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Translating Modern Greek poetry of the 2008 financial crisis

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ABSTRACT

Since Greece's 2008 economic collapse, four poetry anthologies on the financial crisis have been published. Editors, translators, publishers, and writers involved in the production and sale of poetry of the financial crisis for an Anglophone market benefit from the construction of this new literary category – be it financially or in terms of acquiring or consolidating cultural capital. However, these anthologies function within a language landscape in which Greek and English occupy different positions of power. This article argues that although the anthologies' editors are largely conscious of the uneven power dynamic between Greek and English, some of the translation strategies adopted in the anthologies do not serve to create an equal playing field between the two languages. The use of a poststructuralist approach is specifically critiqued, based on the assertion that it loses sight of the ethical complexity of translating from a marginalized language into a dominant tongue.

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Introduction

In "An Unsought for Calling: My Life as Modern Greek Translator", Rae Dalven (1990) relates her experience of translating Modern Greek literature from the 1930s onwards. She recounts that in 1941 Mark Van Doren, the American literary critic and writer, published his anthology *World Poetry* having omitted Modern Greek poetry, although ancient Greek poets were represented. Dalven sought out Van Doren's telephone number and called him to explain his omission, only to be told, "My dear young lady … if I had found a decent translation from the modern Greek, I would have included it" (309). Much has changed since Dalven's days: recently, Modern Greek poetry in the form of "poetry of the financial crisis" has made a vivid appearance on the world literary stage. Since the collapse of Greece's economy in 2008, four poetry anthologies have been published: *Crisis: 30 Greek Poets of the Current Crisis* (2014); *Futures: Poetry of the Greek Crisis* (2015); *Austerity Measures: The New Greek Poetry* (2016), and *I Woke up in a Country: Greek Poetry at the Present Time* (2019). Mainstream Anglophone media outlets, such as *The Guardian* newspaper, have been keen to explore and comment upon this new category, citing books such as *Austerity Measures* as a "chance to share

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Greek experience beyond the headlines – in a way that is fascinating [and] revelatory" (Kellaway 2016).

In order to better contextualize the publication of the anthologies, it is important to assess whether there has been a spike in poetic production in Greece since 2008. On an international scale, publishing houses and institutions have reacted to the general perception that the crisis has elicited a unique and amplified poetic response in Greece through the sale, marketization, and distribution of this contemporary Greek poetry. Importantly, these anthologies function within a complicated language landscape in which Greek and English occupy vastly different positions of power. In this article, I look at Greek's position as a peripheral European language and analyse the implications of its marginal status for the anthologies' translations. I argue that although the anthologies' editors are largely conscious of the uneven power dynamic between Greek and English, some of the translation strategies adopted in the anthologies do not serve to create an equal playing field between the two languages. I close my article with a critique of a poststructuralist approach adopted in the translation of a specific poem in *Austerity Measures*, asserting that such an approach loses sight of the ethical and political complexity of translating from a marginalized language into a dominant tongue. Throughout my article, I make use of paratextual information – such as introductions, forewords, and journalistic interviews, among other materials – to offer a holistic understanding of this new poetic category, and the manner that translation functions within these various collections.

Crisis-ridden Greece is characterized by widespread unemployment, reduced pensions and social welfare services, and the emigration of many young professionals. However, vibrant and increased cultural production in the spheres of music, theatre, and poetry has been cited as the silver lining to this dark cloud (see, e.g. Barley 2015; Tziovas 2017; Van Dyck 2017). It is difficult to say if this is entirely true. The Greek cultural scene certainly appears very active, and several literary magazines (such as Theodoros Chiotis's *Farmakon*) have emerged post-2008. A study on Greek publishing during austerity (Kabouropoulos 2016) makes clear that, although there was a decrease in general book publication after 2008, the production of literary and poetic titles increased: "In parallel with Greek fiction, Greek poetry books showed a persistent growth during the crisis (from 444 new releases in 2008–547 in 2012)". The spike in the publication of poetry titles may be linked to the fact that during the crisis "poets [were] being asked to contribute [to] the publication cost, making the deal beneficial for a number of niche publishers". In this instance the spike may be a false indicator of a surge in poetic production: it may suggest that financially hard-pressed publishers were making more publishing deals that enabled them to shift some of the financial risk onto authors. Moreover, Kabouropoulos notes that the overall decrease in book publication may be the result of a natural contraction following extremely fast growth in the sector in the pre-crisis years. Most importantly, there are no accurate statistics for the Greek book market after 2011. The National Book Centre (EKEBI) that collects and collates data relating to the book industry was suspended in 2013–2014 by the SYRIZA government and has yet to reopen at the time of writing.

The aforementioned assertion that cultural production has boomed since the crisis must be viewed sceptically by literary scholars and book historians. However, the financial crisis certainly gave the literary scene a sense of cohesion that had been

lacking before 2008. The general sense of unease, the amorphous feeling of disillusionment and dissatisfaction that followed the buoyancy and optimism of Athens hosting the 2004 Summer Olympics and Greece's 2001 entry into the Eurozone, was finally directed towards clear targets: the Greek government, the troika, Germany, and the Greek people themselves.

International publishing houses and institutions appear to have understood this supposed amplified poetic response to the crisis as an opportunity for the sale, marketization, and distribution of contemporary Greek poetry. Despite the fact that Greek publishers have not been keen to sell poetry through this new categorical frame, international publishing houses and institutions acknowledge that English-speaking audiences have an avid interest in such texts and see the poems as documenting the crisis. I will discuss these points more fully below. To return in more detail to the four international anthologies listed above, the contexts of publication are as follows: *Austerity Measures*; *Futures*; *Crisis;* and *I Woke up in a Country*. *Austerity Measures*, edited by Karen Van Dyck, was first published in 2016 by the British division of the multinational Penguin Random House, and in 2017 was published in the US as part of the NYRB's Poets series, one of the many imprints of the book-publishing arm of *The New York Review of Books*. *Futures*, edited by Theodoros Chiotis, was published in 2015 by Penned in the Margins, a London-based independent press focused on poetry, experimental fiction, and literary non-fiction. *Crisis* (2014) is the product of Smokestack Books, an independent English poetry publisher, and edited by Dinos Siotis. Van Dyck is a prominent academic in Modern Greek Studies in the United States, whilst Chiotis and Siotis are poets active in the Greek literary scene. *I Woke up in a Country* (2019) is edited by the Greek poets Mania Meziti, Eirini Margariti, and Fanis Papageorgiou, and published by the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, a transnational alternative policy lobby group and educational institution, based in Germany and affiliated to the democratic socialist Left Party. This bilingual Greek-English publication, like many of the activities of the Office in Greece of the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, was funded by the German Federal Foreign office.

All of these anthologies were published by international publishers or funded by non-Greek institutions, although not all are commercial ventures as *I Woke up in a Country* is free of charge either online or as a print copy upon request. There are almost no Greek publishers publishing this type of poetry, with the exception of the Athens-based publishing house, Agra, who brought out Van Dyck's anthology in Greek in 2017, namely after its English publication. That predominantly international publishing houses have chosen to market the crisis is not necessarily because Greek ones have been hard hit by the economic crisis. Granted, of the seven leading publishing houses in Greece in 2004, only three still exist; at the same time, the number of smaller "businesses publishing over 10 new books [per] year, has grown from 151 in 2004, to 167 in 2011" (Kabouropoulos 2016). Instead, the concept of poetry of the financial crisis is primarily a useful marketing tactic on the part of international publishers aiming to sell translated fiction, or in the case of the Rosa-Lux, a convenient way of generating interest in their mission of "reflective confrontation with today's capitalist society as a whole", as stated on their website (2022).

International publishers and institutions are well aware that poetry and literature that deal overtly with the economic crisis appeals to non-Greek readerships for various reasons. Readers may feel titillated or curious reading about austerity's psychological

and emotional effects (see Kellaway 2016; Wallace 2017; Morrisson 2014), not least in a context beyond their own culture and language that is rendered accessible through translation. According to UK-based Mark Richards, editorial director at John Murray, the Greek crisis is marketable since:

> We want to hear the stories that our own writers are unable to write, because they don't know enough or haven't lived through it. In this case, the stories from Greece that people want to hear at the moment are about the crisis and its effect on people's lives there. (Avloniti 2015)

At the same time, there has been little commercial interest in publishing Greek writers who write outside of the ambit of the crisis or do not engage in stereotypes of Greekness. Richards acknowledges that there is an element of "cultural stereotyping" at play in the way that UK publishers choose what literature to translate. According to him, "fiction in translation in the UK is often published on less of a literary basis and more on what might be thought of as a reportage one, like Greek novels addressing the economic crisis". In fact, this new category of literature was exceedingly well marketed and publicized: articles and reviews about the anthologies, its poets, and poems featured in popular Anglophone outlets with a global reach, including *The Guardian*, *TLS*, *The New York Review of Books, Asymptote,* and the *Los Angeles Review of Books*. *The Guardian*, in particular, published three pieces in 2016 on *Austerity Measures*, one of which was authored by Van Dyck (2016b) herself (see also Bausells and Stefanou 2016; Kellaway 2016) and reproduced in part on the Poetry Foundation website (Staff 2016).[1]

As mentioned above, marketing Greek poetry of the financial crisis as a form of reportage directly aligns with the editorial objectives of the anthologies, which task themselves with recording the crisis or informing foreign audiences of Greece's socio-political situation. *I Woke up in a Country* explicitly presents itself as a "means of political education" (Meitani 2019, 8) that documents human experience during a "historically crucial period" (Rossoglou 2019). Van Dyck states that her endeavour is about "bearing witness" to Greece's lived reality, but it is also a utopian act in which poetry offers "new ways to imagine what can be radically different realities" (2016a, xviii). In a similar vein, Chiotis notes that *Futures* "sketches out new ways of acting, talking and thinking about the present (or, at the very least, the very recent past)" (2015, v) while offering a "representative sample of the country's emerging poets responding to a current and traumatic event" (viii). *Crisis* editor Siotis describes his anthology as continuing a poetic trajectory active from ancient times to the contemporary moment, and as chronicling the human condition, "what it truly means to be *anthropos*" (2014, n.p.). Siotis sees his anthology as prescient, recording an economic tragedy that should "warn […] of what is going to happen in other European countries" (ibid.).

None of the editors assert that capturing the national and cultural zeitgeist requires publishing poems that could be thought of as *littérature engagée*: in other words, the anthologies contain a mixture of poems that directly reference the crisis (what we would understand as "political" poems) and others that appear entirely subjective without any reference at all to the external socio-economic context. Instead, the anthologies, for the most part, adopt the view that poetry, simply by virtue of being conceived during the crisis, is inevitably embedded in socio-historical reality or in some instances "anticipate[s] the present mood" (Van Dyck 2016a, xix), and therefore even personal

poems have a political undercurrent. The editors appear self-conscious about their inclusion of poems without any overt political content and offer defences of their editorial choices: Meziti is of the opinion that overtly ideological poetry lacks depth (as quoted in Rossoglou 2019), while Siotis declares in his anthology's introduction that his collection is "neither a protest movement nor a lesson in disobedience", although he does feel that poetry readers might be inspired to start revolutions (2014). However, despite these commonalities, the ordering principles and selection of poets of the anthologies differ, as I will explain in the following paragraph.

Van Dyck's inclusion criteria for *Austerity Measures* were "roughly language (Greek), age (under fifty), and date of publication (in the last decade)" (2016a, xix), although the exceptions to these criteria imbue the anthology with some linguistic and ethnic diversity that offers an expansive interpretation of Greekness. Van Dyck does not assume a correlation between language and ethnicity. More importantly, the anthology uses poems from different sites of publication, or "different venues of poetic activity" (xx), integrating poets that circulate outside of traditional publishing channels. *I Woke up in a Country* (Meziti, Margariti, and Papageorgiou 2019) collated poems from a call for submissions to poets under the age of forty-five, hoping to explore the crisis through the "eyes of people born from the Regime Change in 1974 [the fall of the military dictatorship] to 1999" (2019, 10). The editors mention in their introduction that they felt people of this age group have a closer connection to the crisis, rather than individuals who may have experienced Greece at earlier times of "prosperity" (24). They also acknowledge that their poetic choices were all a manifestation of personal taste and driven by wanting an equal gender ratio: twenty-five female poets, twenty-five male poets. Whereas the editorial visions of *Austerity Measures* and *I Woke up in a Country* are somewhat invested in the idea of a generational poetry, Chiotis baulks at the term "generation" saying that it is impossible to "speak of a generation in the way we thought of that term in the past" (2015, viii). Chiotis might be referring to the fact that in Greek literature, the term "generation" traditionally refers to specific aesthetic movements (such as "the Generation of the '30s") in which the key figures shared a cohesive aesthetic vision. Instead, Chiotis prefers to see the poets of the crisis as an "archipelago" (2015, vii) where the poets are like a chain or loose grouping of individual islands within the same geographical territory – that of the financial crisis. He presents this "archipelago" as a subversion of national and linguistic criteria and includes poets who are not ethnically Greek or do not write in Greek. This concept of the archipelago feeds into the manner in which Chiotis structures his anthology; he meditates upon how "networks, clusters and grids of poets from across the world might gather around a particular theme" (vii). This perspective plays out in the thematic grouping of poets under different headings (Assessment; Adjustment; Implementation; Singularity; Acceleration) that are taken from financial jargon and appropriated for poetic purposes (ii). Siotis's anthology has no specific generational focus, but he has chosen thirty-four poets who he feels encapsulate the "ineffable contemporary Hellenic Odyssey" (2014, n.p.). He understands the contemporary crisis as yet another expression of multiple crises that Greece has experienced, both historical and fictional. He does not explain how he came to the poems in his introduction: his acknowledgements page simply states that some of the poems were previously unpublished, and that others were either previously published in *(de)kata* – the magazine that Siotis founded and publishes – or gleaned from

newspapers, literary festivals, or the poets' solo collections by different publishing houses. Interestingly, despite these differences in criteria, there is still some cohesiveness across the anthologies; even if individual poems differ, many poets feature in at least two of the publications, including Thomas Tsalapatis, Eftychia Panayiotou, A.E Stallings, and Nikos Erinakis. This may be a consequence of some of these poets already having established their poetic reputations and careers.

The editors have also had to negotiate the question of how their poetic selection will be interpreted and disseminated in the Anglophone literary sphere. In an online interview with Rossoglou (2019), Meziti states of *I Woke up in a Country*:

> Greek poets write in Greek, and Greek is not English … I believe that in a world where the English language is predominant, our domestic literature [deserves] to be translated in English. It is the only means to be known. It doesn't matter what you write, it matters in which language you write it. In this sense, I believe that [my] bilingual anthology … will help Greek poetry to travel.

Although Meziti is perhaps too quick to disregard the importance of poetic content or subject matter, she is correct in viewing English as crucial in the global dissemination of local literatures. For Meziti, English's widespread usage is enticing, offering a quantitatively small literature the opportunity to exist beyond Greece's borders. Yet, implicated in the saleability and marketability of the genre of poetry of the financial crisis is the more complicated issue of the general marginality of Greek on the world literary stage, and how the editors of the various anthologies have engaged with and deliberated upon the process and practice of translation from Greek, a marginal language, into English, a dominant tongue. It is to these questions, with a particular emphasis on *Austerity Measures*, that I now turn.

Greek and postcolonial politics

Modern Greek is limited in its dissemination (it is spoken by only 13 million speakers), and distributed across Greece and Cyprus, both politically peripheral European states. Greek is not among the top ten most translated languages into English, nor the ten most translated European languages into English, of which the top five have long been French, German, Spanish, Russian, and Italian (Büchler and Trentacosti 2015, 5). Modern Greek's marginalized linguistic status locks into a larger discussion of Greece as a type of colony, as theorized by Michael Herzfeld (2002) and an increasing number of Modern Greek scholars. Herzfeld forcefully refers to Modern Greece not only as marginalized but also as a "cryptocolony", namely a state that is only "nominally independent" and that has a complicated and "sometimes humiliating" relationship with twentieth-century Western powers (2002, 901). For Herzfeld, Greece suffers from the social, economic, and political effects of colonialism without the formal colonialization. This form of colonization has had the consequence of precluding Greece from academic studies, as many disciplines and fields rely on established and well-known conceptual categories to frame or conceptualize "theoretical reflection" (921). Speaking specifically about the "production of anthropological theory", Herzfeld explains that cryptocolonies have been relegated to the sidelines, unlike the Indian subcontinent and sub-Saharan Africa that are more easily read through the frame of Subaltern Studies or Postcolonial Studies owing to their colonial histories (922). Put differently, the fact that Modern Greek

literature disrupts the traditional binary of colonizer/colonized (919), and neither fits neatly into a postcolonial paradigm nor belongs to one of "the major European traditions (English, French, German)" (Jusdanis 2000, 26), feeds directly into the exclusion of Modern Greek from various epistemologies and disciplines.

For many postcolonial literary critics, the act of translating from a minority or marginalized language into a more dominant tongue (most notably English, or languages of other former colonial powers) has different symbolic resonance depending on the specific language and its relative political, historical, or social position in the world. On the one hand, Mona Baker, citing Pascale Casanova, observes how the translation of literary works from a minority or marginalized language into a dominant or majority tongue "introduces the periphery to the centre in order to consecrate it and grants minority authors 'a certificate of literary standing'" (2014, 18). On the other hand, translation from a minority or marginalized language into a dominant one can also be read as act of colonial appropriation masquerading as creative and cultural engagement, particularly when the target language is a former imperial or colonial language, and the source text is written in a language of the formerly oppressed or colonized. Indeed, Ben Conisbee Baer, drawing on Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, notes that translating postcolonial literature risks "perpetuating (neo-colonial) dominance explicitly framed in terms of benevolence toward the representatives of the 'source' language" (2014, 235). The following paragraphs explore how these dynamics play out in the present context in relation to poetry of the financial crisis.

In translating poetry of the financial crisis into English and publishing it with international houses, the editors of the aforementioned anthologies are bringing the literature of a marginalized state and language to the fore. In all instances the editors' desires to map the Modern Greek poetry scene, to help "render an unfamiliar landscape significantly more legible, more navigable, and perhaps even more alive for the reader" (Van Dyck 2016a, xx), come with the added element of publicizing and legitimizing the work of Modern Greek writers on the world literary stage. It is not coincidental that Van Dyck's anthology was subsequently published in Greek in 2017 with Agra, an Athens-based publishing house; the publication of these anthologies in the Anglophone metropolitan market confers a literary and aesthetic value upon the texts that renders them worthy of publication in their home country.

However, it is interesting to explore how the translations in these anthologies negotiate the power dynamic between marginalized and dominant languages, and whether, while aiming to bring Greece to the world, the editors remain conscious of the possible co-option of Greek voices or identity by Anglophone publishing markets. Whereas Siotis is entirely silent about his anthology's translation practices, Chiotis discusses the uneven power dynamic between languages, noting that "Modern Greek is a language spoken by specific communities and the attempt to translate literature written in this language for a global audience runs the risk of misrepresentation in the attempt to bridge the cultural and linguistic divides" (2015, viii). Here, Chiotis clearly registers that the movement from Greek into English not only involves a shift from the local to the global, but also that such a move may result in a distorted image of the Greece literary landscape if the translator were to diminish Greece's cultural or linguistic difference from the Anglophone world. Chiotis's comments show that he is at once alert to the process of making the text familiar to a global Anglophone audience yet insists on maintaining the poems' foreignness.

For Chiotis, appropriation and co-option are real dangers for Greek texts. In an interview with Athina Rossoglou (2017a), Chiotis acknowledges that the financial crisis has ignited an interest in Greek literature for foreign audiences, and that this particular historical juncture has offered a unique "once-in-a-generation opportunity" for contemporary Greek writers to be marketed outside of Greece. However, he notes that this dissemination is not without its dangers, cautioning, "we [Greeks] should be very vigilant about this renewed interest and in what ways it might be appropriated" and thereby implying that Greek texts could be co-opted by foreign commercial agents, such as publishers and editors, and by audiences.

He places particular emphasis on the role of translation in countering the commandeering of contemporary Greek texts, commenting that translators function both as "mediators across languages and cultures" and "ambassadors of contemporary Greek literature".[2] The translator bears a heavy burden: at once messenger and representative of Greek letters. He stresses, however, that the translator functions in tandem with other literary functionaries that allow for the global diffusion of Greek poetry, and that they too have to interrogate the role translation plays in this commercial and cultural enterprise.

Where Chiotis expresses that all literary stakeholders, especially the translator, need to reflect on in the global diffusion of contemporary Greek poetry, Christiana Mygdali, the Greek-to-English translator of *I Woke up in a Country*, regards translation as a communal endeavour in which poetry readers can offer invaluable critique, as noted in conversation with Rossoglou (2020). She asserts that the watchfulness and attentiveness of readers can ensure that translation functions ethically in instances where the translation is from a minor to a major language. Mydgdali's amorphous understanding of "ethical" translation appears to be couched in the idea of "responsibility": that the translator offers "access" to readers who cannot read the source language and is responsible for the "destiny" of the text – the way the text circulates in the world. She brushes off the distinction between major and minor languages, and seemingly premises her idea of ethical translation as a literal rendering of the source text, in which the reader experiences a translation that endeavours to be as faithful to the source text as possible: "in a world of instant communication, social media, and the internet, translation can be constantly evaluated [by readers] and possible mistakes, misunderstandings or even, deliberate misinterpretations cannot survive for a long time". Mygdali arguably places too much faith in the vigilance of readers who are "very critical of unethical behaviors with[in] the [literary] community", but the optimism of her view chimes with the anthology's broader editorial outlook that does not examine the uneven power relations between Greek and English in any depth. For the anthology's editors, Meziti and Margariti, the ethics of translation into English act only as a positive force to be embraced, one that, when functioning in tandem with promotional support from institutional stakeholders, could contribute to kindling an interest in modern Greek poetry as a whole, rather than simply in the "restrictive" and exclusive area of Greek poetry of the crisis (in Rossoglou 2019).

Van Dyck's views on the power dynamic between marginalized and dominant languages are questioned in her *Reading Greece* interview with Rossoglou (2017b) who, quoting Karen Emmerich (2013), explicitly asks:

> [When] translating from a so-called "minor" to a so-called "major" language or literature, translators do sometimes hold remarkable power including the power to produce what will in many cases become the only interpretation of a work of literature available in a given language. How do you respond to this power? Can translation ever be unethical?

Van Dyck's answer glosses over the imbalance between different languages, explaining that translation in itself is act of agency on the part of the translator: "Translators in any language … wield the power of interpretation in their work. It is not more so when translating into a major language or when translating a minor literature" (in Rossoglou 2017b). Instead, she contends that the real question "is how the translator takes responsibility for this power". Although Van Dyck does not dismiss the important place of the translator in a process of literary transmission, she refuses to read Greece in relation to specific power dynamics that are skewed towards English as a major language. She does, however, offer a vision of translation as an ethical act, stating that it "understands the conditions of its own production and makes that visible. It is one that is open to different interpretations". It is not entirely clear what is meant by the translation perceiving and drawing attention to the conditions of its own production, although she could be suggesting that translation is a constrained act and that its limitations can be signalled to readers. Van Dyck understands ethics as the translation's refusal to concede to a definitive interpretation, and in this manner is anti-authoritarian and democratic in spirit. Van Dyck asserts that an ethical translation ethos, one conscious of power dynamics, requires functionaries of the target language – translators, publishers, and reviewers – to offer instruction as to how to approach translation. Indeed, in her very own anthology's introduction she explains the experimental impetus of the translations to the reader. She continues that ethical translations require authors, publishers, and reviewers in the source language to forgo their attachment to literature as a national institution; yet, as will be discussed in the following section, this position fails to recognize the specific temporal and geopolitical context of the poetry of the financial crisis, and not least how this plays out in editorial and marketing strategies. Indeed, in the following section, I will explore how well this notion of ethics stands up to scrutiny when viewed from a postcolonial perspective.

In fact, in the introduction to her anthology Van Dyck asks "[w]hat can be conjured, woken up, written, and addressed in English?" She reveals that "[e]ditorial weight was consistently placed on the strongest translations, even at the expense of some very strong original poems" (2016a, xxiv). Van Dyck does not clearly define the term "strongest translations"; does she mean, for example, instances where the translator has inserted themselves into the source poem, or instances where sound and style have taken precedence over literal meaning? In *PN Review*, it appears that Van Dyck's understanding of the "strongest translations" are those that create room for "alternative interpretations" of the source poems (2017, 26). Van Dyck's use of the word "expense" is complicated, giving the impression that the original poems suffer as a result of the English translations. It further suggests a lack of sensitivity towards the marginality of Greek within an asymmetrical language landscape. Indeed, Van Dyck comments in her anthology's general introduction that "[t]o recast these poems in the rhythms and multilingual idioms of English with an emphasis on the translated text is to view the crisis cross-culturally, and to treat *Austerity Measures* as a project as much ours as theirs" (2016a, xxv). In so doing, she unwittingly implies less of a balanced two-way

exchange or collaboration, and more the privileging of the Anglophone translator and translation. Importantly, however, Van Dyck emphasizes that in her anthology the translations do not aim to replicate the source texts, but rather to engender and generate new and different readings in the target language, while (echoing Chiotis's editorial statements) remaining conscious of the linguistic and cultural differences (xxiv). She reiterates that translation is a process of loss, but this should not be seen "as a cause for consternation, but as the basis for invention. What is lost in translation is found again, otherwise and elsewhere" (xxiv). Van Dyck's sentiments are no doubt informed by specific facets of contemporary poststructuralist theory that recalibrate concepts of originality and the aesthetic and hermeneutic value of the translation itself, a point I address directly in the following section of this article. Indeed, I will home in specifically on *Austerity Measures*, noting that its sympathy towards a poststructuralist approach to translation, rather than a robust postcolonial approach, plays into a problematic power dynamic between peripheral and dominant languages. I observe through a close reading of the poem "Fuck Armageddon" that a poststructuralist approach somewhat expunges or alters the voice of the Greek source poet, overly domesticating the text for an English-speaking readership and constructing an image of crisis-ridden Greece in the poem in exaggerated politically leftist terms.

The poststructuralist turn

The idea that "different languages can never be brought into point-for-point alignment" (Reynolds 2016, 15) has been well documented in translation studies, and the 1980s saw the discipline's adoption of the poststructuralist view that the agency of the translator must be foregrounded, negotiating the source text not in terms of "strict equivalence or fidelity", but in terms of the "possibilities and potentialities in a text" (Kristal 2014, 29, 33). The translator may play and engage with intellectual and philosophical trajectories that may have been curtailed by the short-sightedness or carelessness of the original author (33), and thereby clearly enhance or develop the source text. In moving away from the idea that translation is a simple literal rewriting of words from the source language into the target language, we understand that "it is always possible that a translation can be more effective than the original in achieving [the] objective" (29) of opening up the text's multiple conceptual spaces and geographies. Certain strands within contemporary translation theory question whether the original text is somehow superior to the translation (here we enter very Borgesian and Derridean territory about what constitutes originality, or the conundrum posed by translations without an original source, as Susan Bassnett [1998] and Emily Apter [2006] have explored).

This specific poststructuralist understanding of translation appears idealistic or overly optimistic when brought into dialogue with postcolonial theory. Indeed, for postcolonial theory the asymmetry between languages, particularly those riven along the fault lines of metropolitan centre versus the periphery, cannot be "fixed by fiat, by simply declaring all languages are equal and fantasizing that they can be studied on an equal footing today" (Conisbee Baer 2014, 236). In other words, for postcolonial theory, the act of translation is ideologically loaded: translations do not exist within a social or historical vacuum, in the same way that languages themselves are locked into specific socio-political and economic structures. Put simply, radical translations of a source or "original" text from a

peripheral language into a metropolitan or dominant tongue, might suggest a dismissiveness or disregard of the source text, feeding into problematic political dynamics. Insofar as the metropolitan translator's voice may replace or obscure the voice of the source poet, radical reworkings have the potential to undermine the literary authority of the source poets. Diverging from the source text when rendering it into a dominant language risks re-establishing an uneven power dynamic between dominant and marginalized languages. At worst, such translations arguably reflect "imperialist domination tactics" (Borzutzky 2015). Arrojo, referencing Niranjana, advocates "literalness" – a "word for word" faithfulness to the text – as a "postcolonial textual strategy" to avoid flattening or homogenizing source texts (1999, 148), thereby maintaining a more balanced power dynamic. However, other critics such as Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi acknowledge translation's more shameful (particularly colonial) histories yet realize that to "restrict translation [into European languages] is to tread perilously close to other forms of censorship" (1999, 5). It is undoubtedly difficult to imagine a universal decolonized translation practice, although it is imperative that translators work with a profound consciousness of the complex politics at play in the linguistic and textual movement from peripheral to dominant languages.

Van Dyck's *Austerity Measures* is aligned with poststructuralist translation theory that sees translation as a "productive rather than reproductive practice" (Bermann and Porter 2014, 9). Van Dyck advocates that the anthology's poems and translations function beyond a nationalistic discourse: they are "not linked to one nation or another", but rather "overspill the containers of what is and isn't Greek" (2017, 28–29). Such comments tend not only to ignore the fact that the poems and translations are read through the national frame of the Greek financial crisis, but also diminish how languages function in the literary marketplace and within specific global histories of Greece's marginality and powerlessness in relation to the (Anglophone) West. Although Van Dyck acknowledges that "the practice of translation is rarely about equality" (28–29), her focus is on the generative possibilities of translation. She asserts: "as with any creative endeavour, translation requires a willingness to play, to push things more in one direction or another, to pull back, accelerate, decelerate" (28–29). In so doing, "it can create its own kind of abundance elsewhere in another language and culture" (26). This poststructuralist approach is clearly borne out in some of the translations in Van Dyck's anthology.[3]

One example of a poststructuralist approach can be found in Max Ritvo's translation of Jazra Khaleed's poem "Fuck Armageddon/Γάμα την αποκάλυψη". In order to facilitate comparison, I have provided my own literal translation of the first two stanzas of Khaleed's poem:

> fuck armageddon. rhymes on messolongi street search for cover. cops invade the occupied building. the same story every evening on repeat. gaze from on high but fight low. turn on mega channel, the police speak with the mouth of pretenderis. sow a knife into the lining. henchmen attack at midday.
>
> junta. the army in the streets. the children play cops and policemen. in the parliament the bosses enjoin laws. the workers in the pen, work and tv. glamour and cock, the youth look like bees without a sting. the rebels in jail, wild animals in the cage. and the poets? the poets in silence. boulevards without noise.

In the first stanza, the reader becomes aware that the poem is set in austerity-wracked Greece. The narrator meditates on the persistent violent clashes being played out on Greece's streets between civilians and the police and complains how the police are given a public forum on the Mega television channel, where they speak through celebrity anchor-man Yiannis Pretenderis. The second stanza begins with an overt reference to the junta and "the army in the streets", presumably setting up an overly simplistic analogy between military dictatorship and austerity Greece. The narrator notes that children emulate the violence of their environment and the constant presence of the police through their play, while the working classes show themselves to be totally ineffectual in this oppressive culture. The working classes have been reduced to animalistic automatons who just work and watch television. Rebels have been imprisoned. The narrator laments that poets are unable to capture this political situation in words, a disillusionment that is then consolidated in the final stanza where poets are described as "fragile" as flowers and "wiped-out leftwingers". Interestingly, however, the narrator distances themself from this ineffectuality by stating "i'm not writing poetry. i'm writing manifestos" and asserting, perhaps with a note of vitriolic irony, that the apathetic poets will be forced to change in the future: "let's see where you'll be when the blood in the street thickens".

Max Ritvo's translation of the poem, of which the first two stanzas are cited below, radically diverges from the source text:

> Fuck Armageddon. The cops get it on. Writhing and fucking dead on top of the poems, who redden. The poems blush their own blood into Messolonghi Street. The poems: fulsome plankton. Blenderized in the French-kissing maws of the armored Megaladon-shark policemen. Who have their heads so far up their ass the police can't even fit an arm in there? The pretenders! Angels of TV! Tarry, pretenders, with smile unscary! Come visit Messolonghi! They murder in broad daylight here – (you should be so lucky!)
>
> Junta: army in the streets. Toy boots on every Caligula kiddy's feet. Mobsters larding the laws to pure pork-fat—no bone, no meat. The labor is sleepily grunting in their pens: doing Miley Mohawks and Masturbating to the QVC TV gems. Our youth are milk powder when I fucking asked for cayenne. The rebels are truncheoned by the Megaladon policemen. The leopards are caged like KFC hens. And the poets? The poets are quiet again. Messolonghi Street: silent as Danny Boy's Glenn. (2016, 171)

Certainly, both the source poem and its translation evoke a sense of disenchantment towards (left-wing) poets and the working classes given their failure to respond adequately to pervasive structural and physical violence. However, the second stanza of Ritvo's translation is more urgent and demanding in its critique of capitalism than the source poem. Ritvo takes the automatic mechanical qualities of the workers who simply "work and watch TV" and contextualizes them, making a clear connection to the mindless commercialism of capitalism. For Ritvo, as for Khaleed, the working classes have become animals; they grunt and live in pens. In the translation, though, these animal workers emulate the rich and famous, styling their hair into the mohawks of pop stars, while masturbating to an online shopping channel. This portrayal of working-class capitalist indulgence is then followed by the narrator lamenting how insipid and apolitical the youth are; they are mere "milk powder" when they should have the fiery kick of "cayenne". Ritvo's translation contains images of largely American capitalism that do not exist in the source poem: Miley Ray Cyrus, QVC TV, and KFC. It

also translates the "bosses" of the source poem into exploitative "mobsters". The poem's rebels are not simply imprisoned but brutally beaten by shark-like policemen, the functionaries of the state. For the target poem narrator, the poets, who should be expressing Greece's reality, have lost their power to speak within a vortex of mind-numbing hyper-capitalism in which the working classes, the youth, and the rebels alike are in positions of powerlessness or apathy. In fact, the translator moves a reference to the Greek war of independence (the famous siege of Messolonghi in which Lord Byron was killed) that appears in the first stanza of the source poem to the translation's second stanza. The reference to Messolonghi in the second stanza suggests that that the fighting spirit of (Greek) poets has been quashed.

Ritvo's translation very actively inserts and exaggerates imagery of capitalism into the poem, in addition to tailoring it to Anglophone, specifically American, readers. Van Dyck certainly acknowledges that Ritvo's work is "[b]y far the freest translation in the anthology, really an adaptation" (2017, 26). For Van Dyck, Ritvo's rendering "shows what is and isn't legible in translation can nonetheless be an excuse for experimentation" (26), a space in which the source text can be opened up in ways that allow the receiving culture to read the poem in their own cultural terms. As an English native speaker and American, Ritvo's immersion in the target culture is useful in ensuring that the poem can circulate as unhindered as possible in the target culture's literary landscape, in which Anglophone readers need little knowledge of the source culture to engage with and understand the poem. Ritvo's familiarity with American culture makes the translated poem accessible and easily digestible to the target culture, while still enacting the poem's sense of disillusionment with the cowardice or political apathy of the Left, thereby maintaining a line of continuity between the source text and its translation. Van Dyck's attitude towards Ritvo's translation feeds into my earlier observations that read her translation ethos as a manifestation of the belief that "it is up to translators, but also the minor cultures themselves to get their literature out there through astute marketing that is informed by knowledge of the receiving cultures" (Rossoglou 2017b). In other words, Van Dyck does not take issue with a target text that focuses its energies on the recipient Anglophone readership: rather, she views this as a necessary imperative in making the target text a marketable and consumable product. She reiterates that "[a]nticipating the impact of a translation in the receiving culture is a way to take responsibility for the translator's work, something that translators as well as publishers need to do" (Rossoglou 2017b). Van Dyck thus views the translator as functioning in tandem with the publishing house, to ensure that minor literatures assert their presence in the major literary landscape.

However, this reconstitution of the source text into a major language brings us back to the issues flagged earlier in this article, that are neatly expressed by Karen Emmerich, a translator of Modern Greek whose translations feature in *Austerity Measures*. Emmerich (2013) concedes that translation is an "opportunity to think about how [a source text] could be even better than it already is", although she qualifies this statement by asserting that a new "better" translation is "not necessarily better suited to its new context (the dreaded 'domestication'), but better in ways that can perhaps only be seen via this shuffling between languages and literary traditions?". Interestingly, Emmerich registers a level of anxiety as a translator of a minor language, distancing herself from the conventional stereotype of translators as the "long-suffering underdogs of the literary world" to assert that the translator can be a figure of great power. She comments that in the case of

minor languages, "translators do sometimes hold remarkable power, including the power to produce what will in many cases become the *only* interpretation of a work of literature available in a given language" (original emphasis). Unlike works in major languages that are often retranslated multiple times, those written in minor languages suffer the indignation of not being translated at all, or translated only once, thereby giving readers a very limited outlook on a particular literary piece or author. Certainly, this is true of the poems featured in *Austerity Measures*—and admittedly, those present in the other financial crisis anthologies—that will function as the definitive and authoritative urtexts for many Anglophone readers of contemporary Greek poetry, an issue of concern in instances where not much editorial attention has been paid to the complexity of the power dynamic in the translation between minor and major languages.

Emmerich (2013) acknowledges that the translator of minor languages who partakes in translation suffers from a "valid fear of a potential abuse of power", but she does also question whether that fear is a "perverse internalization" of the "simplistic" view that a "translation that 'changes' the original is unfaithful, duplicitous, failing in its mission, essentially unethical". She registers the tension between the mishandling or exploitation of minor languages by the translator and a pushing back against the widespread assumption (outside of translation studies) that translation must be a literal reproduction of the source text. This tension arises especially when the status of the source text itself is fraught by instability. It is important to note that Emmerich frames the translator of minor languages as by no means innocuous, but rather as someone who embodies ulterior motives or perhaps even self-serving objectives: "one could also argue that a translator who translates from a so-called 'minor' to a so-called 'major' language or literature is never just a well-intentioned reader or friend". Focusing particularly on their editorial input, Emmerich comments that translators of minor languages are presented as having a stake in the process of translation, one which may be less than transparent or benign. Emmerich flags these points in order to make sense of her own position as a translator of Modern Greek, and as a teacher of translation, translation studies, and literature. However, she does not ultimately offer a prescriptive approach to translation within an unbalanced translation landscape, asserting instead that translation's "strongest ethical claim … is that it demands of us a willingness to inhabit an open book, to maintain a sense and an attitude of uncertainty, and to welcome the endless provisionality". Put differently, implicit in Emmerich's claim is a call to remember that translation is an activity and process that must be subject to scrutiny and introspection, understood through its positionality in relation to various power dynamics, without necessarily foreclosing upon its provisionality. Such a claim functions as an interesting place to close this article, thinking at once of how translation may be about opening up and enhancing the trajectories and multivalencies of a source text, but also of how, as readers and critics, we must "remain vigilant about the highly mediated processes and contestations that lie behind the word on the page" (Booth 2017).

Coda

Editors, translators, publishers, and writers involved in the production and sale of poetry of the financial crisis for an Anglophone market benefit from the construction and dissemination of this new literary category – be it financially, or in terms of acquiring or

consolidating cultural capital. However, these actors undoubtedly must be conscious of the inequality and power dynamics at play between marginalized and dominant languages, especially considering the burgeoning theoretical awareness of Greece as a cryptocolonial state. Although I critique the use of a poststructuralist approach in the translation of a specific poem in *Austerity Measures*, I by no means wish to suppress or censor its use. Indeed, my uneasiness is not with a poststructuralist approach to translation per se, but rather that employing this approach in specific instances has had the effect of consolidating an existing skewed power dynamic. Poststructuralist translation *can* be a "deeply empathic act", or "two-way channel" (Scappettone 2015). Indeed, Jennifer Scappettone (2015) notes that "innovative transmutations such as Zukofsky's Catullus, Carson's Sappho, or Rothenberg's Navajo Horse Songs" are laudable and point to the "commitment obliged by translation". Yet, until translators, editors, and publishers think more critically about the publication of literary texts of the financial crisis in relation to Greece's complicated position within the peripheries/centres complex, maybe it's time for Greek poets to be wary of those bearing the "gift" of publication?

Notes

1. For Greek reviews of the English publication in major news outlets, such as *To Vima* and *Kathimerini*, see Kouzeli (2016) and Kalfopoulos (2016).
2. The concept of mediation – certainly in relation to positivist notions of the translator's ability to faithfully render a text – has been placed under scrutiny in recent years, both from theoretical and empirical perspectives. For a special issue on this topic, see *Translation and Interpreting Studies*, 2023.
3. Van Dyck's anthology (2016a) promotes a left-wing view of contemporary Greece, even if this is not made explicit in the anthology's introduction. The anthology is endorsed by eminent Marxists: Yanis Varoufakis commends it on the front cover, whereas Terry Eagleton celebrates it on its opening page. Van Dyck attempted to publish work by poets featured in *Austerity Measures* in American "liberal and left-leaning publications", such as *The New York Review of Books*, *Harper's*, and *The Nation*. American publications rejected the poems, with one editor asserting that the translations were "too political", until featured in *Asymptote*'s online "Translation Tuesday" column in *The Guardian* (2017, 28–29), a British left-leaning publication. Examples of the anthology's left-leaning poetry include Jazra Khaleed's "Words" or "Somewhere in Athens"; Kiriakos Sifiltzoglou's "From Half Truths", and Stamatis Polenakis's "Poetry 2048".

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