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Translating Intertextuality as Cultural Reference: Yoryis Yatromanolakis' Greek Novel *Eroticon*

If translation is transferring a literary work into a different language, then intertextuality can be regarded as a kind of translation, in that it transfers a literary work into a different narrative idiom. In other words, translating intertextuality can be thought of as the translation of a translation. The difficult task assigned to the translator is to identify the foreign idiom that constantly blends with that of the text in which it is embedded and to reproduce the disparate reverberations that come about as a result of the interaction between the two. In this chapter I will try to address a particular problem in the translation of texts that are constructed on the basis of intertextual allusions, namely the cultural significance that these allusions might be conveying. I will examine the process of transferring the cultural information that literary works carry in their intertextual baggage from the source language to the target language. My aim is to pinpoint the particular implications that the difference between classical intertexts, which are culturally non-specific, and culturally specific ones, has for translation. A case in point is Yoryis Yatromanolakis' novel (written in Greek in 1995 and translated into English by David Connolly in 1999),¹ which ostentatiously features the disparity between universally significant and

Let us consider some intertextual uses of the examples I mentioned above. The German author Ulrich Plenzdorf writes a modern version of Goethe's

Witzke in the novel *Die Legende von Paul Wibeau*, which is set in contemporary Berlin. The eighteen-year-old Edgar Wibeau falls in love with babysitter Charlie, a modern version of Lotte, who after her mother's death cares for her many younger brothers and sisters. Like Lotte, Charlie is engaged and her fiancé, who is initially conveniently kept away in the army, suddenly returns and marries her. His young rival falls into depression and finally commits suicide. Whereas Goethe's

Die Leiden des jungen Werthers is written in the form of letters addressed to his friend Wilhelm, the modern version is a simple first-person narrative. The original German classic is playfully echoed in the recordings that Edgar sends to his friend Willi, but the intertextual allusions are also extended into the colloquial style and wit of D. J. Salinger's

Salvatore. The possibility of infusing a German and an American text into a single narrative strand points to the fact that the cultural specification that marked

Die Leiden des jungen Werthers as a German intertext has been eroded. Thus, when

Die Legende von Paul Wibeau slips into a different language, the allusions to Goethe's classic remain intact; the fact that Goethe is not confined to the German scope makes the intertextual game accessible to the reader, who happens to read Plenzdorf's novel in a language other than German.

Goethe's *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* has been transformed from text into myth, a common myth inscribed in a worldwide cultural subconscious. A similar case is Sophocles'

Oedipus at Colonus, the difference being that there is no text prior to the myth. The French author Alain Robbe-Grillet uses *Oedipus at Colonus* as a loose frame for his novel *Le Viol* in which the detective Wallas becomes the culprit of the crime he is called to investigate. Accordingly, the Swiss author Max Frisch remotely alludes to Sophocles' tragedy in

his novel *Die Verwandlung*, written in German, in which the main character gets involved in an affair with a young woman who turns out to be his daughter. The ancient Greek tragedy is obviously adapted to fit each author's purposes, but there is a common core that both modern works share, which is the reference to the ancient myth, even if this appears like a fugitive shadow. A modern Greek novel drawing from *Die Verwandlung*, for example Aris Alexandrou's novel *Ο Αρσενικός* (1978), a political novel set in Greece during the civil war of 1944-1949, also shares this common element.⁴ Being a common myth rather than a culturally-specific literary work, *Die Verwandlung* is flexible enough to be rendered into different languages, genres and narrative idioms. Consequently, the translation of a work that alludes to *Die Verwandlung* is not impeded by this intertext's cultural specifications, as these have ceased to be prominent. The allusion to Sophocles' tragedy emerges as clearly in a translation of *Die Verwandlung* as in the original French text, because the ancient Greek drama has implications shared by readers of different linguistic backgrounds.

Another interesting example is Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, which has acquired a classic status, being reprinted and reread for four centuries in different languages. This wide reception suggests that the work as we know it nowadays has been invested with the meaning of these multinational readings and has therefore lost the specific implications that attached it to a Spanish context. Borges uses *Don Quixote* in his short story "Pierre Menard: Author of the Quixote," in which Pierre Menard, a French symbolist poet, embarks on the project of rewriting selected passages from Cervantes' novel. Jorge Borges exaggerates the intertextual drive in that his Menard does not write a new version of the *Don Quixote*, but literally produces an identical copy of it. He plays with the cultural significance of the work; the imitator is a Frenchman, who nevertheless attempts to reproduce *Don Quixote* in Spanish. This primarily implies a

transgression of language barriers, but goes

accessible to the foreign reader the translation needs to actualise them in two directions, both cross-culturally and cross-temporally; cross-culturally means to render their cultural significance as indispensable in the target language as they are in Spanish, whereas cross-temporally entails underlining their historical significance for the benefit of the contemporary reader. However, this is not feasible if the translator depends on purely literary means: *Don Quixote*, one of the primary works that Cervantes draws upon, although a best-seller in its own time, would not be recognised and appreciated by the average contemporary reader. Therefore, recent translations of *Don Quixote* have realised the need to preserve the intertextually embossed surface of the work and include extended introductions and footnotes, because it is only there that the significance of the sources can be highlighted.⁷

The case of Yoryis Yatromanolakis' novel *Yatromanolakis* raises similar issues. *Yatromanolakis*, which is Yatromanolakis' fifth novel, significantly differs from the rest of his output;⁸ it is a love manual presented in an erudite and learned style, emulating that of *Yatromanolakis*, composed by the Cretan monk Agapios Landos in 1643. *Yatromanolakis*, a popular text in its own time, is a practical guide on agricultural matters but also on dietary and medical problems, written in a hybrid of Cretan idiom mixed with archaic elements, which was quite conventional in the seventeenth century but is rather alien to the modern reader. It seems that the author, who also produced a significant number of best-selling hagiographical texts, did not have any direct knowledge of agricultural matters but, as he says in his introduction, based his evidence on popular beliefs and the study of Italian and Greek philosophers. On many occasions the instructions given in *Yatromanolakis* are impractical, but this has a certain charm for the modern reader who does not read the work for advice but for pleasure. Even more so in *Yatromanolakis*, the practicality of subject matter becomes a secondary

matter; the text seems to be a work of erudition and the main pretext for producing it is the challenge of discoursing with a wide range of literary sources. Therefore, it can be appreciated both as an emulation of such popular guides and as a parody of them. The primary issue at stake here is the kind of reading game that Yatromanolakis plays with his audience. Is *Geoponikon*, a text only known to a few scholars nowadays, supposed to be recognised by the reader? It is significant that *Geoponikon* is not overtly acknowledged, as is the case with other sources, but it is nevertheless explicitly indicated. The acoustic similarity between the titles *Geoponikon* and *Erotikon* implies a process of imitation. Also, *Geoponikon* follows the formal presentation of *Erotikon* and its author:

Geoponikon: containing most useful accounts on agriculture and medicine, and above all how one should preserve himself in good health, and moreover various medical issues, composed by the monk Agapios of Kreta.⁹

Erotikon: which contains most wondrous accounts concerning the nature of the erogenous parts and pudenda, concerning erotic positions, discourses and reveries and other such like: and above all how each may endure the sorrow of separation and moreover love potions and philtres yet also curses and spells of a most practical kind, from the hand of Yoryis Yatromanolakis of Kreta.

Being overtly based on another text, *Geoponikon* can be considered a postmodern novel, and it is exactly this dimension that complicates the process of translation, since *Geoponikon* is not a text that is easily recognisable by, let alone available to, a wider audience. But even if Yatromanolakis' game with Agapios' text is a rather private one, there are obvious traces of it that should survive in translation; even if the basic intertext goes unnoticed by the reader, he should still recognise its meta-narrative quality amounting to a strong alienating effect, which comes through even if the reader is not familiar with the text emulated. This effect can be viewed as the distance

that separates [redacted] from contemporary works, as regards narrative conventions and language. It is this deliberate disparity with contemporary fiction that the reader is primarily supposed to recognise rather than the particular intertext. At the end of the chapter I focus on showing ways this is achieved in translation.

Apart from [redacted], [redacted] draws on a large variety of intertexts that revolve around the subject of love, ranging from religious texts and ancient Greek literature to Modern Greek prose and poetry. These can be categorised in three different pairs of opposites. Firstly, there are intertexts more traceable in the subject matter, whereas others are located in the style. Secondly, there are intertexts that are explicitly acknowledged, whereas others are subtly implied. Thirdly, there are intertexts that are well known outside the Greek world, whereas others are only significant within the framework of the Greek cultural and linguistic community. Interestingly enough, intertexts that are employed for the sake of subject matter are explicitly acknowledged and are usually universally significant; on the other hand, implied intertexts are those employed for stylistic reasons and are confined to Greek cultural ramifications. The following table summarises this grouping of intertexts:

Group A	Group B
subject matter	style
acknowledged	implied
universally significant	culturally significant

This double resonance impels us to look at these intertexts in more detail. Intertexts vary in type and length, but for brevity's sake I will refrain from discussing the variable degree to which Yatromanolakis' text alludes to them. Intertexts belonging to group A are, for example, Plato's [redacted], particularly the part delivered by Aristophanes, the book of Genesis and lives of saints, which are explicitly named. In

those cases, however, where intertexts are employed mainly for stylistic reasons (group B), they are not acknowledged. The multi-layered language of _____, which

And then the sea, that raged like boiling broth,
was quieted, all calm and polished clean,
a fragrant garden, filled with all the stars;
Nature, by some deep mystery constrained,
shone forth in beauty and forgot her wrath.
No breath of wind touched sea or sky, not even
such a passing bee makes on a flower,
but close by the girl, who gladly clung to me,
the full moon quivered limpid on the water;
something at once unravelled there and lo,
before me was a woman clothed in moonlight.¹³

This kind of allusion is so subtle that it is most likely to be glossed over by someone

Notes

¹ Yoryis Yatromanolakis, (Athens: Kedros, 1995), trans. David Connolly (Cambridge: Dedalus, 1999). All extracts quoted hereafter refer to the Dedalus edition.

² Interestingly enough, worldwide reception is only possible through translation; thus, translation is the beginning and the end of a receptive process that keeps spinning around its tail.

³ See Hans-Robert Jauss, , trans. Timothy Bahti, introduction by Paul de Man (Brighton: Harvester, 1982).

⁴ Extracts of this novel have been translated by Kay Cicellis (6, 1989, 57-62), and recently in David Ricks, ed., (London: Peter Owen, 2003), 370-5.

⁵ Jorge Luis Borges, “Pierre Menard, Author of the ”