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WORKSHOP REVIEW

MODERN GREEK LITERATURE THROUGH A TRANSLATOR'S LENS, KING'S COLLEGE LONDON, 23 JANUARY 2019

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The workshop entitled *Modern Greek Literature through a Translator's Lens* took place at King's College London on 23 January 2019. Funded by Creative Europe, the European Union's financial support programme for the creative, cultural and audio-visual sectors in Europe, the workshop emerged as a collaboration of King's College London with the British School at Athens and Aiora Press. Two days before the organization of the workshop at King's College London, on 21 January 2019, a first workshop under the same title took place at the British School at Athens. Emeritus Koraes professor Roderick Beaton (King's College London) discussed Modern Greek literature and translation with Patricia Barbeito, professor of American Literatures (Rhode Island School of Design) and translator. The panel of discussants also included Dr Dionysis Kapsalis, poet and director of the National Bank of Greece Cultural Foundation and the poet and translator Alicia Stallings. On 23 January, the group of discussants participating at the King's College London workshop was slightly altered. Roderick Beaton and Patricia Barbeito engaged in a dialogue on the topic of translation with three other specialists of the field, namely David Ricks, professor of Modern Greek and Comparative Literature (King's College London), and the writers Victoria Hislop and Panos Karnezis.

Roderick Beaton, moderator of the panel discussion, opened the workshop stressing the idea that literature and translation constitute cultural and creative processes indispensably connected to each other. Deploying the example of Homer's epic poems, 'The Odyssey' and 'The Iliad', which are considered global literary classics, he argued that their canonization and dissemination would have been impossible without the existence of translations that made them accessible to the international readership. Beaton's introductory words were followed by the presentations of Victoria Hislop, David Ricks, Patricia Barbeito and Panos Karnezis and also by a Q&A session. The discussants

addressed the subject of the workshop exploring the relationship between translation and two other processes that are embedded within the production of literature, namely writing and reading. Specifically, the four speakers approached the entwined practices of translating, writing and reading literature from different angles and perspectives, each one of them drawing on its personal field of experience and expertise. The presentations followed a circular structure: the workshop opened with Victoria Hislop, an English author whose novels are translated into various languages, including Greek, and it closed with Panos Karnezis, a native Greek speaker and author who is writing his own literary works in English.

Victoria Hislop, author of the bestsellers *The Island* (2005) and *The Sunrise* (2014) among numerous other novels and short stories set in a Mediterranean and very often Greek landscape, discussed translation as illustrating the state of mind of a writer whose work is translated. In her presentation, Hislop juxtaposed the active position in which the writer sees herself through the writing experience with the vulnerable position in which she finds herself through the translation process. The source of this vulnerability, according to the author, originates in the realization of the writer that she has no agency over the way her own intellectual and creative work will be disseminated in a different language and, in consequence, within a different cultural background. Underlining the bond of trust that exists between the author and the translator and the leap of faith that the first performs, Hislop argued that the translator functions as a mediator between the literary text and the foreign reader. In this context, the work of the translator is not to merely convert the language in which a text is written to another, but mainly to translate aspects of culture embedded in Modern Greek literature, making the literary text accessible to foreign readers. In order to further stress the pivotal role of the translator in the literary production, Hislop concluded that although the work of the translator is overlooked by the readers, in reality, translators are actively involved in the writing process, very often correcting inconsistencies and mistakes that even the editors cannot trace.

The second speaker, David Ricks put translations of Modern Greek literature into a broader perspective, outlining the developments in this industry during the last years. Ricks opened his presentation highlighting that Modern Greek constitutes a minor language in the sense that it is spoken by the limited number of the inhabitants of Greece and Cyprus and also by the members of the Greek diaspora residing outside these geographical areas. The limited number of people speaking Greek makes Modern Greek literature a minor literature which shares common features with other minor literatures such as the small number of writers and the even smaller number of translators who are primarily second- or third-generation Greeks. The above-mentioned elements and the publication of translations through the academy, foundations and organizations, according to Ricks, are the main reasons that limit the dissemination of Modern Greek literature. However, he argued that the landscape of translations of Modern Greek literature has changed drastically in the last fifteen years, tracing two trends that contributed to this shift. The first one is that next to the Norton Anthology of Greek poetry entitled *The Greek Poets: Homer to the Present* (2010) and translations of much translated authors, such as C. P. Cavafy, George Seferis and Nikos Kazantzakis we have now translations of less known authors. The examples of such attempts include translations of literary texts of the nineteenth century, most notably the translation of Andreas Laskaratos (*Reflections*, 2015) and Alexandros

Rizos Rangavis (*The Notary*, 2017) as well as a forthcoming translation of Konstantinos Theotokis. The second trend refers to the emergence of alternative translations; next to traditional translations such as the above-mentioned examples appear translations of Greek texts embedded in anglophone poetry such as George Kalogeris's *Dialogos: Paired Poems in Translation* (2012). This more inclusive and overall broader coverage of literature led to a greater variety of translated works that can be used as a valuable pedagogical tool for students who are now able to compare multiple translations of a single work.

The following discussant, Patricia Barbeito approached the topic of translation through the lens of the professional translator. Barbeito, a translator of Modern Greek literature herself, argued that the translation is a mixed experience of translating and reading a literary text. Defining translation as a live dialogue of the translator with the editor, the writer and the reader, Barbeito extended, in a theoretically sophisticated way, Hislop's argument regarding the importance of the role of the translator in the dissemination of a literary text. Her presentation concentrated on literature in the era of globalization. Placing Jacques Derrida at the epicentre of her analysis, she argued that cosmopolitan multilingualism has replaced monolingualism. In this context, according to Barbeito, the literary text does not constitute a monodimensional cultural text, but a multidimensional one that includes points of reference touching upon different languages and cultures, an inherent characteristic of contemporary literature that makes translation a complex process. Based on this feature of global literature, Barbeito argued that in the translation process the original text should not be turned into a monolingual, monolithic piece of writing in order to guarantee accessibility to the foreign readership. Drawing on her recent experience in working on her latest translation project, namely M. Karagatsis's *The Great Chimaira*, she concluded that the linguistic and cultural fluidity of a text should be retained in the translation, guaranteeing the preservation of a sense of authenticity that the original text exudes.

Unlike Barbeito, Panos Karnezis is not a professional translator of books of other writers, but operates as the translator of his own literary texts, which include both collections of short stories such as the *Little Infamies* (2002) and novels such as *The Maze* (2004) and *The Fugitives* (2015) among others. Writing his books not in Greek, which is his mother tongue, but in English, a learned language for him, Karnezis explained that he is approaching translation as a way of communicating with people around him. In his case, however, the term 'translation' does not refer to the literal meaning of the word which is associated with the conversion of the language in which the original literary text is written into another, but it is much more focused on making a culture accessible to another as an inherent characteristic of the authorial practice. Karnezis, in his presentation recognized the flexibility of English language as a language spoken by numerous speakers, not always or not necessarily native ones, juxtaposing it with the rigidity of the Greek language, a feature owed to the limited number of its speakers. The author, although praising the virtues of writing in English, also indicated a number of limitation and challenges that come with this choice: the sounds, the length of the sentences, the rhythm of the language and the idiomatic use of it function differently in English and in Greek. To these should be added the sense of humour which cannot be easily translated, considering that it changes as the languages change. As a result, writing in a foreign language, according to Karnezis, lacks the intimacy that one experiences

when writing in her mother tongue and the writing process becomes more time consuming.

The common thread that pierced through the presentations and dominated the lively Q&A session that followed lies on the multiple and constantly shifting content of the term 'translator'; it oscillates between the literal meaning of the professional practitioner who makes possible the dissemination of a literary work in foreign readerships and the more fluid meaning of the writer who is not writing in his mother tongue and who makes his work accessible to foreign readers without the mediation of a professional translator. No matter how many meanings the term obtains, the task of translation constitutes, above all, a way to resonate cultural differences for readers who are hardly familiar with the Greek language, literature and culture in general, as Barbeito put it. What is more, in all these cases, translation constitutes a challenging enterprise, as it balances between reading and writing. Hislop, drawing on her own experience as a translator of Cavafy, stressed the subject of the artistic licence of the translator which is incorporated within this exercise of balancing between the reading and the writing process. Indicating that the translator should not substitute the writer, Hislop argued that the interventions of the translator should be limited as the reader wants to hear the writer's voice rather than the translator's.

The kaleidoscopic way in which the translator's lens was approached in the workshop was further illuminated by Karnezis and Ricks who concentrated on the authorial practice in reference to translation. Karnezis argued that the writer who writes in a foreign language, addressing a foreign and potentially also international readership, has to consider the unfamiliarity of the foreign reader with Greek cultural references. Admitting that himself is writing from the point of view of someone who does not know much about Greece, Karnezis made it clear that part of his authorial practice is translation in the sense that he permits international readers to culturally access his literary work. Karnezis's approach not only puts Modern Greek literature in the realm of what Barbeito called cosmopolitan multilingualism in her presentation, but also is connected to another dimension of the term 'translator' that Ricks added in the equation. According to Ricks, the best writers in Greece are bilingual in the sense that they are not trapped in the perspective of a single culture, language and literature. This idea extends the concept of the author as translator as discussed by Karnezis in order to also include the writer who does write in her mother tongue, but who intends to be translated. Both authorial practices, although different from the work of the professional translator and from each other in their intentions, open up Modern Greek literature to a broader international readership, making Greek literary texts less confined to the inherent restrictions that minor literatures have.

The workshop brought forward a subject that concerns writers, literary scholars, editors and other professionals involved in the production and publishing of literature since the emergence of the so-called national literatures; the place of national literature in an increasingly globalized world. 'Nowadays, national literature doesn't mean much: the age of world literature is beginning and everybody should contribute to hasten its advent' wrote Goethe addressing Eckermann in 1827 (see Goethe 1984); these words underlined a diachronic desire for production of literary works able to surpass the linguistic, geographical and cultural limits of the nation. More than an

intellectually and culturally stimulating endeavour, this desire today takes the form of a pressing demand, especially for minor literatures, since they have to adjust to the needs of a predominantly globalized literary market. This workshop, in line with current developments in this field, opened the floor for a more outward-looking approach of Modern Greek literature, placing it in the realm of world literature and discussing in a fruitful and creative manner translation as a prerequisite for its dissemination in international readerships.

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