

**“Beginning with O, the O-mega”  
Translingual Literature and its Lessons for Translation<sup>1</sup>  
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Over the last decade I have been researching and writing about the multilingual literature of the Greek Diaspora (Van Dyck 2000; 2008; 2010). At the same time I have continued my life’s work of translating Greek poetry into English (Van Dyck 2009a and 2009b). These two preoccupations, Diaspora literature and translation, have a lot in common. Both are concerned with the movement between languages and cultures and the relationship between these two different forms of exchange. In the following pages I would like to address the connections between these two fields and more specifically the lessons for translators that the multilingual literature of the Diaspora offers. My main contribution to Translation Studies is my focus on the translingual aspect of transcultural exchange.

I.

For much of the 20th century, the study of literature has been organized around national literatures written predominantly in one language: American literature in English, Greek literature in Greek, German Literature in German. Over the past few decades our views of literature have begun to change to accommodate the many multilingual texts that do not fall neatly into one or another national literature. The case of countries that produce literatures in two or more languages or linguistic registers is relevant, but I am concerned with another phenomenon that, though at the core of our transcultural lives, has received less attention: literature that is written ostensibly in one language, but is influenced by and draws on another in order to do something it can’t do on its own. The works of Conrad, Kafka, and Nabokov come immediately to mind as examples of what we could call translingual literature.<sup>2</sup> The poetry of Olga Broumas is another interesting case. In her collection *Beginning with O* she

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<sup>1</sup> I am very grateful to colleagues at the “From Internationalisation of Higher Education to Transcultural Science” conference at Leuphana University (September 18, 2010); also at seminars in the English and Greek departments at Aristotle University (Oct. 20, 2010, Dec. 8, 2010), in the Anthropology and History department at the University of Thessaly, Volos (Dec. 1, 2010), at the Institute for Byzantine and Modern Greek at the University of Vienna (December 13, 2010), as well as at the Institute for Byzantine Studies (February 9, 2011) at Queen’s University, Belfast for their kind invitations and helpful comments on different sections and versions of this paper.

<sup>2</sup> It is certainly debatable how much Kafka’s German or Conrad’s or Nabokov’s English owes to other languages. Stanley Corngold’s essay argues against the position that Kafka’s German has to do with Yiddish or with a so-called Czech dialect of German (Corngold 1994). Similarly many would say that Conrad’s English has little to do with Polish or Nabokov’s with Russian. But my point is that the language of these writers feeds on the relation between different languages. By grouping these authors together I am drawing attention to a metaphorical sense of how literatures are formed inside and besides other literatures and languages, what Deleuze and Guattari call deterritorialization and reterritorialization in their essay on minor literature (1986).

describes how Greek is present in her English “like a curviform alphabet/ that defies/ decoding.” She traces a double path from the O to the O-mega and back again. “What tiny fragments,” she writes, “survive, mangled into our language” (23). Here “our” is both English and Greek.

My point is that we can move from a token internationalization of literature and culture in our curriculum to an actual examination of how literatures and cultures interact by paying more attention to such cases. I am reacting here both to the tendency to teach national literatures separately, but also to relegate minor literatures to world literature courses taught in translation. Over the past few decades this topic has been taken up seriously by critics in the context of Comparative Literature (David Damrosch, Gayatri Spivak) and Translation Studies (Susan Bassnett, Lawrence Venuti), but even here, I would want to push the question further to see if it is possible to get the question of comparativism out of the purview of English departments in the United States, Greek departments in Greece, or German departments in Germany.<sup>3</sup> The goal is to have all languages and literatures shape the debate without the national language determining what can and can't be compared. In order to imagine “the global” in a responsible manner, we need to understand the specificity of how and when languages yield to and rely on each other.

Cultural productions that are created at the interstices between two or more languages are powerful art as well as powerful teaching tools. They tell us things about the relations between two cultures that monolingual productions often efface. They help us understand what can and can't pass from one culture to another and why. Examples abound in all areas of Greek culture from songs to speeches to stand-up comedy to television advertisements and literature. The folksongs of the Greek communities in Southern Italy are a good case with their lexical and syntactic mixing of Greek and Italian. The vocabulary is Italian, but the structure of the language is Greek.<sup>4</sup> Or the 19<sup>th</sup> century linguist Yannis Psycharis's famous diatribe against Purist Greek. His *Journey*, ostensibly from Paris to Constantinople, is also a journey between languages in which French and German pop up and mix in with different registers of Greek. On one page the Greek and Latin alphabets are interspersed every other letter. (Van Dyck 2005). Or the language jokes popular from the 1980s that say something in Greek, but sound like they are in another language: *καφασάκι γαι μούρα* (Kafasaki ya mura) means “a basket of berries,” but sounds Japanese, while *Βόλο-Λαμία με κάρο* (Volo-Lamia me caro) means “going from Volos to Lamia in a cart,” but sounds Italian and *Για για, μπείτε! ρηγά είναι!* (Ja, ja, bitte rieche eine) means “Granny, go in, it's shallow,” but sounds German. The joke for English actually means something in both Greek and English: *Να η Σπάρτη!* (na i Sparti!). While in Greek it means “Here's Sparta!”, in English it means “nice party” (ni-ceparty) (Van Dyck 2010, 12-13). This is particularly funny because it is always funny

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<sup>3</sup> Emily Apter's series on translation at Princeton University Press is an important attempt in this direction.

<sup>4</sup> The CD put out by the Peloponnesian Folklore Foundation on the Hellenic Musical Tradition of South Italy includes songs from both Greek-speaking and Albanian-speaking villages.

when two things sound the same, but refer to two different things. (Think of parody.) But it is also funny because parties are not exactly what Sparta was famous for. These hybrid idioms (Greek-Italian, Greek-French, Greek-English) suggest ways of translating that register how languages interrelate, rather than replace one another. “Nice party” after all isn’t Greek. To get the joke the listener needs to think of the sounds as Greek and English, together and separately. This cross-over of two or more different systems and this creating of a place of sameness in the midst of radical difference is where the translingual can offer important models for translation and ultimately for how two cultures can draw near each other and cohabit. Let’s turn to literature to explore how this works in more detail.

## II.

Literature that is structured by the relation between different languages is important for what it teaches us about the limits of national literatures, about literature, but also about the theory and practice of translation.<sup>5</sup> Translingual literature shows us that a translation can sound foreign, it can make English Greek or Greek French, for example, but that in order to do this and not be dismissed as awkward, it must create a new logic, neither Greek nor English nor French, for the text. Multilingual writers from Nabokov to Broumas are often translators as well. Their work makes a double claim: if literature isn’t completely at home in one language and literary tradition, then translations also need not aspire to a seamless fit. They, too, can experiment with the way languages interact and alter each other. They can let one language depend on another. In his essay on the task of the translator Walter Benjamin reminds us that good translations alter a language forever. Holderlin’s translation of Greek tragedy, for example, made the German language Greek (1988, 80-81). Antoine Berman discusses how Chateaubriand’s Milton imprints French with English (1999). In fact, not only are Broumas’s translations of the Nobel laureate poet Odysseus Elytis internally multilingual, but when the poet reads them aloud she often reads one line in Greek, the next in English, and so forth, so that her audience inhabits a world that is both Greek and English. Such examples point to a specific kind of translation, not translation in general, but it is this kind of translation that multilingual literature equips us for and that I will be discussing.

I argue against dividing literature in terms of national borders: homelands, new lands, ethnic communities, in my case, Greece, America, or Greek America. Rather I ask that we look at literature for how it moves between languages and cultures, how it includes one language in another in very specific ways. Broumas, for example, creates sound patterns in English that require a more open Greek pronunciation of vowels. This is also, I argue, how we might come up with alternative ways of translating and recontextualizing the source text, ways that lie between, and outside, the opposing poles of making the translation at

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<sup>5</sup> On the topic of multilingualism and translation, see Jean-Jacques Lecercle (1990), especially his treatment of Louis Wolfson’s “Le schizo and les langues.” Also see John Johnston’s discussion of Wolfson in his article “Translation as Simulacrum” (in Venuti 1992, 41-56), as well as Jeffrey Mehlman’s review of the book (1972).

home in the new language or foreign to it. Rather than making something the same or different, what happens in translingual texts is the making of something the same in the name of difference. When Broumas includes the English *o* in the Greek *o*-*omega* or interweaves English and Greek lines in her translations, she connects the two languages, but also makes both languages foreign to themselves. What does the selective way that translingual literature borrows from one language in order to operate another offer literary translation?<sup>6</sup>

### III.

I will begin by discussing a Greek-French novel that dramatizes the relation between transcultural production and translation in a very compelling way and then turn to the example of Greek-American literature in order to explore the nitty-gritty of how the mixture of languages works in literature and literary translation.

In his recent novel *Ξένες λέξεις* (Foreign Words) the Greek-French author Vassilis Alexakis premises the movement between cultures on the movement between languages. Alexakis, though based in Paris, has written and translated his novels from Greek into French and vice versa for decades. In this novel he introduces a third language into the equation: Sango, an African language. As the novel's protagonist attempts to learn this language, his readers also pick up the basics. The project of the book is to teach his readers enough Sango so that by the end of the book they can read the final paragraph written in Sango. I quote from Alyson Waters' translation: "Baba ti mbi a kui. Mama na baba ti mbi a gue..." (2006, 215)

The boldness of the experiment in some ways can be seen as setting this novel apart from Alexakis's previous work, but it can also be viewed as an extension and intensification of what he, and many others, have always already been doing as multilingual authors and translators. Alexakis's novels whether written about Greece in Greek, and then translated into French, or written about France in French, and then translated into Greek, pose a meeting of Greek and French cultures through the medium of language. Introducing a third language is a way of naming the double language that his oeuvre has been imagining from the beginning. This novel teaches us Sango in the same way his previous novels taught us particular versions of Greek French and French Greek. Since his novels are already translations and vice versa, Alexakis's work provides a good occasion for thinking about the lessons of transcultural literature for translation. What it suggests is that translations, like literature written between languages, can teach their readers new languages. The success of a translation is not in its invisibility, but in its ability to make visible, or at least available, however provisionally and subliminally, the relation between two different linguistic systems.

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<sup>6</sup> Here I disagree with Derrida's point in *The Ear of the Other* that the one thing translation can't get across is the existence of several languages at work in one linguistic system. Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake* and Borges's *Pierre Menard* are his examples (1985, 98-100). For me these are just the kind of multilingual texts we should be looking at for ways to make our translations more open to other languages.

## IV.

Alexakis's texts help us think more generally about the relation between literature of the Diaspora and translation and to define Diaspora literature as a multilingual literature that draws on more than one grammar, syntax and vocabulary to make meaning. But in order to speak about how languages interact and work on each other and how this might alter our ideas about translation I want to turn to the case of texts in Greek and English.

In my research I examine a broad range of texts that are written in English and in Greek, in America and in Greece but which all have an in-between status, a pressure from elsewhere. In his memoir Elias Kulukundis describes this pressure. He talks about how writing his first book *The Feasts of Memory* helped him to find a balance between his two lives as an American and a Greek. For him Diaspora writing is a synthetic practice which involves working with Greek stone and English mortar. He writes:

Since there was no way I could talk in Greek, and no way I could be Greek and not talk except to write, my book became my way to join my life together. It was the place where my worlds converged. I wrote in English, but I used Greek words and Greek ideas, letting them have their Greek meaning in the context of the English language. Working with Greek stones and English mortar, I built myself a sheepfold in the hills, taking shelter in the earlier generation, away from the chaos and confusion that had come with my parents' emigration.<sup>7</sup>

For Kulukundis writing is a way of bringing one language and culture closer to the other.

The manner in which Greek comes into English or English into Greek can be a matter of content, of translating customs or experiences. This is the way it is in Jeffrey Eugenides's novel *Middlesex* in which living between the Greek and American cultures is a metaphor for living between sexes and vice versa. Often, however, the passage between languages is not at the level of content. Sounds, words, phrases, and even syntactical structures are carried over and reused. Words appear, transliterated but still foreign, teaching the reader the new language through the new context. This is true of Alexakis's novel and also of Kulukundis's in which untranslatable Greek words like ξενιτειά (*kseniteia*, homesickness) smatter the text and become meaningful over the course of the book. And different things happen depending on whether we go from Greek into English or the other way around. For example, it is the names of Greek food that are usually not translated in Greek-American literature, just left in – *mousaka*, *bachlava*, while it is the English words for computers and pop culture that tend to show up in Greek texts. Transliteration and the embedding of unexplained foreign words in the text is one of the most common and fascinating techniques of Diaspora literature.<sup>8</sup> But there are also less obvious ways of taking a

<sup>7</sup> This is from his unpublished manuscript *Bold Coasts*, 83.

<sup>8</sup> This is apparent in the work of African authors like Chenué Achebe and Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o, but also Francophone writers such as Patrick Chamoiseau.

characteristic of one language – the predominance of vowels, the ease with which it rhymes, whether word order is fixed or free – and then transporting this into the other language. Whether explicit or implicit, whether more at the level of content or form, these multilingual texts, nonetheless, specialize in a certain selectivity. They tend to single out and focus on one aspect of the culture or language they are importing and not others. Thus the modes or mechanisms of how one culture or language exerts a pressure on another become familiar and recognizable in this new hybrid context. Even if they often differing in degree or direction, and it is these structures of movement, and the selectivity of what is actually brought over, that can prove useful for translators.

I work on literature by Greeks who write in America (like Elia Kazan, Eugenides and Broumas), but also literature of Greeks who live in Greece and write about America (like Alexandros Papadiamantis, Manolis Triandaphyllides, and Thanasis Valtinos). I also look at literature by Greek writers who write in English (like Kay Cicellis), as well as American expatriates who live in Greece (like the poet James Merrill). I even include the work of writers who don't explicitly write about America, but draw on the American language in their Greek (like Margarita Karapanou and Katerina Anghelaki-Rooke). But rather than focus on the ethnicity or mother tongue of the author or organize texts according to the kind of movement they describe (diaspora, immigration, emigration, repatriation, exile, expatriation, travel), I look at the strategies these texts have for moving between languages. What is it about one language that helps them to do in the other language what they couldn't otherwise do – be more abstract, put repetition on the side of continuity and duration and singularity on the side of time, limit or enable mobility? My goal is to codify and name this middle ground of transaction, not as some vague grey area, not as “hybridity” or “hyphenated” per se, not even as “weird” English or “weird” Greek since here, too, all the different kinds of “weird” get jumbled together, but to outline the particular forms of give-and-take that go on between languages at given historical moments.<sup>9</sup>

## V.

The importing of one language into another not only gives us instructions about how to imagine other worlds, but materially recreates the foreign sounds and sights of other places. Reproducing words or phrases from another language, writing so that a dialect of accent can be heard, visually playing with a different alphabet are certainly not as immediate a sensory experience as listening to music or viewing a painting or a film, but for writing on a page, it is strikingly palpable, convincing. We feel the elsewhere when we read Irini

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<sup>9</sup> Following Hana Wirth-Nesher's work on the languages of Jewish American literature, I am interested in uncovering the experimental side of Greek American literature. The title of Wirth-Nesher's study *Call it English* underscores the multilingualism of immigrant writing by invoking the title of Henry Roth's rich portrayal of life on the Lower East Side, *Call it Sleep*. Evelyn Ch'ien's study *Weird English* also focuses on the way writing between worlds creates hybrid idioms, but whereas Wirth-Nesher shows us how source and target languages act upon each other in an endless mobius strip of translation, Ch'ien glosses over the specifics of the foreign languages that are at work in English.

Spanidou's surreal-sounding literal translations of Greek proverbs in her novel *God's Snake* or the smattering of Greek words in Olga Broumas's and Eleni Sikelianos's writing and translations.<sup>10</sup>

Let me focus on these contemporary women writers who bring Greek into their English and on one particular mode they have: their attention to the sound of the Greek language. The importance of the oral tradition in Modern Greek literature in which anthologies to this day begin with folk songs may be a cliché, but when this obsession with orality and the sound of the language is translated into English something quite original happens. Let me give you a few examples of how writers bring Greek into English through its sound, also of how they use these techniques in their translations.

Irini Spanidou's novels follow a revealing trajectory: her first *God's Snake* was about Greece and almost completely thought-out in Greek, and then "translated," sometimes quite literally, by the author into English. We feel the otherworldliness particularly in her surreal-sounding literal translations of Greek proverbs and her Greek-English puns: "Anger that lasts and water that stands turn bad" or "ka-kaaaaa" which is the sound the crow makes, but also means "shit" in Greek. This kind of translation, what we could call, following African literary criticism, second order transliteration in that it keeps the order, if not always of letters and sounds, then of words, has an uncanny ability to release the repressed metaphoricity of the literal. While her second *Fear* was definitively written in English and had no more weird language games. It was about Greece, but not in Greek. Finally her most recent novel *Before* was both about America and conveyed in a flat American tone, though slight traces of Greek emerge at crucial moments. On the whole it wasn't very successful as a novel, but when Greek breaks into the English as a kind of nostalgic reimbedding of a former practice and these are powerful. For example, we hear the sing-songy Greek intonation of the mother pleading with her son at the very end:

... she said, you're a good boy, you don't want to worry your mama, she's sick, listen to me, I want to say this now, when you grow up you go back to Greece, *na phyges, na phyges*... (2007, 203)

Another interesting case is the younger Greek-American poet Eleni Sikelianos. Greek is not her first language, the way it is for Broumas and Spanidou, nonetheless, it exerts a pressure on her work. In Sikelianos's biography of her great grandmother Eva Palmer Sikelianos we hear Greek's easy alliteration in her sound-scat on the most untranslatable of Greek words *alafroiskitos*, one her great-grandfather, the poem Angelos Sikelianos, made famous. In English she writes: "Alafroiskitos, the Seer, the shadowless one..." picking up on the way the vowels and sigmas of the Greek word interact and then reproducing this in the English "seer, the shadowless one..."

The homophonic principle of how a word can inhabit two languages at once is a key component of Sikelianos's poetics. In a class she once gave for my

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<sup>10</sup> For a discussion of how Spanidou's *God's Snake* draws on the Greek language, see my article (2000).

students at Columbia she handed out a page of French translations of Gertrude Stein's *Tender Buttons*. She didn't tell us who had written or translated the texts. She then asked everyone to regroup the French sounds to create words in English and produce our own homophonic translations. Going around the room reading our poem-translations everyone was surprised at how much like Stein they sounded. The discovery for all of us was to what extent meaning inheres in sound in poetry, especially in Stein's case, and that this could come across even at twice removed.

Even in less extreme cases Sikelianos uses sound in her translations. When we were translating "The Free Besieged" by the Greek poet Dionysios Solomos, she repeatedly wanted to carry over the sound of the original Greek into our translation. One example is how we created a free verse equivalent of the ABAB rhyme scheme and of the booming oo-sounds of the original with half-rhymes and repetition of the word "sound:"

Resounding  
in enemy air  
another sound sounds  
like an echo there.  
They hear it as it soars  
with a horrible blast  
that lasts for hours  
and the world thunders.  
(Van Dyck 2009b, 406)

## VI.

But it is Olga Broumas's oeuvre and her call for a "politics of transliteration" that provides the most prolonged meditation on how the sound of Greek can be brought into English. Her poetry uses Greek to make English more vocally expressive. She wants the articulated vowel sounds of the Greek omega and alpha versus the bland "uh" sound of middle-American vowels.<sup>11</sup> As she said in another class of mine at Columbia:

The only reason my poems are the way they are is because when I say an "a" I say an "ah" [as in "father."] I don't say an "uh." For me "American" is "A-me-ri-can." As if I had an accent. I don't have an accent, but I *hear* vowels, and I *see* vowels, and when I write I'm aware of what the vowels are doing. If your vowels as a writer are all "uh," then you're only going to have predictable end-rhymes, if you have rhyme at all. But if you're aware of your "a"s, then you're going to be aware of all your "a"s.

This attention of hers is clear in the poem "Artemis" in which Greek, as I previously cited, "is the curviform alphabet/ that defies/ decoding, appears/ to

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<sup>11</sup> In American English the words "got," "what," and "mud" all sound the same. The o, the a, and the u all have the same uh-sound.

consist of vowels, beginning with O, the O-/ mega, horseshoe, the cave of sound” (23). In this poem the shape of the letter omega – horseshoe, cave of sound -- as well as the enjambment of o-/ mega teach us how to pronounce the more open Greek o sound. In reconnecting the transliterated O of English to the O-mega of Greek she finds a cave of sound. But what interests her is not any attempt to reenter this cave in order to find comfort in some mythical matriarchal past, but rather the way its vowel sounds can be used to reinvent a new tongue. It is this act of transliteration that becomes the basis of her politics in the final stanzas:

I am a woman committed to  
 a politics  
 of transliteration, the methodology  
  
 of a mind  
 stunned at the suddenly  
 possible shifts of meaning -- for which  
 like amnesiacs  
  
 in a ward on fire, we must  
 find words  
 or burn. (1977, 23-4)

This politics of transliteration, born of knowing two languages, characterizes Broumas's poetry in subsequent collection as well. After the "fragments... mangled into our language" of *Beginning with O*, we find a Greek joke retold in English in her 1983 collection *Pastoral Jazz* in which the Greek words "futbol" and "Eleutheria" are left in untranslated.

There is a joke it goes in Greece  
 that summer there was a *futbol*  
 match and the husband had  
 lost his lady. BITCH! He shouted  
 after her WHORE WOMAN HEY YOU  
 BITCH! Greece is civilized  
 the cop said call your wife  
 by name. I can't  
 the man said. Call her name  
 the cop said. Not allowed  
 the man said. Call her name I said the cop  
 said if you don't the man stood in the Greek *futbol*  
 stadium he said  
 ELEUTHERIAAAAAAAAAA (1983, 10)

The joke relies on the reader knowing that the woman's name "Eleutheria" also means "freedom." This poem is set during the Junta when Broumas was a teenager and words such as *eleutheria* were officially censored in Greece in

public spaces such as football stadiums. As in the poem "Artemis," transliteration for Broumas is about bringing the sounds of the mother tongue into the new tongue -- not soccer, not football, but futbol --, and, by doing so, messing up preconceived notions of what is and isn't Greek or American.

Broumas also uses this practice of taking a Greek sound and putting it into the English language in her translations. As I have already mentioned when she reads her translations of Elytis she goes back and forth between the two languages giving us a phrase in the original and then in her translation, creating such an inter-linguistic web that it is impossible to tell where Greek leaves off and English begins. Again in my class she explained:

I try to stay as close to the original in terms of sound. The way I did my translations of Elytis was to send him a tape, and he would write back and he would say, "You have the poem." ... As different as Greek and English are, you can do this. ... Even though they don't have the same number of syllables, they still have the same basic stresses. So even if a line is longer, ... the song is still there. ... For instance the Greek in this line from Elytis' *To μονόγραμμα* (The Monogram) is "αλλά θέλω της ξέσκεπτης όρθιας θάλασσας τον καλπασμό." That's a lot of syllables. [I translated it] "I want the uncovered standing sea's full gallop." It's much shorter, but it still has—"ξέσκεπτης όρθιας θάλασσας τον καλπασμό," "uncovered standing sea's full gallop."

Broumas's translation practice rests on finding a place of intersection between the two languages, something that is the same, the tendency to alliterate with s's, or the accentual-syllabic metrical system, and then pushing it slightly in the direction of the source language, Greeking English. We see how she homophonically reproduces ξέσκεπτης in the phrase "standing seas" albeit slightly scrambled or how she keeps the accentual beat even if the Greek has more syllables. She is interested in making something the same, yet different.

But her most telling admission about the way Greek and English languages intermix in her work came when she recently began translating in the other direction from English into Greek. She tells the story of translating a poem by the American poet Stanley Kunitz in honor of his 100<sup>th</sup> birthday. Different poets were asked to translate the same poem into different languages. She worked hard and finally came up with a version she liked. Then a funny thing happened which she describes like this:

... a few months later I had to go somewhere and I was taking the poem and I was going to read it, because it was another tribute to Kunitz, and I was looking for the final draft, going through the pages on my desk, and I picked it up. And looked at it, and thought, "Wait a minute, this is the first draft I did," and I read it, and I thought, "This is perfect! Why did I spend all those hours and hours," I look at it, and here and here and here, it's beautifully done, "I can't believe this is my first draft," ... And then I realized: it was the original, in English. It was the original English poem.

No wonder it was perfect. But I was so into what the poem was *in* me that I no longer had a concept of whose it was or what language it was in.

What I have found studying Olga Broumas's poetry and translations is that to create a text that is neither completely consumed by the new language, nor rejected by it, a writer must bring little bits from one language into the other homeopathically, or like grafting or organ transplantation. In all of these practices foreign matter is used to jumpstart the system and determine a new way of life. In the case of American writers who are Greek, especially women, the sound of the mother tongue seems to be one of the central aspects they want their new language to have. Literary translation can learn from the selectivity of their attention. Even without the extreme case of homophonic translation, we see how Sikelianos and Broumas focus on the sigma in their adaptation of Greek into English – "shadowless seer," "standing seas." This is a way of importing something from one language to do something different in the name of sameness in another language. And of course the power differential is never lost on these writer-translators. It matters whether a minor language is working on a major language or the other way around. Sameness and homogeneity, or *omogeneia* as the Greeks call themselves when they live in foreign countries, the *omogeneia* of Astoria or of Melbourne, are principles of the powerless. Big countries with lots of clout can afford a certain diversity and heterogeneity. The focus on the oral tradition and sound as well as on the homophonic and homogeneous is a way of projecting solidarity and gaining ground. Yet, such a process is always in danger of becoming a stereotype of itself. These examples show how by focusing on the materiality of language one can foreground the complexity. Theirs is an identity poetics, rather than an identity politics.

## VII.

Texts, such as Broumas's, Spanidou's and Sikelianos's, positioned inside national cultures but near the border, near where the familiar meets the foreign, suggest ways of making translations indebted to other languages without losing them. They offer us a workshop for practicing how to match different languages and cultures without giving in to the temptation of making them the same and yet still using sameness as a guiding principle. What we learn is that two languages are brought closer together not by trying to carry over all aspects of one language into another, nor by simply finding analogies whereby Papdiamantis becomes Dickens and Seferis, Eliot, but by picking one or two aspects and establishing a logic of exchange. To succeed and not appear awkward a translation like a poem by Broumas or a novel by Alexakis or Spanidou must prepare its readers. It must give them the chance to learn the new rules over the course of a work or series of works so that they can understand and even speak for themselves the new hybrid tongue. And this is the lesson that such literature has to offer translators: a kind of translation that effaces or gives in completely to the foreignness of the original is unwilling to take on the selectivity of the

strategies that Diaspora literature uses to import things that can work in both languages.

Attention to translingual literature and its lessons for translation also have important ramifications for our understanding of intercultural exchange more generally. When we read the possibility of cultural translation through the practice of linguistic translation, we can describe and imagine transnational and transethnic modes of belonging that do not fit the established patterns of separatism or assimilation, the 'homogenia' of the Diaspora versus the melting pot of immigration, for example. There is something about the tolerance of multilingual literature and translations that is exemplary. These texts teach us to match up incommensurable experiences in Walter Benjamin's words "lovingly and in detail..." We learn that a good translation, like a good immigrant, not only fits in to the new culture, but gives back and alters the terms of what is acceptable in that culture. In the end to begin "with O, the O-/ mega," means coming up with ways to live in the space between languages and cultures, not as a utopia, but as a real, daily practice of translation that can be described if we only give it the time and attention it demands.

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