

# **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,<sup>1</sup> 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-

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<sup>1</sup> 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 (*καραγκιοζοπαίχτης*), 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.<sup>7</sup> 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."<sup>8</sup> 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*.<sup>9</sup> 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*

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

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 58-9.

<sup>9</sup> *Ξεκίνημα* 8 (August 1933) 251-2.

(1950).<sup>10</sup> 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):<sup>11</sup> “Πολλά γράμματα λαβαίνω γεμάτα ενθουσιασμούς και θαυμαστικές εκφράσεις, αλλά δεν έχουν την αξία της δικής σου περιωπής.”<sup>12</sup> His only comment on Kotzioulas’s poetry refers to his third collection of poems, *Δεύτερη ζωή* (1938),<sup>13</sup> 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.”<sup>14</sup> 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.<sup>15</sup> 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

<sup>10</sup> 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.

<sup>11</sup> See Skarimbas, *Άπαντες σίχοι*, pp. 13-45.

<sup>12</sup> *Αγαπητέ Κοτζιούλα*, p. 73.

<sup>13</sup> Kotzioulas, *Άπαντα Α΄*, pp. 101-53.

<sup>14</sup> *Αγαπητέ Κοτζιούλα*, p. 75.

<sup>15</sup> 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.<sup>16</sup>) 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.<sup>17</sup>

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).<sup>18</sup> 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

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<sup>16</sup> See his collection *Βοϊδάγγελοι* in *Άπαντες σίχιοι*, pp. 130-45.

<sup>17</sup> 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).

<sup>18</sup> 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).<sup>19</sup> Kotzioulas devoted to Charlie Chaplin both a poem<sup>20</sup> and a study,<sup>21</sup> 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".<sup>22</sup> 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

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

<sup>20</sup> Kotzioulas, "Ένας φοιτητής βλέπει Σαρλώ", *Άπαντα Α'*, p. 89.

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

<sup>22</sup> 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 τακουριών 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– [...]<sup>23</sup>

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

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<sup>23</sup> Skarimbas, *Άπαντες σίχλοι*, 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.<sup>24</sup>

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.<sup>25</sup>) 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».

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<sup>24</sup> Kotzioulas, *Άπαντα Α'*, pp. 49-52 (49).

<sup>25</sup> 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".<sup>26</sup> Through this dialogue, Skarimbas indicates the ghostly substance of the women he describes, who often appear as lifeless dolls, or even robots,<sup>27</sup> 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.<sup>28</sup>

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

<sup>26</sup> K. G. Karyotakis, *Ποιήματα και πεζά*, ed. G. P. Savvidis (Athens: Ermis <sup>7</sup>1984), p. 102.

<sup>27</sup> See Kokolis, *Άνθρωποι και μη*, pp. 13-15.

<sup>28</sup> 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.<sup>29</sup> 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,<sup>30</sup> 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,

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<sup>29</sup> 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*.

<sup>30</sup> 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.<sup>31</sup> 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”.<sup>32</sup> 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

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

<sup>32</sup> 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”,<sup>33</sup> 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”,<sup>34</sup> 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”.<sup>35</sup>

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

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

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

<sup>35</sup> 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,<sup>36</sup> 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.<sup>37</sup>

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”)<sup>38</sup>; 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.<sup>39</sup>

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

<sup>37</sup> 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.

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

<sup>39</sup> Kotzioulas, *Άπαντα Α'*, p. 122.

Then, in 1937, at a time when Karyotakis was attacked by everyone, including the Left,<sup>40</sup> 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”.<sup>41</sup> 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.<sup>42</sup>

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”

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

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

<sup>42</sup> 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)<sup>43</sup>

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)<sup>44</sup>

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

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

<sup>44</sup> 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*,<sup>45</sup> 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.<sup>46</sup> 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.<sup>47</sup> Kotzioulas, who did not take part directly in the conflict between centre and province

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<sup>45</sup> 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.

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

<sup>47</sup> 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.

(unlike Skarimbas and Pappas, he lived in the capital and was an active member of its intellectual life, despite the fact that he was disregarded), supported his friend in his struggle more effectively than Pappas, since he articulated the main ideological line of the magazine with four studies concerning Greek literary life, written in a more sober, and thus more convincing, way than the contributions of Skarimbas and Pappas. These restrained articles, devoid of personal attacks, to a great extent saved the dignity of *Νεοελληνικά Σημειώματα*, which has justifiably been criticized for its personal character, tactless aggressiveness and futile opposition to the capital.<sup>48</sup> Myrivilis, who was directly offended by the comments of Skarimbas, even talked about an organized “φιλολογικός γκαγκστερισμός”<sup>49</sup> and, along with other offended writers, critics and state institutions like the Academy, contributed to the closing of the magazine by the Metaxas regime in September 1937.<sup>50</sup>

These four studies of Kotzioulas examine, respectively, Greek literary language, philology faculties, Greek ethnographies and literary criticism.<sup>51</sup> Although they expressed the writer’s personal opinions and preferences, they converged with the views of Skarimbas at crucial points, confirming the ideological affinity of the two men. Although Kotzioulas did not go as far as calling Athens “τη χωριατικότερη πρωτεύουσα του κόσμου”,<sup>52</sup> as Skarimbas did, he argued convincingly that it still maintained its provincial character (thus giving an answer to the cosmopolitan rhetorical of members of the generation of the ’30s, such as Theotokas):

Μου φαίνεται πως δεν ήρθε ακόμα η ώρα που η μεγαλούπολή μας μπορεί να ζήσει ανεξάρτητα (μέσα στη φιλολογία), δίχως τους δεσμούς που την ανάγουν –με σχέσεις υποτέλειας– στο

<sup>48</sup> For more on these attacks see Varelas, *ibid.*, pp. 199-202.

<sup>49</sup> S. Myrivilis, “Φουρτουνοποίησης”, *Η Εθνική* (16 October 1937).

<sup>50</sup> For more on this short-lived periodical see Varelas, *ibid.*, pp. 198-200.

<sup>51</sup> Kotzioulas, “Η λογοτεχνική μας γλώσσα”, “Οι Φιλολογικές Σχολές”, “Ελληνικές ηθογραφίες”, “Η ελληνική κριτική”, *Νεοελληνικά Σημειώματα*, issues 2, 3, 4 and 5 respectively (April-July 1937).

<sup>52</sup> Skarimbas, “Η ελληνική επαρχία”, p. 40.

ύπαιθρο, σ' όλες αυτές τις μικρές κατάσπαρτες πατρίδες. Η πρωτεύουσά μας είναι πάντα η συνισταμένη, δε βρήκε ακόμα την ανεξαρτησία της. Το πολύ πολύ υποδιαιρείται σε μικρογειτονιές που διατηρούν ακόμα όλο το τοπικό τους χρώμα και δε διαφέρουνε στο βάθος από τους επαρχιώτικους συνοικισμούς. Όσο για τη διεθνική ζωή μας, δεν είναι να τη συζητάμε σοβαρά. Αν από καιρό σε καιρό μερικοί Έλληνες ταξιδεύουν στην Ευρώπη, αυτό είναι το ίδιο με τα ταξίδια που κάνουν πολλοί επαρχιώτες μας ως την Αθήνα: δεν πρόκειται ν' αλλάξει κανείς μ' αυτόν τον τρόπο τη μορφή ενός πολιτισμού.<sup>53</sup>

What is more, the views of Kotzioulas about Greek literary language are almost identical to those of Skarimbas. I quote:

Ο λογοτέχνης τώρα της εποχής μας έχει όχι μόνο τη δυνατότητα παρά και την υποχρέωση μαζί ν' αντλήσει ακόμα από την πρώτη πηγή: από το στόμα του λαού. Η γλώσσα των μεγαλοπόλεων μπορεί να 'χει πολλές ευκολίες, για τη λογοτεχνία όμως είναι άψυχη και συνθηματική, κατάλληλη μόνο για όσους γράφουν χρονογραφήματα κι επιφυλλίδες. Δεν ξέρω αν είναι απαραίτητο για το λογοτέχνη να προέρχεται από επαρχία, μα πρέπει να προσέξει πολύ τις μικρές αυτές πατρίδες με τους κλειστούς πολιτισμούς των. Κάθε περιφέρεια και κάθε χωριό είν' ένας ολόκληρος κόσμος με τα έθιμα και τη λαλιά του. Όπως το καθετί, έτσι κι η γλώσσα μας, περισσότερο μάλιστα' από τ' άλλα, βρίσκεται ριζωμένη στα στρώματα τα λαϊκά.<sup>54</sup>

Moreover, by warmly supporting the Greek ethnographic tradition, from Alexandros Papadiamandis up to Ioannis Kondylakis and Kostas Krystallis, a tradition which he regarded as “τον πιο ώριμο καρπό της εθνικής λογοτεχνίας μας”,<sup>55</sup> Kotzioulas appears to be more conservative than Skarimbas, who, in the same year, even claimed that he and other contemporary writers had managed to surpass the heritage of Papadiamandis, Grigorios Xenopoulos

<sup>53</sup> Kotzioulas, “Ελληνικές ηθογραφίες”, p. 56-9 (56).

<sup>54</sup> Kotzioulas, “Η λογοτεχνική μας γλώσσα”, pp. 21-3 (23).

<sup>55</sup> Kotzioulas, “Ελληνικές ηθογραφίες”, p. 56.

and Konstandinos Christomanos.<sup>56</sup> 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.<sup>57</sup>

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 Evvia<sup>58</sup> (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 Epirus<sup>59</sup> 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,<sup>60</sup> while Skarimbas proposes the “απαριστοκρατοποίηση”

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

<sup>57</sup> Stamboulou, *Πηγές*, p. 115.

<sup>58</sup> *Αγαπητέ Κοτζιούλα* (see note 7), pp. 120-1.

<sup>59</sup> See Kotzioulas, *Θέατρο στα βουνά* (Athens: Themelio 1976).

<sup>60</sup> 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.<sup>61</sup> 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.<sup>62</sup> 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)<sup>63</sup> 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.<sup>64</sup> 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,<sup>65</sup> 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”.<sup>66</sup> 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

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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>66</sup> 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).<sup>67</sup> 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,<sup>68</sup> 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.<sup>69</sup>

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».<sup>70</sup>

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)”.<sup>71</sup> 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.<sup>72</sup> This connection

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

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

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

<sup>70</sup> See *Ευβοϊκά Γράμματα* 23 (February 1945).

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

<sup>72</sup> 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”.<sup>73</sup> 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”.<sup>74</sup> It is an undeniable truth that due to his “σκανδαλιστική φαντασία”<sup>75</sup> 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.<sup>76</sup> 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

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

<sup>74</sup> See *Ελεύθερη Γνώμη* (24 June 1984).

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

<sup>76</sup> 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”.<sup>77</sup> 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.<sup>78</sup>

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;”,<sup>79</sup> 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

<sup>77</sup> *Αγαπητέ Κοτζιούλα*, p. 122.

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

<sup>79</sup> *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– τώρα 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.<sup>80</sup>

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.

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<sup>80</sup> *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”.<sup>81</sup> 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.<sup>82</sup>

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

<sup>81</sup> Kotzioulas, “Πού τραβάει η ποίηση;”, p. 16.

<sup>82</sup> 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.<sup>83</sup> 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).<sup>84</sup> 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.<sup>85</sup>

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

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

<sup>84</sup> *Νέος Νουμάς* 6 (January 1952) 5-8.

<sup>85</sup> Skarimbas, “Ανοικτή επιστολή”, pp. 66 and 75.

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

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.<sup>87</sup>

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.

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

<sup>87</sup> See the comments of Stamboulou, *Πηγές*, pp. 397-400.