harmonic close-knit of these dissimilar elements, the artist thought it right to rely upon our living literature. [...]

It is important to note that [he] avoids direct borrowing of folk-song melodies in his work, because he believes that

¹¹ From the programme of the concert as published in *Ο Νουμάς* 299 (8 June 1908) 5.

¹² For an account of the concert and the reactions to the programme (a typical title, in Pop’s newspaper *Αθήναι*, was “Συναυλία με κοτσίδες”) see Manolis Kalomoiris, *Η ζωή μου και η τέχνη μου. Απομνημονεύματα 1883-1908* (Athens: Nefeli 1988), pp. 143-52, first published in *Νέα Εστία* 398-431 (January 1944-June 1945).

systematic borrowing from national melodies scarcely helps a national music to develop; but the themes in some of his large-scale works (*Greek Suite*, *Ballads* and others) and the melodies in some of his songs have been built on the rhythm, the scales and the character of our folk songs. [...] This has to be the aim of every truly national music, to build the Palace for the *national soul* to dwell!

Now, there's no harm in the artist using foreign material alongside the local stuff in order to build his palace, provided that his palace is founded on Greek soil, made to be enjoyed by Greek eyes, to be regarded as a genuine Greek palace.¹³

The central piece of the concert, the *Greek Suite*, was clearly meant to illustrate all this; the titles of its movements speak for themselves:

Από τα παραμύθια της γριάς (From the old woman's tales)
 Σαν παιχνίδι και σα νανούρισμα (As a game and as a lullaby, a
 movement removed in later revisions)
 Από τον Ερωτόκριτο και την Αρετούσα (From Erotokritos and
 Aretousa, with a motto from the third part of the romance)
 Σα χορός και σα χωρατό (As a dance and as a joke)
 Το παλάτι (The palace)

Kostis Palamas, who had urged the case for a critical edition of *Erotokritos*, in *Noumas* in 1906, the same year that Kalomoiris started working on his *Greek Suite*, and on whose poetry – and Psycharis's – the last movement was based, saluted the young composer in a poem published immediately after the concert on the front page of the same demoticist bastion, concluding with the poet's ideal:¹⁴

¹³ “Λίγα λόγια”, *Ο Νουμάς* 299 (8 June 1908) 4, now also in Kalomoiris, *Η ζωή μου και η τέχνη μου*, pp. 145-6.

¹⁴ See respectively: Kostis Palamas, “Σούτσος και Κορνάρος”, *Ο Νουμάς* 195 (23 April 1906) 1-3 and “Στο μουσικό Μανόλη Καλομοίρη”, *Ο Νουμάς* 300 (15 June 1908) 1.

conveniently reprinted in 1930,¹⁸ perhaps with some minor changes. The four-act structure remains, as does the Prologue, discreetly criticised by Lalaouni as rather lengthy.

In its printed form at least, Synadinos's *Erotokritos* incorporates the fourth part of the romance, up to Aretousa's imprisonment, in the third act, and in the final, fourth, act presents a very brief account of the war and the Athenians' victory over the Vlachs thanks to Erotokritos, who soon enters and asks for Aretousa's hand; the play, and in all probability the opera too, ends with the recognition scene. The Poet's role is confined to the Prologue and his final identification, whereas the narration is taken over by the characters (some of them invented to this end) who comment on or summarise the plot.

What about the music? Composer Antiochos Evangelatos was among the few present at the performance and, as his son Spyros Evangelatos has told Vyron Fidetzis, recalled it as an interesting though rather flat composition. Alexandra Lalaouni provides a few more clues:

Albertis was right to seek his inspiration in Cretan folk songs, to envelop the poem with music inspired by the same environment whence sprung this magnificent hymn to Love, Faith and Beauty. And he sought his inspiration in our Cretan mountains and poured it into music which is new, fresh, refreshing and original, into new orchestral combinations, into an undreamt-of variety of rhythms. And it is strange that he managed to compose music worthy of the work, to depict the medieval atmosphere, to render Kornaros's decapentasyllable

¹⁸ Th. N. Synadinos, *Θέατρον. V. Διασκευή του κρητικού έπους του Βιτζέντζου Κορνάρου Ερωτόκριτος. (Δράμα σε τέσσερα μέρη)*, έκδοση δεύτερη (Athens: Ekdotika Katastimata "Akropoleos" 1930). Cf. N. Cartoijan, "Le modèle français de l'Érotokritos", poème crétois du XVII^e siècle", *Revue de Littérature Comparée* 16 (1936) 266: "en 1929, le dramaturge si populaire qu'est Th. N. Synadinos en a tiré une pièce de théâtre. Le succès de cette adaptation à la scène a provoqué l'émulation d'un compositeur, M. Albertis, qui a fait un opéra sur le livret de Synadinos; composition chantée l'hiver dernier à l'Olympia d'Athènes."

with innovations both in song and orchestra, which employed saxophones and *viololyres* made by the composer himself to convey the sound of the Cretan lyra.¹⁹

Lalaouni particularly singles out the accompaniment to the Prologue, Erotokritos's "matinata", the duet of Aretousa and Frosyni, the lovers' duet in the third act, and the third act as a whole. Sadly, we shall never know for ourselves.

4a-c. Nikos Mamangakis, *Ο Ερωτόκριτος του Βιτζέντζου Κορνάρου. Μπαλλάντα για τρεις φωνές και πέντε όργανα* (1964), *Ο Ερωτόκριτος, σουίτα μπαλέτου για πέντε όργανα* (1967) and *Ballade d'Érotokritos* (2006)

5. Nikos Mamangakis, *Ερωτόκριτος* (ballet, 1965)

Our next composition appears in 1964, this time in an LP issued by "Lyra", a record company also noted for its series of poets' reading their own poetry.²⁰ It is a "Ballad for three voices and five instruments", the first *Erotokritos* by Nikos Mamangakis, which inaugurates a stream of compositions related to the romance by composers of Cretan descent.

Born in Rethymno in 1929, Mamangakis studied at the Hellenic Conservatoire in Athens and at the Music Academy of Munich, with Carl Orff among others. He has employed various techniques and achieved remarkable combinations of sound and rhythm in a "characteristic structural balance".²¹ His compositions include two "Cretan Renaissance" operas, *Erofilis* and *Erotokritos and Aretousa*, to which we shall return, and many works of vocal, orchestral, electronic and chamber music, and music for solo instruments, as well as music for the stage, television and cinema.

¹⁹ Lalaouni, op. cit. This violin-shaped type of lyra was actually developed in the 1920s, a period coinciding with Albertis's first stay in Crete.

²⁰ It is worth noting that George Seferis, who was among them, kept in his copy of Xanthoudidis's edition of *Erotokritos* an invitation to hear the recording of Mamangakis's work, to be introduced by G. Leotsakos, at the Technology Institute of Athens on Tuesday 8 December 1964.

²¹ Symeonidou, op. cit., p. 248.

- I. Φαντασία – Ομηρικός ύμνος (Fantasy – Homeric hymn)
- II. Νυχτερινό – Ραψωδία – Ρωμαίος και Ιουλιέττα (Nocturne – Rhapsody – Romeo and Juliette)
- III. Μπαλάντα – Εμβατήριο του Ερωτόκριτου – Στα δίχτυα του έρωτα (Ballad – Erotokritos’s march – In the nets of love)
- IV. Θέμα και παραλλαγές για τον Τρωίλο και τη Χρυσήδα (Theme and variations for Troilus and Cressida)

8. George Tsontakis, *Erotokritos*. An Oratorio-Drama (1982)

On 15 May 1982, George Tsontakis’s *Erotokritos* had its full-house premiere in New York, at the Alice Tully Hall, Lincoln Center. Tsontakis, a Juilliard School doctoral candidate in composition at the time, was born in Astoria in 1951. A highly acclaimed composer and the recipient of numerous commissions, fellowships and major distinctions in classical composition, such as the recent Grawemeyer Award (2005) and Charles Ives Living (2006), he has composed music for chamber ensembles, solo instruments, orchestra, choir and soloists, which is frequently performed and increasingly recorded by eminent musicians in the USA and Europe.

On his first visit to his grandparents’ native Crete, he kept hearing a tune his grandfather used to sing: the *Erotokritos* “hymn”, as he calls it relating it to Byzantine chant, was to open and occasionally recur in the composition he soon embarked on, sung “in the style of folk singers” by the only soloists in the work, representing Erotokritos and Aretousa – Grigoris Maninakis and Elli Paspala in the New York performance. The two lovers were also each represented by an actor and a dancer. The others parts were played by actors only, who “conversed” with almost continuous orchestral and choral music. This 90-minute performance was a collaboration of the Metropolitan Greek Chorale, the Greek Theater of New York and the Phaestos Chamber Symphony, conducted by the composer and directed by Loukas Skipitaris, who had jointly adapted the “script”. The original Cretan text was “effectively condensed [...] to a dramatic skeleton treated in 11

scenes”,²³ with a prose narration in English incorporating lines from the translation by Theodore Ph. Stephanides, who had granted permission for its use before publication.

What is this modern oratorio-drama like? According to Tsontakis, the conception is rather abstract: “What’s left out of the oratorio is the solos, and what’s left out of the drama is the plot and continuity. It’s all reconciled by music.”²⁴ “The unusual fusion of spoken Greek poetry rendered dramatically, English narration, choral commentary in the ancient Greek manner, dance as a symbolic enactment of the plot and music brought to mind such modern hybrids as Stravinsky’s *Oedipus* and Penderecki’s *Paradise Lost*”, says a reviewer, the music – the choral settings in particular – having a “ring” of Schoenberg and the second Viennese school. “One suspects that there is an opera-in-progress underneath the surface of this *Erotokritos* and that such a treatment might be well suited to the material”, he concludes.²⁵

It is interesting that a New York reviewer, who had understandably failed to see in the elusive Cretan romance much beyond “an entertaining story”, should make this connection. And, although George Tsontakis has assured me that he did not have anything “historical” in mind, I cannot help thinking that his *Erotokritos* may also be “winking” at the time when oratorio actually was opera’s twin.

9. Dimitris Kapsomenos, *Τρία προελούντια, για εννέα εκτελεστές* (1983)

An interlude between large-scale compositions is offered at this point by Dimitris Kapsomenos (1937-1994), who grew up in Chania and studied first there, and later in Athens and Italy. He composed vocal, orchestral, choral, stage and chamber music, and experimented with unusual instrumental combinations. The last of

²³ Theodore W. Libbey, “Oratorio: ‘Erotokritos’ by Tsontakis”, *The New York Times* (17.5.1982).

²⁴ Theodore W. Libbey, “Chorus to sing Crete’s love epic”, *The New York Times* (14.5.1982).

²⁵ Libbey, “Oratorio: ‘Erotokritos’ by Tsontakis”.

Three preludes for nine performers, which he composed in 1983, is entitled “*Erotokritos*”, the previous ones being “*Μνήμες*” (“*Memories*”) and “*Βυζαντινό*” (“*Byzantine*”).

10. Nikos Mamangakis, *Ερωτόκριτος και Αρετούσα* (opera, 1985)

Nikos Mamangakis’s *Erotokritos and Aretousa*, an opera “of a new concept” in five parts, was commissioned by the Municipality of Heraklion, was performed at the Heraklion Summer Festival in 1985 (and shown live on local TV), was recorded in October of the same year and was soon released as a double LP produced by Manos Chatzidakis’s “*Seirios*”; a new recording came out in 2006.

In 1985, the Poet’s part was shared by Manos Moundakis and Spyros Sakkas, who also performed the role of the King; those of Aretousa and Erotokritos were interpreted by Savina Yannatou and Yannis Samsiaris; Nena was sung – very appropriately – by Nena Venetzanou, and the parts of Polydoros, Pezostratos and Aristos by Panos Zacharatos. The 2006 Poets A and B are Yannis Idomeneos and the composer; Erotokritos shifts from tenor to the baritone Tassis Christoyannopoulos, Foteini Darra sings the part of Aretousa and Angeliki Kathariou that of Frosyni.

The libretto, by the composer, with the assistance of Vassilis Nikolaidis, is a selected one tenth of Kornaros’s text. Of his compositions back in the ’60s Mamangakis employs only the “nucleus” of Aretousa’s two songs, the Prologue, and the joust theme; the rest of a total of 55 musical pieces, as well as the structure as a whole, are new. Four choruses are added, sung in 1985 by the Heraklion Municipal Choir – their natural Cretan accents discreetly exploited. A string quintet and three wind instruments (clarinet, trumpet and trombone) are used alongside a mandolin “decorating” the Poet’s part and a harpsichord is employed throughout the work as a kind of *continuo*.²⁶

²⁶ See the composer’s note on the sleeve of the LP.

In the description of musicologist Yannis Papaioannou, this opera seeks to combine, more systematically than ever before in the composer's work, original Cretan folk elements, joined to Cretan Renaissance ones, with a daringly atonal, abstract idiom, occasionally even approaching twelve-note music, to create a harmonic whole of Mamangakis's own.²⁷

11. Yannis Drossitis, *Τριλογία πάνω στον "Ερωτόκριτο", για παιδική ή γυναικεία χορωδία "α καππέλλα" (1990)*

Yannis Drossitis was born in Heraklion in 1957; he studied piano and composition at the National Conservatoire of Athens, as well as Byzantine and traditional music at the Simon Karras school. His works include a *Trilogy on "Erotokritos"*, composed in 1990, to be sung *a cappella* by a children's or women's choir.²⁸ It comprises three more or less slow two- to four-part pieces, thankfully employing non-predictable passages of the work: "Τση μέρας τ' άστρο" (B 517-20), "Το μαύρο νέφαλο" (B 2125-32) and "Η μέρα η λαμπυρή" (E 1503-8).

12. Yannis Markopoulos, *Ερωτόκριτος και Αρετή (2000/2003)*

In 1996, the former song-writer Yannis Markopoulos addressed the 8th Cretological Congress in Heraklion on the subject of a "A musical approach to *Erotokritos* for the composition of an opera".²⁹ Four years later, on 19 and 20 September 2000, at the Herodeion, he collaborated with Nikos Koundouros to present a "multiform" *Erotokritos* combining music and theatre, as well as dance, in two parallel sets of singers and actors. The performance as a whole was poorly received by the press, but the music did eventually result in a double CD in 2003.

²⁷ See Papaioannou's note on the LP sleeve.

²⁸ It is published in the collection: Antonis Kontogeorgiou, *Για τις χορωδίες μας* (Athens: K. Papagrigoriou-Ch. Nakas 1993), pp. 234-7.

²⁹ See *Γενικό-Αναλυτικό Πρόγραμμα, Η' Διεθνές Κρητολογικό Συνέδριο, Ηράκλειο, 9-14 Σεπτεμβρίου 1996*, Εταιρία Κρητικών Ιστορικών Μελετών, p. 104; Markopoulos's talk never took the form of a published paper.

Erotokritos and Areti is described by the composer as an opera in two acts: “My intention is to illustrate the link between two philosophical concepts – Love and Virtue – which here become personified”, he notes.³⁰ The libretto, by Markopoulos, reduces the original text to 800 lines, with a division between parts three and four. (The joust is briefly dealt with by the orchestra playing a “dance”, which concludes with an old Cretan tune.)

The parts of *Erotokritos*, *Areti*, the King, Nena and Pezostatos are sung by tenor Antonis Koronaios, soprano Mata Katsouli, baritone Tassis Christoyannopoulos, mezzo-soprano Sophia Michailidi and baritone Kostis Konstandaras respectively. The last is the founder of the Fons Musicalis vocal ensemble, which also takes part. The other singers, such as Vassilis Stavrakakis, Kostas Makedonas, Manolis Lydakis or the Pyx-lax group leader Manos Xydous, come from backgrounds as diverse as Cretan folk music, what is tantalizingly called “έντεχνο” and “λαϊκό” song, even pop. An “ensemble” of eight Cretan lyra-players and singers, and a ten-member orchestra of Renaissance and Greek instruments, conducted by the composer, interact with the Flemish Radio Orchestra and Choir, conducted by Michel Tilkin.

In this ambitious composition a “recitative” functions as a “persistent theme that changes melodically in accordance with the personage or musical ensemble interpreting the role of the poet”,³¹ interspersed with so-called arias, duets, choral and orchestral pieces – a shadow, I’m afraid, both rhythmically and melodically, of the fascinating Markopoulos back in the ’60s and early ’70s.

13. Giorgos Koumendakis, *Ο μικρόκοσμος που άκουγε* (2000)

Four approaches to Erotokritos (*Τέσσερις δρόμοι για τον Ερωτόκριτο*, “Lyra”) were presented in 2000 by four very different and interesting musicians. Three contributions, those by Loudovikos

³⁰ See p. 9 of the booklet accompanying the CD.

³¹ The musicologist Alexandros Stoupakis, writing in the same CD booklet, p. 11.

of Anogia, Nikos Xydakis and Psarantonis, will be awkwardly left out, but the one by Giorgos Koumendakis meets the limiting conditions of this paper.

Born in Rethymno in 1959, Koumendakis, perhaps more widely known for the music he wrote for the opening ceremony of the Athens Olympics, studied music in his hometown and in Athens, and also attended seminars by Boulez, Ligeti, Xenakis and others. His work (dance, opera, vocals, chamber, solo and choral music, music for the stage and classical drama) is distinguished by his peculiar handling of detail in his variations and by his close study of ancient Greek music.³²

His approach to *Erotokritos* is *The Microcosm that listened*, three short pieces for harpsichord played by Alexandra Papa-stefanou: the “Fly”, the “Dragon-fly” and the “Little lizard”. As the composer comments: “The microcosm of my childhood castle, now an ally, accompanies me along the paths of *Erotokritos* and helps me submit my own brief improvisation.”

* * *

A rather unsuspected wealth of music inspired by Kornaros’s romance has emerged from the lame and disproportionate list given above; the range and quality of this music could only be fully brought out by a musicologist, who would also have to take into consideration compositions this paper may have missed, as well as any other kind of music sung to, written for, or referring to *Erotokritos*.

³² Symeonidou, op. cit., p. 198.

Militant intellectuals against the literary establishment: parallels between Giorgos Kotzioulas and Giannis Skarimbas (1930-1951)

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The friendship between Giorgos Kotzioulas and Giannis Skarimbas – which started in the first years of the 1930s and lasted until Kotzioulas’s death in 1956 – is one of the most interesting ones in the history of Modern Greek literature. It wasn’t lofty and messianic, like the friendship between Nikos Kazantzakis and Angelos Sikelianos, nor scintillating and mutually uplifting, like the one between Odysseas Elytis and Andreas Embeirikos. This rather prosaic and “proletarian” friendship owes its uniqueness to the explosive combination of two genuine disputants, two uncompromising creators, proud of their humble origins, who fervently castigated the intellectual environment of their time. Decisively marked by the decadent experience of the inter-war period, they both seemed to feel out of place in a period strongly coloured by the optimism and self-confidence of the generation of the ’30s, who had adopted modernism in order to achieve a prominent place in European literary life. What is more, being leftists but not members of the Greek Communist Party, Kotzioulas and Skarimbas were also out of tune with the optimistic spirit of socialist realism; thus they were naturally marginalized. Yet they did not passively accept their marginalization, as we shall see. Choosing Kostas Karyotakis as their main poetic precursor and leader in the path of combative resistance, they persistently opposed the new literary establishment. Their attack

on the modernism of the generation of the '30s did not lose its nerve after the decade of the '30s, like so many other reactions against modernism during those first years of its development,¹ but became more forceful in the decades that followed.

Keen – and gifted – correspondents, the two friends wrote frequently to each other, but unfortunately only a few of their letters have been preserved. Eleven letters of Skarimbas to Kotzioulas, five of Kotzioulas to Skarimbas, as well as a poem and three critical texts of Kotzioulas for his colleague, and their brief collaboration in Skarimbas's literary journal *Νεοελληνικά Σημειώματα* are the only actual traces of the relationship I will attempt to investigate here. Let me begin by giving some biographical facts. The older of the two, Skarimbas, was born at Agia-Thymia in the province of Parnassida in 1893, just three years before K. G. Karyotakis. (Despite his age, Skarimbas is usually placed among the members of the generation of the '30s, on account of his boldly experimental prose.) Kotzioulas was born in Platanousa, a barren village of the province of Ioannina, in 1909, the same year as Giannis Ritsos (though *he* is usually regarded as a belated member of the generation of the '20s, because of the traditional and conservative style of his poetry and prose). Both had parents of lowly social standing (with the exception of Skarimbas's "αρχοντοπούλα" mother): Skarimbas's father was a tailor and later worked as a customs official, while Kotzioulas's father was a farmer who also worked as a postman in order to enhance the family income.

After their basic education at schools in the provinces, they pursued different career paths: Skarimbas graduated from the Middle Forest School, worked as an accounts clerk at the Singer sewing machine company and finally was employed as a customs guard in Chalkida, where he remained until his retirement. Kotzioulas came to Athens in 1926, when he was seventeen years old, and enrolled in the School of Philosophy, from where he gradu-

¹ See Takis Kagialis, *Η επιθυμία για το μοντέρνο: Δεσμεύσεις και αξιώσεις της λογοτεχνικής διανόησης στην Ελλάδα του '30* (Athens: Vivliorama 2007).

ated a few years later. In contrast to Skarimbas, he persistently avoided the constraints of a permanent job (although he was occasionally given such a chance thanks to his widely respected learning and his many friends in distinguished positions); instead, he had temporary jobs as translator, journalist and particularly proof-reader for various journals and publishing companies, financially dependent on the whim of his employers and living in poverty. This rather bohemian life-style ruined his delicate health: at the age of twenty-three he suffered a nervous breakdown and two years later he was affected by tuberculosis (like many other poets of the inter-war period) and spent most of the second half of the 1930s in sanatoria on Parnitha and Pendeli; in between he lived in some of the poorest districts of Athens. He got married in 1950 and had a son, but died in 1956 from diabetes and a weak heart in his forty-seventh year. Skarimbas, on the other hand, got married when he was only 26 years old, had five children (one of whom died at the age of 6) and lived all his life in Chalkida, where he died “full of years” in 1984. Yet he too led a rather unconventional life in the narrow boundaries of his town. Both men, it should be noted, were completely untravelled and anti-metropolitan (despite the bitter-sweet charm that Athens exercised on Kotzioulas, who lived there most of his adult life).

Both Kotzioulas and Skarimbas developed a varied creative and intellectual activity: apart from being a novelist and a poet, Skarimbas was also a playwright, a journalist, a book-reviewer, and a puppeteer (*καραγκιοζοπαιχτης*), and he wrote his own version of the history of the Greek revolution, while Kotzioulas, despite the harsh conditions of his life, was a prolific poet, a writer of short stories, memoirs, travel accounts, autobiographical prose and theatrical plays, as well as a literary critic, journalist, diarist and tireless translator of ancient Greek, Latin and modern European and American poets.

Despite the fact that Kotzioulas was more of a scholar than Skarimbas (it is characteristic that he often used the terms “φιλολογία” and “λογοτεχνία” without distinction) and his education was broader and more formal than that of his self-educated friend,

wishes.⁷ In his next letter, two weeks later, worried about Kotzioulas's silence, he warmly assures him: "Εγώ τόσο εσένα όσο και τον Καρθαίο σας αγαπώ ειλικρινά. Και σας έχω τους καλλίτερους –και τους μόνους μου– φίλους."⁸ It is obvious that the relationship – and most probably the correspondence – of the two men had started before the middle of the 1930s.

Kotzioulas's poem leads to the same conclusion, given that it is the most direct and casual of the poems he occasionally devoted to his fellow-poets, establishing a relationship of equality between his honorand and himself. In the first of the four rhymed quatrains of the poem, Kotzioulas stresses the joyful spirit of Skarimbas's art and its depiction of ordinary people, and he presents himself as a "χωριάτης", thus reflecting Skarimbas's own self-presentation as "άνύποπτος και αγαθός επαρχιώτης" in an open letter he sent to the literary journal *Ξεκίνημα* in 1933, protesting against the unfair (in his view) criticism of I. M. Panagiotopoulos for his novella *Το θείο τραγί*.⁹ In the second quatrain Skarimbas is shown to be fortunate because he lives on an Aegean island, in the midst of nature, far away from the wicked step-mother Athens, where the harsh conditions of life had once led Alexandros Papadiamandis into deep poverty and had killed Kostas Krystallis in his twenties, as Kotzioulas often reminds us in both his poetry and his prose. Finally, Kotzioulas seems to echo discussions with Skarimbas when he refers, in the last two quatrains, to social injustice and to art as both a consolation and a game.

Kotzioulas admired Skarimbas's literary work and he acknowledged the superiority of his talent: "αν οι Έλληνες ένιωθαν από ποίηση, έπρεπε να μας είχε σβήσει όλους εμάς τους στιχογράφους", he remarked with admirable modesty in his review of Skarimbas's second collection of poems, *Εαυτούληδες*

⁷ See *Αγαπητέ Κοτζιούλα. Η αλληλογραφία του ποιητή Γιώργου Κοτζιούλα (1927-1955)*, preface Giannis Papakostas, ed. Nasi Balta (Athens: Odysseas 1994), pp. 57-8.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 58-9.

⁹ *Ξεκίνημα* 8 (August 1933) 251-2.

(1950).¹⁰ Skarimbas, for his part, respected his learned friend particularly as a thinker and critic, and highly valued his opinion. He writes to him in September 1936, after the publication of his first collection of poems, *Ουλαλούμ* (1936):¹¹ “Πολλά γράμματα λαβαίνω γεμάτα ενθουσιασμούς και θαυμαστικές εκφράσεις, αλλά δεν έχουν την αξία της δικής σου περιοχής.”¹² His only comment on Kotzioulas’s poetry refers to his third collection of poems, *Δεύτερη ζωή* (1938),¹³ and it praises his friend’s personality rather than his art: “Μεσ στους στίχους σου αυτούς, προβάλλεις συ ο ίδιος με την –λες– αγιακή σου μορφή, μ’ αυτή τη μυστική αχτινοβολία σου που μας μαγεύει μαζί σου.”¹⁴ The “μυστική αχτινοβολία” of Kotzioulas is quite different from the playfully sinful, semi-autobiographical protagonist of Skarimbas’s poems. Yet both poets, as has already been remarked, echo the subdued, bitter climate of the inter-war period, and especially the poetry of Karyotakis, with which they creatively converse.¹⁵ The self-referential protagonist of their poems (who, in the case of Kotzioulas, is openly autobiographical) is often defensively self-undermined, thus expressing, indirectly, a strong sense of respect and artistic self-confidence. What is more, both poets remained faithful to the traditional poetic forms in a period when free verse had become dominant. (It should be mentioned, though, that

¹⁰ Kotzioulas, “Συλλογές με ουσία”, *Νέος Νουμάς* 5 (195) 6-8. Skarimbas’s collection is included in the volume *Άπαντες σίχοι (1936-1970)* (Athens: Kaktos 1996), pp. 47-88.

¹¹ See Skarimbas, *Άπαντες σίχοι*, pp. 13-45.

¹² *Αγαπητέ Κοτζιούλα*, p. 73.

¹³ Kotzioulas, *Άπαντα Α΄*, pp. 101-53.

¹⁴ *Αγαπητέ Κοτζιούλα*, p. 75.

¹⁵ See Giannis Papakostas, “Κ. Γ. Καρωτάκης–Γιώργος Κοτζιούλας: σχέση διαλόγου”, in the collective volume *Καρωτάκης και καρνωτακισμός (Πρακτικά Συνεδρίου)* (Athens: Etaireia Spoudon Neoellinikou Politismou kai Genikis Paideias 1998), pp. 283-94, and X. Kokolis, “Ο Καρωτάκης του Σκαρίμπα”, and Panagiotis Pantzarelas, “Σκαριμπίζοντας καρνωτακικά, ή και αντιστρόφως”, both in: X. Kokolis, *Άνθρωποι και μη: τα όρια της φαντασίας στο Σκαρίμπα* (Thessaloniki: University Studio Press 2001), pp. 153-62 and 179-88 respectively.

Skarimbas made a few rather unfortunate efforts to write in free verse after the 1950s.¹⁶) However, whilst the masterly disciplined verse of Kotzioulas aims at defending tradition as the only steady point in unstable times, Skarimbas, with his frequent and daring use of dissonances, enjambments and dashes, and in general with his gaspingly articulated verse, aspires to highlight, as David Ricks has put it, the artificial and unstable character of language, and ultimately of reality itself.¹⁷

Skarimbas is more existential and introverted, whilst Kotzioulas is more realistic and more socially and politically orientated (especially from 1940 onwards); however, their first poetic collections have important affinities. First of all, the two friends have common poetic ancestors, mainly Jules Laforgue, Romos Filyras and Karyotakis. Secondly, many of their poems have a distinctive *fantaisiste* character (*fantaisisme* is a poetic tendency which developed in France in the first years of the twentieth century and which, as Manolis Anagnostakis reminds us talking about Skarimbas, is characterized by a playful combination of mockery and tenderness, seriousness and lightness, happiness and sadness).¹⁸ Thirdly, the first-person narrator of their poems owes a lot to three popular figures or types of the inter-war period: (a) Don Quixote (especially to the eternal conflict between his intrinsic and his extrinsic self, and to his idealism, which is doomed to failure); (b) the absurd, comic and deeply human figure of Charlot; and (c) the vagabond, self-destructive heroes of the Norwegian Knut

¹⁶ See his collection *Βοϊδάγγελοι* in *Άπαντες σίχοι*, pp. 130-45.

¹⁷ David Ricks, "Παράδοση και πρωτοτυπία: Η περίπτωση του Σκαρίμπα", in: N. Vayenas (ed.), *Η ελευθέρωση των μορφών. Η ελληνική ποίηση από τον έμμετρο στον ελεύθερο σίχο (1880-1940)* (Heraklion: Panepistimiakes Ekdoseis Kritis 1996), pp. 175-85 (180, 184).

¹⁸ Manolis Anagnostakis, "Η «φανταιζίστικη ποίηση» και ο Γιάννης Σκαρίμπα", *Τα συμπληρωματικά. Σημειώσεις κριτικής* (Athens: Stigma 1985), pp. 141-9 [= *Για τον Σκαρίμπα*, ed. Katerina Kostiou (Nicosia: Aigaion 1994), pp. 212-18]. In his anthology *Χαμηλή φωνή. Τα λυρικά μιας περασμένης εποχής στους παλιούς ρυθμούς* (Athens: Nefeli 1990), Anagnostakis includes eight poems of Kotzioulas and four of Skarimbas (pp. 186-94 and 200-4 respectively).

Hamsun. All those figures claim their freedom and uniqueness in human society.

I think that Charlot, in particular, illuminates the deeper affinities of Kotzioulas's and Skarimbas's poetry, especially through his combination of crudeness with tenderness and lyricism, as Petros Spandonidis has pointed out referring to the influence of Charlot in Skarimbas's novel *Μαριάμπας* (1935).¹⁹ Kotzioulas devoted to Charlie Chaplin both a poem²⁰ and a study,²¹ which underline many of the debts of Skarimbas and himself to Chaplin's popular comic hero: the folk mentality, spontaneity, naivety, daring exposure of his wounds, cunning improvisation, ruthless attack on formality and pomposity, avoidance of historical topics, simplicity of means, suppression of class distinctions, transformation of the humble everyday reality into art. Yet above all it is this combination of coarseness and tenderness which both closely links Skarimbas and Kotzioulas and distinguishes them from the other poets of their time. This combination is more clearly displayed in their love poems, where they usually appear to fall in love with ethereal, upper-class women and are inevitably doomed to rejection. Their poetic ancestor in this respect is Romos Filyras, who is forever enchanted by "blue-blooded" women. Lorentzos Mavilis could also be considered an ancestor of the two poets through his sonnet "Φάληρο", where he desires to be crushed under the car of an "αρχοντοπούλα ... τετράξανθη".²² The heroes of Hamsun have similar self-destructive erotic tendencies. Yet Kotzioulas and Skarimbas are not devastated by the unfortunate outcome of their passion, as are Hamsun's protagonists, neither do they content themselves with extolling their beloved ones from a safe distance, as Filyras usually does. They emphasize the class

¹⁹ P. Spandonidis, "Γιάννη Σκαρίμπα, Μαριάμπας", *Μακεδονικές Ημέρες* [Thessaloniki] 8-9 (September-October 1935) 324-6 [= *Για τον Σκαρίμπα*, pp. 87-90: 89-90].

²⁰ Kotzioulas, "Ένας φοιτητής βλέπει Σαρλώ", *Άπαντα Α'*, p. 89.

²¹ Kotzioulas, "Ο φίλος μας ο Σαρλώ", *Νεοελληνικά Γράμματα* 214 (11 January 1941).

²² L. Mavilis, *Τα ποιήματα*, ed. Giorgos Alisandratos (Athens: Idryma Kosta kai Elenis Ourani 1990), p. 105.

difference between their objects of adoration and themselves and, consequently, between the idealized women and their earthly and clumsy existence; they underline their total rejection and yet they are led, lightly wounded, to their next, equally quixotic erotic adventure. This combination of external coarseness and inner delicacy in the personality of the two aspiring lovers exceeds the usual combination, in the inter-war period, of the poorly-dressed and the chivalrous. It is often presented with a hint of humour and self-irony and it is directly associated with the folk and provincial profile which the two friends create for themselves in their literary work. Thus in the following lines of Skarimbas's poem "Η άγνωστη":

Κι ήταν ωραία ως πέρασε άκρη του δρόμου εκεί,
 μ' άγνωστο πάτημα ποδιού και τρυφερό μυστήριο,
 στο πεζοδρόμι κρούοντας ωραία ερημική,
 των τακουινιών της το γοργό κι ερωτικό εμβατήριο.

Στάθκα στητός, τη μουσική γροικώντας του αλαφρού
 κυματισμού των ρούχων της [...]

κι ήταν αυτή –το νοιώθω ναι– που αν ήθελε, με μιας,
 τον βάρβαρό μου εαυτό γλυκά θα 'χε ημερώσει.

Τώρα; Τώρα στους πρώτους μου έμεινα εδώ οδυρμούς,
 Πάνας του δρόμου ερωτικός –η φύση ως μ' έχει κάμει– [...]²³

even if Skarimbas had not introduced himself as a "βάρβαρος" erotic Pan, the peasant expression "στάθκα στητός", through which he is introduced in the poem in the first line of the second stanza, would be enough to indicate the overwhelming difference between the elegant stranger and himself.

Kotzioulas on the other hand, in his poem entitled "Το τραγούδι της μεγαλουσιάνας που την αγαπούς' ένα φτωχόπαιδο", underlines right from the start the class difference between the

²³ Skarimbas, *Άπαντες σίχοι*, p. 25.

third-person (yet clearly autobiographical) hero of the poem and the woman he loves:

Αυτή κρατούσε απ' το μεγάλο αρχοντολόι,
για τους προγόνους της μιλούσαν τα κιτάπια,
κι από χωριάτες εκείνου ήτανε το σόι,
χοντρά τσαρούχια, μαύρες σκούφιες, κοντοκάπια.²⁴

In the next stanzas the poet focuses now on the poorly dressed man and now on his aristocratic loved one, exploiting elements of the mentality of Don Quixote in order to emphasize the contrast between the man's desire and reality. (It is not accidental that the poem is dedicated to K. Karthaios, the much-praised translator of *Don Quixote* into Greek in the 1920s.²⁵) For example:

περπάταε με τα παντελόνια του τα τρύπια,
περπάταε κι ήταν σα να ζει στα παραμύθια.
[...]
Κι άρχισε τότε να της λέει και να μη σώνει [...]
για τη στιγμή που δείχνει θρόνο το κασόνι.
Για την αγάπη της μιλούσε, την αγάπη.

Εκείνη ακούρμαινε και πάντα εχαμογέλα'
τέτοια ρητορική μπορεί να μην αρέσει;
Σε λίγο θα 'τανε δική του! Μόνο η τρέλα
σκαλώνει τόσο θαρρετά, σε τέτοια θέση.

Μα σαν τη ρώτησε, αποκρίθηκε μ' ένα όχι.
[...]
Μονάχα αυτό συλλογιζόταν: «Η καρδιά μου,
δε θα συχάσει ουδέ με δυο χιλιάδες χρόνια».

²⁴ Kotzioulas, *Άπαντα Α'*, pp. 49-52 (49).

²⁵ For the influence of Don Quixote in Modern Greek literature see Alexandra Samouil, *Ιδαλγός της ιδέας. Η περιπλάνηση του Δον Κιχώτη στην ελληνική λογοτεχνία* (Athens: Polis 2007). On pp. 224 and 225 Samouil examines Skarimbass's poem "Δουλτσινέα" and Kotzioulas's "Τσοπάνος ιδαλγός".

The two friends on the one hand idealize the women who appear in their poems, following the romantic mode of Filyras and often using religious vocabulary in order to describe them, and on the other hand, by contrast, they open up a dialogue with Karyotakis's supposedly misogynistic poem "Αποστροφή", which starts with the emblematic lines "Φθονώ την τύχη σας, προνομούχα / πλάσματα, κούκλες ιαπωνικές".²⁶ Through this dialogue, Skarimbas indicates the ghostly substance of the women he describes, who often appear as lifeless dolls, or even robots,²⁷ while the more realistic Kotzioulas criticizes the opposite sex, which, however, never ceases to be the main driving force for his creation:

Τη νιότη μου όλη καταριέμαι και το γένος
που καρτερεί από κούκλες άδειες τη χαρά.

Κι όμως χωρίς εσάς άχρηστα θα 'ταν όλα,
με σταυρωμένα χέρια θα 'στεκα κι εγώ.
Τώρα, όσο θέλει ας με μουσκεύει η τρύπια σόλα,
κάτω από τ' άστρο μου τραβάω με πείσμα αργό.²⁸

Another basic affinity of the two poets that should be mentioned is the folksiness of their style and their often dialectal language, which, in the case of Kotzioulas, originates from the villages of Tzoumerka (it is characteristic that three of his collections of poems are accompanied by concise "Idiomatic Glossaries"). As a result, their poetry is lent a similar colouring, which reflects their unaffected and unconventional personalities. Furthermore, neither of them escaped the danger of repeating themselves in their maturity; however, by doing so with youthful freshness and zeal they wrote some of their best poems.

One final remark before I proceed to the examination of their ideological development and similarities: it should be kept in

²⁶ K. G. Karyotakis, *Ποιήματα και πεζά*, ed. G. P. Savvidis (Athens: Ermis ⁷1984), p. 102.

²⁷ See Kokolis, *Άνθρωποι και μη*, pp. 13-15.

²⁸ Kotzioulas, *Άπαντα Α'*, p. 68.

mind that in the coarse, lonely and unconventional provincial heroes of their poems, who are rejected by upper-class women and keep a critical distance from the codes of behaviour of the civilized urban centres (whether of Athens or of Chalkida), one can discern the writers who were distinguished for their militant articles against the literary and broader intellectual and socio-political developments of their time.

During the 1930s the two writers were in the limelight of the literary world, not only because they often wrote articles and book reviews (sometimes with a quarrelsome humour, as we shall see), in newspapers and magazines of the capital and the provinces, but also because they each published five literary works, almost half of their entire literary output.²⁹ Besides *Ελληνικά Γράμματα*, the two writers “met” each other in other literary journals of the time, such as *Λόγος*, *Ξεκίνημα*, *Νεοελληνικά Γράμματα* or Skarimbas’s own *Νεοελληνικά Σημειώματα*, while they avoided both the hardcore communist journal *Νέοι Πρωτοπόροι* and the *Νέα Γράμματα* of the emergent generation of the ’30s. What is more, their views about people and things in Greek literary life were often similar or even identical. They believed in the national importance of demoticism, they zealously defended the demotic language and the literary use of local idioms. They were against both purist Greek and the neo-demoticism movement,³⁰ they went along with the development of literary satire and the expression of contemporary social problems in art. They were wary of the poetry of the great visionaries Angelos Sikelianos, Kostis Palamas and Nikos Kazantzakis and they had similar poetic preferences: in addition to Dionysios Solomos and Andreas Kalvos, they selected Lambros Porfyras, Miltiadis Malakasis, C. P. Cavafy, Kostas Varnalis,

²⁹ Skarimbas published the short stories *Καημοί στο Γριπωνήσι*, the novels *Το θείο τραγί*, *Μαριάμπας* and *Το σόλο του Φίγκαρω* and the poems of *Ουλαλούμ*; Kotzioulas brought out the poetic collections *Εφήμερα*, *Σιγανή φωτιά*, *Δεύτερη ζωή* and *Ο γρίφος* and a collection of prose narratives, *Το κακό συναπάντημα*.

³⁰ For more on this see Christina Dounia, “Μια ξεχασμένη συζήτηση πάνω σε μια ιδέα του Γ. Σεφέρη”, *Το Δέντρο* 19-20 (1986) 80-3 and 21 (1986) 87-9.

Romos Filyras, and above all Kostas Karyotakis, while among the younger poets they singled out Nikos Kavvadias and Tefkros Anthias.

On the other hand, in the second half of the decade their views diverged noticeably as far as literary trends of the twentieth century and their employment by Modern Greek writers were concerned. Kotzioulas abandoned his initially tolerant and sometimes even favourable attitude towards the new trends and in 1937 wrote an intensely anti-modernist text (which will be discussed in detail below). In this text he rejected the stylistic trends of the “συγχρονισμένους” (as he called them) Greek poets, and accused them of imitation of the “ευκολίες των κουρασμένων Ευρωπαίων” and disrespect for tradition.³¹ Skarimbas on the other hand seems, at this time, to take a more positive view of western literary currents, which he characterized in 1938 as “άνθη εξευγενισμένα μιας μακρότατης παράδοσης της τέχνης”.³² He also believed that his country’s literature would quickly rise to the challenge of European cultural developments and he seemed satisfied with the domestic production of his day in both prose and poetry.

What is more, in their prose-writing the two friends started to diverge. Skarimbas abandoned the ethnographic short stories of *Καημοί στο Γριπωνήσι*, as well as those that accompany *Το θείο τραγί*, and started to write novels, a genre much promoted by the generation of the '30s. His stories took place in urban settings, he expressed his appreciation of prose-writers such as Thrasos Kastanakis, Giannis Beratis and Kosmas Politis and he intensified his stylistic and narrative experimentations. Kotzioulas, on the other hand, although he managed to express the “δραματική ψυχή” of the inter-war man in his poetry, steadfastly continued to write narratives that described the customs and the manners of his

³¹ Kotzioulas, “Συγχρονισμένη ποίηση”, *Νεοελληνικά Γράμματα* 6 (February 1937) 14.

³² Skarimbas, book review of “Στρόβιλος” by P. Samaras in the Chalkida newspaper *Εύριπος*, issue 3,227 (10 April 1938) 1-2. See further Symeon G. Stamboulou, *Πηγές της πεζογραφίας του Γιάννη Σκαρίμπα* (Athens: Syllogos pros Diadosin Ofelimon Vivlion 2006), pp. 288-9.

native land using, as he confessed to his friend the prose-writer Epameinondas Gonatas, the methods of “φωτογραφία” and “φωνοληψία”,³³ which had been collectively condemned by the generation of the '30s, beginning with Theotokas's *Ελεύθερο πνεύμα* in 1929. Thus he persisted in the depiction of a bygone age with stable values from which he did not wish to be cut off.

However, the fact that Skarimbas gradually went over to the urban type of novel does not necessarily mean that he gave in to the generation of the '30s. As a poet he never conformed to its modernizing commands, and as a narrator he remained a unique case, with an increasing stylistic peculiarity. It is characteristic that Karandonis, in his review of *Μαριάμπας* in 1935, did not totally reject Skarimbas but criticized the acrobatics of his language and particularly the dominant inter-war quality of his work: his dependence on Knut Hamsun and his typically *fantaisiste* and clown-like swings “από το σοβαρό στο κωμικό, από το κωμικό στο σατανικό, από την εξιδανικευμένη τρυφερότητα στη λαγνεία και τη σατυρίαση, από την εκζήτηση στη φυσικότητα”,³⁴ contradictions which were incompatible with the more “settled” aesthetic of the prevailing literary discourse of the generation of the '30s. As Katerina Kostiou points out, Skarimbas's divergence from the norm, “σε επίπεδο ιδιοσυγκρασιακό, κοινωνικό, ιδεολογικό, υφολογικό, αισθητικό, ήταν μεγαλύτερη από το μέσο όρο αντοχής που διέθετε αυτή η Γενιά”.³⁵

It is virtually certain that both Skarimbas and Kotzioulas were displeased by the emergence of the urban writers of the generation of the '30s, who were educated in Europe and who loudly proclaimed their superiority on the literary scene. In the second half

³³ Kotzioulas, *Ανέκδοτα γράμματα*, ed. E. H. Gonatas (Athens: Keimena 1980), p. 87.

³⁴ Karandonis, “Γιάννη Σκαρίμπα, *Μαριάμπας* (μυθιστόρημα). Χαλκίδα 1935”, *Νέα Γράμματα* 10 (October 1935) 570-2 [= *Για τον Σκαρίμπα*, pp. 78-82].

³⁵ K. Kostiou, “«Νεοελληνικά», «υπερελληνικά», «αλλοεθνή» ή «πανανθρώπινα»; Η ασύμβατη σχέση του Σκαρίμπα με τον Θεοτοκά”, *Πρακτικά Α' Πανελληνίου Συνεδρίου για τον Γιάννη Σκαρίμπα* (Athens: Diametros 2007), pp. 143-94 (146).

of the same decade, they both had the feeling of being put aside and treated unfairly. This feeling, as we shall see, led Skarimbas to associate himself with the struggle of the provinces against the capital. The iconoclastic *Μαριάμπας*, although it had received some good reviews, had been accused of absurdity, surrealistic deviations, even populism,³⁶ while Kotzioulas, already affected by tuberculosis and even poorer, had lost the financial support of Katsimbalis, who had funded the publication of an early study of Kotzioulas on Myrivilis in 1931, but now turned to the generation of the '30s.³⁷

The well-known article of Karandonis on Karyotakis and Karyotakism, published in the first issue of *Τα Νέα Γράμματα* in 1935, must have deeply annoyed the two friends for two reasons: first, because the “official” critic of the generation of the '30s condemned the inter-war period and its bitter-sweet climate in which they had both reached their maturity (he talked, for example, about the “κλαυιάρικα, νευρασθενικά, ψευτορωμαντικά και υπερατομιστικά ιδανικά της εποχής του Καρυωτάκη”)³⁸; and secondly, because Karandonis’s accusations against Karyotakism partly concerned both the two friends. Kotzioulas, who had dedicated an emotional elegy to Karyotakis in his first poetic collection, reacted with these ironic verses:

Μάνα μου, πώς δε μου 'χε φύγει το μυαλό
 κείνους τους μήνες που ήμουν άμαθο παιδάκι!
 Οι άπιστοι φίλοι μου θα μ' έλεγαν τρελό
 κι όχι, όπως τώρα, μιμητή του Καρυωτάκη.³⁹

³⁶ For a detailed presentation of the critical reception of *Μαριάμπας* see Stamboulou, *Πηγές*, pp. 229-40.

³⁷ Kotzioulas, *Ο Στρατής Μυριβήλης και η πολεμική λογοτεχνία* (Athens 1931). For more on the generous offer of Katsimbalis see the autobiographical text of Kotzioulas “Σχόλια στα γραφτά μου και χαμένα χειρόγραφα” (1953), which is to be found in his Archive at the University of Ioannina.

³⁸ A. Karandonis, “Η επίδραση του Καρυωτάκη στους νέους”, *Νέα Γράμματα* 9 (1935) 478-86.

³⁹ Kotzioulas, *Άπαντα Α'*, p. 122.

Then, in 1937, at a time when Karyotakis was attacked by everyone, including the Left,⁴⁰ Kotzioulas confessed that “όλοι μας σχεδόν όσοι αρχίσαμε να δημοσιεύουμε από το 1930 και δώθε βρήκαμε για έναν καιρό τον εαυτό μας μέσα στα ποιήματά του”.⁴¹ At the same time Skarimbas made a similar confession, the ironic ambiguity of which does not conceal the strength of feeling:

Τώρα, αν η τρομαλέα αυτή σαγήνη (και ιδιοσυγκρασία) των στίχων του, έκαμε καλό ή κακό; Χμ...μάλλον ναι, μάλλον όχι! Και τούτα τα πράγματα δεν μπαίνουν εύκολα σε υλική διατίμηση [...] ο καρνωτακισμός, για μια ωρισμένη γενιά μάς στάθηκε ένας “λαμπρός και ολέθριος” φίλος μας, ένα είδος... γλυκειάς αμαρτίας. Ο χρόνος θα δείξει αν θα νοσταλγούμε, για πολύ, ή για πάντα την ολέθρια αγάπη του ή θα καταρώμεθα την εκτυφλωτική του μαγεία.⁴²

Karyotakis never stopped being a very important figure of Modern Greek lyricism for the two friends. As time went by, the poet of the *Σάτιρες* increasingly marked their militant stance in literary and political matters.

Consequently their relationship became ever closer in the course of the 1930s. It is characteristic that Skarimbas addressed his letters to “αγαπητέ Κοτζιούλα” in 1935 and to his “πολυαγαπημένο μου φίλε Κοτζιούλα” in 1936, while one year later Kotzioulas became the main contributor to the magazine *Νεοελληνικά Σημειώματα*, which Skarimbas started to publish in Evvia in March 1937 with the intention of criticizing the negative aspects of Greek intellectual life. Even before the magazine came out, the two writers had started their angry journalism, Kotzioulas with his first anti-modernist manifesto entitled “Συγχρονισμένη ποίηση”

⁴⁰ For the adventurous reception of the poetry of Karyotakis see Christina Dounia, *Κ. Γ. Καρνωτάκης. Η αντοχή μιας αδέσποτης τέχνης* (Athens: Kastaniotis 2000).

⁴¹ Kotzioulas, “Φιλολογικές σχολές”, *Νεοελληνικά Σημειώματα* 3 (May 1937) 38-41 (40).

⁴² Skarimbas, “Περί καρνωτακισμού”, *Η Καθημερινή* (2 November 1936) (also in Dounia, *Κ. Γ. Καρνωτάκης*, p. 383-4).

(published in *Νεοελληνικά Γράμματα* in February 1937) and Skarimbas with the article “Ελληνική επαρχία” (published in the magazine *Πνευματική Ζωή* from December 1936 to February 1937). Both written with an acerbic tone, these two texts present essential ideological links. Although Skarimbas focused on what he called “νεολογιωτατισμός” of the Athenian centre (which exercised its power particularly in the University, the Academy and the Press), while Kotzioulas mainly attacked contemporary Greek poets for imitating the latest European trends and abolishing metre, rhyme, theme and rational sequence, they both defended the values of demoticism (which Skarimbas connected with the Greek provinces and Kotzioulas with the marginalized, in his view, Greek poetic tradition) and they condemned what they considered to be pretentious “ξενομανία” of Greek intellectual life and the related entry of foreign, mainly French words, into the language:

Αχ τι επαρχιωτικ προστυχάντζ να μη παρλεβουφραντσέξ και
 εμείς, παρά πάντα απλοί, σκληροτράχηλοι, να σφυροκοπούμε
 ακούραστοι τη σκληρή πέτρα της νεόπλαστης γλώσσας μας,
 χουχουλίζοντας –για να το ζεστάνουμε– κι’ όλας, το ανήλικο
 φιόρο της τέχνης μας.

(Skarimbas)⁴³

Τα γαλλικά, που τα μάθανε μαζί ή πριν απ’ τα ρωμαϊκά, τους
 έχουν κακοσυνηθίσει. Κοντά στους ελληνικούς τρόπους, που
 δεν αποκλείεται να ’ναι οι χειρότεροι του κόσμου, άρχισαν ν’
 αποστρέφονται, να νομίζουν κατώτερο, κάθετι το ελληνικό,
 και τη λογοτεχνία μας φυσικά.

(Kotzioulas)⁴⁴

According to Kotzioulas, the victim of this intellectual snobbery was the Greek literary tradition, while for Skarimbas it was the Greeks from the provinces (“σε κανένα λαό, σε καμμιά γλώσσα η

⁴³ Skarimbas, “Η ελληνική επαρχία”, *Πνευματική Ζωή* 3 (December 1936) 39-41 (39).

⁴⁴ Kotzioulas, “Συγχρονισμένη ποίηση”.

λέξη «επαρχιώτης» δεν έχει τη χυδαία, την κοροϊδευτική και προσβλητική σημασία που έχει σε μας”, he remarks). In other words, in both cases the genuine popular Greek civilization (which these two writers felt they expressed with their work and their intellectual and moral attitude) appeared to be seriously injured. They both took into consideration the element of social inequality, given that, as they believed, the intellectual authority of Athens, and particularly that of Greek modernism, functioned as a kind of elite that addressed itself to a small minority of the Greek – mostly Athenian – reading public.

In *Νεοελληνικά Σημειώματα*, which had the telling subtitle “Μηνιαία έκδοση ελέγχου, κριτικής και μελέτης” and whose militant tone has been compared to that of *Νουμάς*,⁴⁵ Skarimbas threw himself, with increasing zeal, into his campaign against Athens, in a conflict of centre vs. provinces that had already begun in the early 1930s, involving a number of scholars, and which reached its peak in 1937, mainly thanks to the part played by Skarimbas.⁴⁶ Skarimbas had a column called “Παραγραφάκια” that gave the main tone of the magazine with its usually sarcastic comments on people and situations in the Athenian intellectual life. The poet Nikos Pappas, from Trikkala, a fanatical supporter of the provinces against the patronage of the capital, supported Skarimbas’s line with two severe articles.⁴⁷ Kotzioulas, who did not take part directly in the conflict between centre and province

⁴⁵ See the unpublished doctoral thesis of Lambros Varelas, “Η αντιμετώπιση λογοτεχνικών και πνευματικών κινήσεων της ελληνικής επαρχίας (1929-1940). Θέματα ιστορίας και βιβλιογραφίας της νεοελληνικής λογοτεχνίας” (Thessaloniki 1997), p. 197. For details of the adventurous life of this short-lived periodical, see especially pp. 196-202.

⁴⁶ For more on this conflict between Athens and the provinces see Varelas, *ibid.*

⁴⁷ Pappas even argued that “Ούτε το γλωσσικό, ούτε η Ελληνική Επανάσταση του είκοσι ένα ούτε ο Σολωμός, κανένα γεγονός, δεν έχει το ύψος και τη σημασία της επαρχιακής προόδου για την εθνική ευημερία”. See “Το τέλος της πνευματικής παντοκρατορίας των Αθηνών”, *Νεοελληνικά Σημειώματα* 3 (May 1937) 36. See also his article “Η εν Αργινούσας ναυμαχία”, *Νεοελληνικά Σημειώματα* 4 (June 1937) 51-2.

and Konstandinos Christomanos.⁵⁶ Yet in fact Kotzioulas's praise of ethnography provided further arguments for the position Skarimbas had taken in favour of the provinces – a position that demonstrated his dedication to the provinces to be an independent continuation of the great ethnographic tradition and his opposition to the alien, western-dependent capital.⁵⁷

We do not have letters or any other evidence to confirm the contacts of the two writers in the '40s. But if we take into account the intimacy of a letter of Skarimbas in May 1950, in which he invites the newly-wed Kotzioulas and his wife to his house in Evvia⁵⁸ (an invitation to which Kotzioulas responded), it can be taken as certain that that the two friends did not lose contact during the difficult years of the Occupation and the Civil War. Besides, (a) their participation in the National Liberation Front, (b) their theatrical activity (Kotzioulas wrote plays for the guerrillas on the mountains of Epirus⁵⁹ while Skarimbas played Karagiozis in the neighbourhoods of the occupied Chalkida, both with the aim of encouraging people to resistance), and particularly (c) their critical interventions in literary, intellectual and historical developments prove not only that they continued to follow a common course, but also that their ideological convergence was becoming more and more intense, since Skarimbas abandoned his modernistic forays and became an ardent supporter of the native literary tradition. In 1945 they both suggested that art should be addressed to the general public, which was unable to follow the modernistic literary developments. “Σήμερα προέχει να εκλαϊκώσουμε και όχι να καταδικάσουμε την τέχνη”, Kotzioulas remarks,⁶⁰ while Skarimbas proposes the “απαριστοκρατοποίηση”

⁵⁶ Skarimbas, “Ένας –χωρίς ρίψιμο κύβων– Ρουβικών”, *Νεοελληνικά Γράμματα* 10 (10 July 1937) 3.

⁵⁷ Stamboulou, *Πηγές*, p. 115.

⁵⁸ *Αγαπητέ Κοτζιούλα* (see note 7), pp. 120-1.

⁵⁹ See Kotzioulas, *Θέατρο στα βουνά* (Athens: Themelio 1976).

⁶⁰ See the unpublished text “Εξηγήσεις για τον αναγνώστη”, which Kotzioulas intended to put as a preface to a book he was preparing at that time (the book, which was never completed, was to be called *Εκείνοι που μας έλειψαν* and would have involved portraits of Greek men of letters

of art, meaning the rejection of the new trends, which alienate the writer from his sources, as he commented.⁶¹ These urges reflect, besides the personal conceptions of the two friends, the collective spirit of the Occupation, during which the Greeks demonstrated a great desire to participate in culture.⁶² During that period Kotzioulas turned from a poet of the “φλογέρα” into a poet of the “τρομπέτα” (as he wrote in one of his poems)⁶³ and he participated in the literature of the Resistance with two poetic collections, which effectively depict his experience beside the guerrillas of Velouchiotis in 1943-44.⁶⁴ Skarimbas, on the other hand, continued to cultivate his eccentric poetic and narrative writing. In one of his poems, however, he adjusted the inter-war motif of a human-robot to contemporary circumstances, presenting the German conquerors as robots,⁶⁵ and in his narrative work “Αρκομανούσα Νταρνταλά” a captain who is shy of women is presented as a deckhand on the ship of his admiral fiancée, who personifies the National Liberation Navy and “τους αρκουδογερμανούς χτυπάει και τους Βουργάρους”.⁶⁶ Finally, during the Civil War Kotzioulas wrote satirical epigrams against writers like Myrivilis, who had gone along with the side of the victors, and articles for the communist newspaper *Ο Ρίζος της Δευτέρας* where, among other things, he zealously supported the resistance literature

who died during the German Occupation); see the Kotzioulas Archive in Ioannina.

⁶¹ See Skarimbas’s interview entitled “Η «απαριστοκρατοποίηση» της τέχνης”, *Πορεία* 1 (November 1945) 6.

⁶² See Angela Kastrinaki, *Η λογοτεχνία στην παραγμένη δεκαετία 1940-1950* (Athens: Polis 2005), p. 25.

⁶³ Kotzioulas, “Πρώτα και τώρα” (1945), *Άπαντα Γ’ (Ποιήματα 1943-1956)* (Athens: Difros 1959), p. 95.

⁶⁴ See the collections *Ο Άρης* and *Οι πρώτοι του αγώνα*, both published in 1946 [= Kotzioulas, *Άπαντα Γ’*, pp. 161-89].

⁶⁵ Skarimbas, “Τα ρομπότ”, *Εαυτούληδες* (1950) [= *Άπαντες στίχοι* (see note 10), p. 65].

⁶⁶ See the periodical *Γράμματα* 19 (October 1946) 110-12. For more on this peculiar tribute of Skarimbas to the Resistance see Kastrinaki, *Η λογοτεχνία στην παραγμένη δεκαετία*, pp. 361-2.

against its harsh critics (such as Karandonis).⁶⁷ On the other hand, Skarimbas published in Chalkida the short-lived newspaper *Λευτεριά*, in which he satirized the civil servants and the politicians of the nationalist party,⁶⁸ while in the following decades he frequently referred to the democratic values of the National Liberation Front and its suppression by post-civil war governments and by the leaders of the generation of the '30s.⁶⁹

During the 1940s, the role of prosecutor of that increasingly powerful literary generation was assigned to Skarimbas, who “replaced” Kotzioulas for a while (Kotzioulas was then busy with his theatrical activities in the mountains, and later on with the writing of studies about his literary precursors). Skarimbas bitterly attacked free verse and the poetic production of the modernist elite, which, as he wrote, turned poetry into:

λόγο... κυβιστικό... μπαλκόνι πριμιτιβιστικό ή και ξόρκιο...
περίπατο μεγαλοπρεπή λυρικό, ένα είδος... ταγκού μες στην
τέχνη! Και λέγεται «ελεύθερος στίχος».⁷⁰

More often, and more vehemently, he made fun of surrealism: firstly with the intense parody contained in his novel *Το σόλο του Φίγκαρω* (1939), then in his frequent articles in the press of *Envia*, and later on in his short story “Το μουστάκι (του κ. Φρανσουά ντε λα Τουζς)”.⁷¹ It is likely that Skarimbas’s anti-surrealist passion derives to some extent from his annoyance at the insistent association of his style with surrealism on the part of critics, beginning with the young Dimitris Mentzelos in 1931.⁷² This connection

⁶⁷ See, for example, his article “Διανοούμενοι και πολιτική”, *Ο Ρίζος της Δευτέρας* (5 May 1947).

⁶⁸ For more on this see Maria Hatzigianni, *Ο άλλος Σκαρίμπας* (Athens: Sygchroni Epochi 1984).

⁶⁹ See Kostiou, “«Νεοελληνικά», «υπερελληνικά», «αλλοεθνή» ή «πανανθρώπινα»,” (see note 35), pp. 181 and 193.

⁷⁰ See *Ευβοϊκά Γράμματα* 23 (February 1945).

⁷¹ It belongs to the collection of short stories entitled *Τυφλοβδομάδα στη Χαλκίδα* (1973), now edited by K. Kostiou (Athens: Nefeli 1996).

⁷² D. Mentzelos, “Ο υπερρεαλισμός και η [sic] τάσεις του”, *Ο Λόγος* 7, 8, 9 (1931) [= *Ηρίδανός* 4 (February-March 1976)].

ignores the intense personal character of his style, the radicalism of which, as Giorgos Paganos points out, “δεν πειθαρχεί σε ρεύματα και σχολές, δεν εντάσσεται σε συστήματα”.⁷³ A lot of ink has been spilt on the investigation of the relations between Skarimbas and surrealism. Nevertheless, I believe that Ritsos approaches the truth when he characterizes Skarimbas as a “δημιουργό με το ένστικτό του, πριν και από την Ευρώπη, ενός γνήσιου, ρωμέικου υπερρεαλισμού του παράδοξου”.⁷⁴ It is an undeniable truth that due to his “σκανδαλιστική φαντασία”⁷⁵ and his uncompromising attitude (including his militant action in his journal *Νεοελληνικά Σημειώματα*), Skarimbas felt, rather early on, that he was outside the rules of the literary game of the generation of the '30s. So naturally he wanted to dissociate his writing from the surrealist movement and more generally from modernism.

During the 1940s Skarimbas defended more and more zealously the native (provincial-agricultural) tradition against the modernist (European-Athenian) developments. He now preferred Krystallis to Elytis and ethnography to the contemporary prose production.⁷⁶ Thus his views converged more and more with those of Kotzioulas. During their brief time together in Chalkida in May 1950 (when Kotzioulas and his wife were put up by Skarimbas's family), the two friends confirmed their ideological unanimity. Being both outside the literary norms of their time (Kotzioulas for being too traditional and Skarimbas for being too eccentric) and feeling exiled from the institutional discourse on literature, they prepared to react by publishing a journal which would bear the title “Εγριπώτικη φυλλάδα”. A feverish correspondence followed, as they continued to make plans and encourage one another. Skarimbas, whose financial situation was then rather

⁷³ G. Paganos, “Ο Σκαρίμπας, το παράλογο και ο υπερρεαλισμός”, *Γράμματα και τέχνες* 5 (April-June 1988) 21-4.

⁷⁴ See *Ελεύθερη Γνώμη* (24 June 1984).

⁷⁵ A. Karandonis, “Γιάννη Σκαρίμπα, *Μαριάμπας* (μυθιστόρημα)”, in *Για τον Σκαρίμπα*, p. 79.

⁷⁶ See especially Skarimbas's articles published in the periodical *Ευβοϊκά Γράμματα* during the 1940s.

satisfactory, as he said, envisaged his new publishing undertaking as a continuation of the extremist *Νεοελληνικά Σημειώματα* and once again assigned to Kotzioulas the role of its “scientific” pillar, characterizing him as “έναν από τους μόνον δύο τρεις που διαθέτει η σύγχρονη Ελλάδα αυθεντικούς διανοουμένους, αληθινούς επιστήμονες και τίμιους λογοτέχνες”.⁷⁷ Kotzioulas, for his part, could not wait to get started:

Βάρα στο σταυρό! Αυτό πρέπει να ’ναι το σύνθημά μας. Πρέπει να σπάσουμε κόκαλα, να τους αγκαλιάσουμε κυριολεκτικά, γιατί κι αυτοί θέλησαν να μας θάψουν ζωντανούς, όχι μονάχα εμάς τους δυο, αλλά ολόκληρον κόσμο, τον κόσμο το δικό μας.⁷⁸

The “κόσμος” of the two friends is the unpretentious world of the simple people, the residents of the provinces, and in general the Greek literary tradition, in other words the “πληβεία αποστολή” of the provincial writers that dates back to Papadiamandis and now extends to them.

Immediately after his meeting with Skarimbas in Chalkida in 1950 Kotzioulas wrote his most fervently anti-modernist manifesto entitled “Πού τραβάει η ποίηση;”,⁷⁹ where the arguments of his older article “Συγχρονημένη ποίηση” are developed further and their opposing tension culminates. Kotzioulas now openly castigates the poetic orientations and intrigues of the “σχισματική παρασυναγωγή” of the generation of the ’30s. The terminology of this furious article is largely political, since the left-wing critic perceived the recognition of the poets of this generation as the result of a ruthless battle of social classes, in which the “γαλαζοαίματοι” Giorgos Seferis and Odysseas Elytis were the main winners and writers like Skarimbas and himself were defeated. Through a series of inspired metaphors, Kotzioulas

⁷⁷ *Αγαπητέ Κοτζιούλα*, p. 122.

⁷⁸ Letter of Kotzioulas to Skarimbas in June 1950 (Archive of Skarimbas in the Greek Literary and Historical Archive in Athens).

⁷⁹ *Ο Νέος Νουμάς* 5 (April-June 1950) 14-22.

talks about “πνευματική απολυταρχία”, “υπερφίαλο ιμπεριαλισμό”, methods similar to those of “ολοκληρωτικά καθεστώτα” or “τάγματα εφόδου”, in order to describe the ways in which the hard core of the generation of the '30s established themselves, by means of a well-organized campaign centred around Giorgos Katsimbalis and his journal *Ta Néa Grámmata*. The leftist critics Kostas Varnalis and Markos Avgeris are criticized for their negligence in failing to avert the danger. This bitter and rather aphoristic lampoon, which was no less quixotic than Skarimbas's struggle against the Athenian literati, did not trigger off any public debate. However, Skarimbas expressed his enthusiasm in one of his letters to his friend:

Το «πού τραβάει η ποίηση» είναι πραγματικό αριστούργημα κριτικής τοποθέτησης αυτού του φαινομένου της προσβολής του ιερού ανθρώπινου λόγου και του νοήματος αυτού. Το «κύριο άρθρο» της δικής μου «Φυλλάδας» (που μετά από το δικό σου φυλλάδιο, αυτό, παρέλκει και διέταξα την αποστοιχειοθέτησή του) είχε ακριβώς το φαινόμενο τούτο για θέμα του. Σου όμως λιγότερο μαχητικά, μα περισσότερο συστηματικά και σοφά, το εξάντλησες –για πρώτο χέρι– καλλίτερα. Το δικό μου –το άρθρο– τόχα τιτλοφορήσει «Με το βήμα της Χήνας!» Σου –στο δικό σου– κάπου γράφεις, «Τάγματα Εφόδου» (Τι σύμπτωση!) Αυτό το «Τάγματα Εφόδου» θάταν ακριβώς ό,τι έπρεπε για τίτλος του αριστουργηματικού φυλλάδιου σου. Όπως νάναι, με τον τίτλο αυτό θα ετοιμάσω ένα σχόλιο για το δικό σου φυλλάδιο.⁸⁰

This commentary was never written, or at least never published, because “Εγριπιώτικη φυλλάδα” never materialized. However, the similarity of the terminology with which the two friends expressed their accusations against the generation of the '30s (which they essentially charged with fascist organization methods) was not merely a “σύμπτωση”, as Skarimbas writes, but the point where their converging courses finally met.

⁸⁰ *Αγαπητέ Κοτζιούλα*, p. 126-7.

One year later, Kotzioulas wrote a brief but warm review of Skarimbas's second poetic collection *Εαυτούληδες* (1950), where he contrasted – indirectly but clearly – Skarimbas's poetry to the violently “συγχρονισμένη” (and de-hellenized) modern Greek poetry, which, as he explained in his article “Πού τραβάει η ποίηση;”, had been led to the “αποθέωση του παραλογισμού”.⁸¹ According to Kotzioulas, Skarimbas appears to tame his sub-conscious and to create a coherent, harmonic and genuinely Greek poetry. The intention to clear Skarimbas of any suspicion of surrealism (as well as to associate him with the generation of the 1920s) is obvious.

Κάτω απ' αυτές τις ζηλευτές εικόνες του, κάτω απ' τις όλο ελληνικότητα παρομοιώσεις του, σύντομες, γοργές, αστράμματα έμπνευσης, σκούζει, φρουμάζει ένα σκοτεινό υποσυνείδητο, το άλογο κτήνος που θάθελε να εκφραστεί με άναρθρες κραυγές, αλλά που η ευλογία της τέχνης μπορεί να τις μεταβάλλει σε αβρότατες, ιπποτικές, δακρύβρεχτες εξομολογήσεις [...] Έχουν όλα τους [τα ποιήματα] συνοχή, έτσι που αποτελούν ένα άρτιο σύνολο, μια μοναδική αρμονία. Είναι ο πιο ερωτικός ποιητής έπειτ' απ' το Φιλύρα, ο πιο πρωτότυπος ύστερ' απ' τον Καρυωτάκη.⁸²

Kotzioulas passed away in 1956, at the age of 47. That year the first institutional recognition of Skarimbas's literary contribution was celebrated. However, Skarimbas would continue his militant action for three more decades, gradually sharpening his tone against all those things he considered as negative aspects of our intellectual and socio-political life, including the generation of the '30s and the powerful cultural mechanisms of the capital. Three years after the death of Kotzioulas, in an open letter to Elias Erembourg (who, in his Russian anthology of the modern Greek novels, did not include Skarimbas or any other representative of the Greek provinces), Skarimbas commemorated his Epirot friend

⁸¹ Kotzioulas, “Πού τραβάει η ποίηση;”, p. 16.

⁸² Idem, “Συλλογές με ουσία”, p. 8.

in the best possible way, by including him (along with other writers like Kostas Varnalis, K. G. Karyotakis, Lambros Porfyra, Dimosthenis Voutiras, Miltiadis Malakasis, Kostas Krystallis, Themis Kornaros, and of course himself) in what he called the “ταπεινοί αναρριχητές του γιδόστρατου”, who marched along the “σκολιό μονοπάτι του αγίου Ταγκόρ”, as did in the past Pushkin, Gorky, Tolstoy, or Gogol.⁸³ The emotional way in which Skarimbas refers to this group of Modern Greek writers (which he opposes to the divinely inspired Olympians Kostis Palamas, Angelos Sikelianos, Nikos Kazantzakis, Stratis Myrivilis, Ilias Venezis and a few more) echoes in both style and content the more personal and combative article of Kotzioulas entitled “Η Σχολή του Καρυωτάκη και ο κύκλος των ομογενών” (1952).⁸⁴ Both writers use the first plural to depict themselves as representatives of all like-minded writers. Skarimbas writes:

[...] όσοι –εν ζωή– δρούμε ακόμα, παλλόμεθα πάντα μες στους διαλογισμούς του λαού, κάτω από της συνειδήσής του τους χτύπους [...] Είμαστε γνήσια άνθη του κήπου μας, αυθεντικά παιδιά του λαού [...] Όχι, δεν έχει σημασία (ή έχει όσην έχει) αν το ταξίδι του κόσμου οι μεν το κάμνουν με ... ορεβουάρ λουξ εισιτήριο, οι παμπλείστοι δε οι άλλοι μας [...] φυτοζωούν ή έχουν πεθάνει στην ψάθα.⁸⁵

And Kotzioulas:

Δουλεύουμε για να ζήσουμε και δουλεύουμε για την τέχνη μας, χύνοντας ιδρώτα κι αίμα για το κάθε κομμάτι μας, ενώ αυτοί είναι μαθημένοι στα έτοιμα και στις εύκολες επιτυχίες [...] παίρνουμε σθεναρή στάση μπρος στα σύγχρονα δεδομένα, τ' ανακατεύουμε αυτούσια και θαρρετά στο γράψιμό μας, βάνουμε μπόλικο χόμα στην ποίησή μας [...] Τέλος, έχουμε κλίση στους χωριάτες, στους ανθρώπους της δουλειάς, τους

⁸³ Skarimbas, “Ανοικτή επιστολή προς τον κ. Ηλία Έρεμπουργκ”, *Ευβοϊκός Λόγος* 21-22 (November-December 1959).

⁸⁴ *Νέος Νουμάς* 6 (January 1952) 5-8.

⁸⁵ Skarimbas, “Ανοικτή επιστολή”, pp. 66 and 75.

θεωρούμε σάρκα απ' τη σάρκα μας, αυτούς που αποτελούν τα εννιά δέκατα του πληθυσμού μας.⁸⁶

These two texts obviously converge due to both the class standards they apply and the high respect they express for the folk values which, according to both Kotzioulas and Skarimbas, a writer has to express with his work and with his life as well. In the following decades (the 1960s and '70s) Skarimbas talked openly about the generation of the '30s, which he identified with the Athenian establishment, as being indifferent to the needs and desires of the ordinary people. What is more, with his last short stories he returned to the ethnographic framework of his first attempts in the genre, thus bringing his adventurous creative career to a close.⁸⁷

In conclusion: despite their very different prose-writing styles (Kotzioulas, as we saw, was persistently ethnographic and realistic, whilst Skarimbas was idiosyncratically and radically modernist and “παραδοξολόγος”), these two “επαρχιώτες” – as they proudly used to call themselves – are connected by a fine poetic affinity, their militant but unpretentious style and morals, as well as a similar vision of art, which they regarded as deeply rooted in the folk experience and aiming to delight and criticize (and not to convey a profound and hermetic meaning). Kotzioulas was broadly educated and poetically gifted, while Skarimbas had a strong and highly unconventional literary talent. However, both of them had low social capital and an implacably uncompromising spirit, and thus did not gain the recognition they deserved. Quixotic in both their poetry and their articles, they fought a battle against the intellectual hegemony of Athens and the generation of the '30s. Their libels were rarely taken seriously and their alliance did not bear the fruit they expected; yet the story of their friendship has a lot to reveal to us about the unofficial history of Modern Greek literature, which is still uncharted territory.

⁸⁶ Kotzioulas, “Η Σχολή του Καρυωτάκη και ο κύκλος των ομογενών”, p. 8.

⁸⁷ See the comments of Stamboulou, *Πηγές*, pp. 397-400.

The year 2007-8 at Cambridge

Students

Cecily Arthur graduated with a First in Part II of the Modern and Medieval Languages Tripos. During her year abroad, which she spent in Kalamata at the University of the Peloponnese, she undertook a translation project on Maniot folk poetry, and in her final year she took translation and essay papers in Modern Greek, and a paper on “The history and structure of Modern Greek”.

Richard Thompson was awarded a First in the Part IB examinations. Madelaine Edwards spent her year abroad at the University of Crete in Rethymno. She is to be congratulated on being awarded joint first prize in the London Hellenic Society undergraduate essay competition for 2007.

Vicki Hart passed the examinations for the Certificate in Modern Greek, with a mark of Credit. Alexander Holyoake was awarded a pass with Credit in the Diploma in Modern Greek.

Thekla Papantoniou was the first student to take the new module “Myth and history in Modern Greek literature”, as part of the MPhil in European Literature and Culture.

Teaching staff

As Ms Eleftheria Lasthiotaki was on maternity leave, the greater part of the language teaching was undertaken by Dr Regina Karousou-Fokas, who also made a major contribution to the teaching of “The history and structure of Modern Greek”. Dr Notis Toufexis also contributed to this course, as well as teaching advanced translation into Greek and giving two lectures for the course on “Greek literature, history and thought since 1880”. Mr Kostas Skordyles taught a course on topics in modern Greek history. Professor David Holton taught various courses on Greek literature, the history of Modern Greek, and translation from Greek.

Visiting speakers

Nine speakers gave invited lectures during the 2007-8 academic year. The programme was as follows:

- 25 October. Professor Peter Mackridge (St Cross College, Oxford): *A language in the image of the nation: language and national identity in Greece since the eighteenth century*
- 8 November. Professor Roderick Beaton (King's College London): *Kazantzakis the Cretan: versions of the Minoan past from the author of Zorba the Greek*
- 22 November. Professor Robert Holland (Institute of Commonwealth Studies, University of London): *Britain and the ambiguity of Greek sovereignty since 1832*
- 31 January. Dr Athina Vogiatzoglou (University of Ioannina): *Militant intellectuals against the literary establishment: Giorgos Kotzioulas and Giannis Skarimbis (1935-1952)*
- 14 February. Professor Peter Trudgill (University of East Anglia): *Why Greek vowels aren't boring*
- 28 February. Dr Natalia Deliyannaki: *Erotokritos into music*
- 6 March. Professor Paschalis Kitromilides (University of Athens): *Adamantios Korais and the dilemmas of liberal nationalism*
- 1 May. Dr Philothei Kolitsi (University of Thessaloniki): *The portrait of the female artist in modern Greek prose fiction*
- 8 May. Dr Dimitra Kolliakou (Newcastle University): *Answers without questions: the emergence of fragments in child English and Greek*

Graduate Seminar

The Graduate Seminar enjoyed a full and varied programme, which this year was organised by two PhD students, Foteini Lika and Stratos Myrogiannis. Papers were given by the following invited speakers: Nikos Falagkas, Korina Giaxoglou, Irene Theodoropoulou (all from King's College London), Dr Sarah Ekdawi (Oxford University), Ioanna Langa (Queen's University, Belfast), and Marios Mouratis (University of Thessaloniki). The other papers were given by Cambridge-based graduate students and research staff: Eleni Kapogianni, Dimitris Michelioudakis, Thekla Papantoniou, and Dr Notis Toufexis.

Activities of members of the Modern Greek Section

Professor David Holton found himself called on (again) to chair the Faculty of Modern and Medieval Languages, to fill an unexpected vacancy from January to September 2008. He also served as Acting Vice-Master of Selwyn College in the Lent and Easter Terms 2008. He gave lectures at King's College London and the University of Stockholm, and chaired a panel at a conference billed as the "First Worldwide Conference of Modern Greek Studies", held in Athens in July 2008. Later that month he gave a lecture at a summer school at Delphi, under the auspices of the University of Athens, and he was honoured there, at a special ceremony, with a "Wisdom Award", in recognition of his contributions to the study of Greek language and culture of the post-Byzantine period. He has published:

"Foreword", in: David Wills, *The Mirror of Antiquity 20th century British travellers in Greece* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing 2007), pp. x-xii

"Σκέψεις για την υποδομή της διδασκαλίας της νέας ελληνικής στο εξωτερικό: βοηθήματα και μορφές υποστήριξης", *Πρακτικά Διεθνούς Συνεδρίου: Η Ελληνική Γλώσσα ως δευτερη/ξένη – Έρευνα, Διδασκαλία, Εκμάθηση*. Επιμέλεια έκδοσης: Κωνσταντίνος Ντίνας – Άννα Χατζηπαναγιωτίδη (Thessaloniki: University Studio Press), pp. 34-41

"Οι Νεοελληνικές Σπουδές στο Πανεπιστήμιο του Cambridge", *Ινστιτούτο Νεοελληνικών Ερευνών Εθνικού Ιδρύματος Ερευνών, Ενημερωτικό Δελτίο 32* (December 2007) 96-9

"Το φαινόμενο της Κρητικής Αναγέννησης", *Παλιμνηστον 20/21* (2006-7) 31-50

Dr Notis Toufexis gave a paper at the First Worldwide Conference of Modern Greek Studies, held in Athens from 3 to 5 July 2008. In May 2008 he gave two papers (one together with Tina Lendari) at a Conference on "Philology and computing" held at the University of Athens, and a talk on the "Grammar of Medieval Greek project" at the Centre for Byzantine Studies, University of Thessaloniki. He also gave a talk at the Late Antique and Byzantine Seminar, University of Oxford in January 2008 and

participated with a presentation at a workshop on “Epistemic Networks and GRID + Web 2.0 for Arts and Humanities” held at the Internet Centre, Imperial College London, also in January 2008. He has published: “Diglossia and register variation in Medieval Greek”, *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 32 (2008) 203-17.

About the contributors

Roderick Beaton is Koraes Professor of Modern Greek and Byzantine History, Language and Literature, and Head of the Department of Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, at King's College London. During 2007 he was seconded to the University of Crete, where he gave a series of lectures, with Peter Bien, on Kazantzakis; these are expected to be published as a book, in Greek, by Kastaniotis in March 2009. He has also edited a collection of studies on Kazantzakis to be published by Crete University Press (in Greek) and, with David Ricks, *The making of Modern Greece: Romanticism, nationalism and the uses of the past (1797-1896)* (Ashgate 2009).

Natalia Deliyannaki completed her PhD thesis, entitled "On the versification of *Erotokritos*", at the University of Cambridge in 1995. In addition to articles on Cretan Renaissance literature, Cavafy and Sikelianos, she has published an anthology: *Κρητική λυρική ποίηση; Από την περίοδο της ακμής* (Athens: Ermis 1999). In collaboration with Ch. L. Karaoglou, she compiled the *Βιβλιογραφία Γιώργου Θεοτοκά, 1974-2002* (Thessaloniki: University Studio Press 2004). She has recently edited and published the drafts of Seferis's unfinished novel *Βαρνάβας Καλοστέφανος* (Athens: Morfotiko Idryma Ethnikis Trapezis 2007).

Athina Vogiatzoglou studied at the University of Crete and then at King's College London, where her PhD thesis was supervised by Dr David Ricks. She is Assistant Professor in the Department of Philology of the University of Ioannina. She has published: *Η Μεγάλη Ιδέα του Αυρισμού. Μελέτη του "Προλόγου στη Ζωή" του Άγγελου Σικελιανού* (Heraklion: Crete University Press 1999) and *Η γένεση των πατέρων. Ο Σικελιανός ως διάδοχος των εθνικών ποιητών* (Athens: Kastaniotis 2005). She has also edited the novel *Τασσό* (1858) by Achilleas Levendis (Athens: Nefeli 2000) and the collected studies of G. P. Savvidis on Sikelianos: *Αυχνοστάτες για τον Σικελιανό* (Athens: Ermis 2003).

