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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 *Eroticon* (written in Greek in 1995 and translated into English by David Connolly in 1999),[1] which ostentatiously features the disparity between universally significant and

culturally confined intertextual sources. The problem of translating a culturally specific intertext has become more prominent in our postmodern era, where the literary work is totally dependent on its textual background. I will therefore examine the intertextual allusions behind this novel and the solutions employed by its translator within the framework of a general discussion of the relationship between translation and postmodernism.

In order to contextualise the issues in question, it is worth discussing briefly the term "classic" in reference to cultural identity, and looking at some examples of literature that has been established as such, for example Goethe's *Die Leiden des jungen Werther*, Sophocles' drama *Oedipus Rex* and Cervantes' *Don Quixote*. This is old news: classic status is not a quality that a literary work inherently possesses, but a title to be gained. It usually involves a long history of worldwide reception,[2] which means that the work has transgressed the "horizon" of its production that confined it to a certain time, place and language.[3] This transgression occurs as a constant renewal through reading, whereby the "horizon" of production merges with that of consumption. Thus, the term "classic" does not designate literature that has a prominent historical interest, but literature that pertains to the actuality of the time that it is read. As time passes, the particular circumstances of production gradually become effaced; instead the reader converses with the work as a mixture of concurrent moments of reception. Thus, a contemporary reading of *Oedipus Rex* does not merge our present with the past of Sophocles' time, but with a concatenation of past receptive moments that established the work's status. On the contrary, a work that has ceased to be read is inevitably confined to the historical moment of its production or of the time when it still was popular, as is the case with the seventeenth-century intertext of Yatromanolakis' *Eroticon*.

Let us consider some intertextual uses of the examples I mentioned above. The German author Ulrich Plenzdorf writes a modern version of Goethe's *Die Leiden des jungen Werther* in the novel *Die neuen Leiden des jungen W.*, 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 *Werther* 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 *The Catcher in the Rye*. 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 *Werther* as a German intertext has been eroded. Thus, when *Die neuen Leiden des jungen W.* 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 Plentzdorf's novel in a language other than German.

Goethe's *Werther* has been transformed from text into myth, a common myth inscribed in a worldwide cultural subconscious. A similar case is Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, the difference being that there is no text prior to the myth. The French author Alain Robbe-Grillet uses *Oedipus Rex* as a loose frame for his novel *Les Gommes* 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 *Homo Faber*, 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 *Oedipus*, for example Aris Alexandrou's novel *To Kivotio* (*The Strongbox*), 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, *Oedipus* is flexible enough to be rendered into different languages, genres and narrative idioms. Consequently, the translation of a work that alludes to *Oedipus* 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 *Les Gommes* 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 *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 well beyond that point. In order to write an identical version of *Don Quixote* Pierre Menard has to "know Spanish well, recover the Catholic faith, fight against the Moors of the Turk, forget the history of Europe between the years 1602 and 1918, *be* Miguel de Cervantes."[5] This process of identification, otherwise signalled as the ironical shift from *becoming* to *being*, implies an abolition of the popular boundaries between reader and author; *Don Quixote* does not belong to Cervantes or to the Spanish-speaking world, but to the occasional reader who actualises it, in this case Pierre Menard. The relationship of the text to the intertext is constantly differentiated in an endless process of liquefaction designated by the reading. Perhaps we could even suggest that the allusions of the particular intertext are almost effaced by a general idea of textuality, which opens "Pierre Menard" up to different readings.

In Borges' story *Don Quixote* hovers ambiguously like a shadow and the reader is deceived in his belief that he can grasp an essence that constantly escapes him. Despite this idiosyncratic use of *Don Quixote*, its significance does not require explanation. This is not the case, however, with the forgotten sources upon which Cervantes' classic itself depends and which frame the novel with a robust intertextual network.[6] Don Quixote declares himself a knight-errant as a result of his passionate reading of chivalric novels. These novels are not only important for the plot but also as signifiers of the textual conception of Cervantes' novel, which functions both as a parody and as an imitation of them. Without its intertextual implications *Don Quixote* would resemble a smooth façade; however, the dense intertextual system behind the novel consists of sources that were obviously more significant to the Spanish-speaking world of the early seventeenth century than they are to, let's say, the contemporary German or English readership. In order to make these sources

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: *Amadis de Gaul*, 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 *Eroticon* raises similar issues. *Eroticon*, 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 *Geoponikon*, composed by the Cretan monk Agapios Landos in 1643. *Geoponikon*, 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 *Geoponikon* 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 *Eroticon*, 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 *Eroticon* and *Geoponikon* implies a process of imitation. Also, *Eroticon* follows the formal presentation of *Geoponikon* 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]
>
> Eroticon: 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, *Eroticon* 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 *Eroticon* 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 *Geoponikon*, *Eroticon* 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 *Symposium*, 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 *Eroticon*, which encompasses elements of the Cretan dialect of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, evokes the influential tradition of Renaissance Cretan literature, exemplified by Georgios Chortatzis' drama *Erofili* and Vintzentzos Kornaros' romance *Erotocritos*. These texts also present a thematic similarity as love stories.[10] The indirect reference to Cretan texts has an obvious impact on the cultural identity of the novel, which is not just Greek but particularly Cretan.[11] This localisation is stressed in all formal aspects including the cover page, in which Yatromanolakis introduces himself as a Cretan author, *"dottore di Filosofia,"* and his work as written *"con licenza de Superiori, & Privilegio,"* the standard copyright convention of the Venetian authorities. Furthermore, he dedicates his work to a "most gentle and erudite lady, gracious in every way" just as the Cretan authors of the Renaissance dedicated their works to erudite patrons. The allusions to Crete are not confined to the Cretan Renaissance. Dionysios' Solomos poem "The Cretan" (1833) is recalled in the following passage:

> Remain there suspended amidst the black lake encircling you and allow the rising image to pass beside you, now radiant as a fantasy. And when she passes proudly and ascends sufficiently, allow yourself to sink anew, though ever casting your gaze upwards and taking pride. And you will see that the back water will overflow with her radiance and your moonclad lady will rise like a column of light into the air, reaching towards the stars.[12]

Yatromanolakis pays obvious homage to Solomos' poem, which presents the shipwrecked Cretan fighting to save his fiancée from a sea-storm. The vision of a female figure surrounded by moonlight disrupts his struggle:

> On rolled the thunder…….

> 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 who reads the work in translation. Whereas it is bound to mean something to those readers who have read it in the original, it probably goes unnoticed by readers who are not aware of the culture it represents.[14]

Thus, the cultural significance that Cretan intertexts have for a Cretan author is inevitably lost in translation, unless there is an equivalent in the target language. In the absence of such an equivalent the translator David Connolly reproduces the alienating effect of the original through alternative means. As I said before, what seems to be prioritised is the preservation of the meta-narrative quality of the original, even when the exact examples do not come through. In this case the culturally specific intertextual allusions of *Eroticon* are replaced with genre-specific ones. The English reader can identify the genre of practical guides, which *Eroticon* imitates. Furthermore, *Eroticon* strongly evokes sensual literature such as the *Kama Sutra*—also indirectly referred to in the Greek original—and other such works, for example the anonymous *Eroticon* edited by J. P. Spencer,[15] or even Ovid's *Ars Amatoria*. Another group of texts that can possibly be evoked in the English version are various kinds of religious texts, lives of saints and the imperative idiom of Holy Scripture, but also texts of witchcraft, which the reader has not necessarily read but is aware of. Since all these texts are more accessible to the English-speaking audience, their

reverberations can possibly create an alternative intertextual network that replaces lost Greek and Cretan references.

Sensual literature also proves to be an important stylistic resource for the Greek linguistic infusion of *Eroticon*. The translator resorts to the language used in nineteenth-century translations of the *Kama Sutra* and the *Perfumed Garden* by Sir Richard F. Burton, which recreate the alienating effect that the archaic language has in the original by reproducing their pompous and erudite tone. For example:

> Wherefore, if you wish to be reckoned a most gallant man and a prudent and noble-minded lover, see to it that by your own hand you render your lady radiant that she may sparkle most alluringly in the eyes and hearts of others and thus be glorified. For we light not the candle to put it under a bushel, but to reveal it. Should, however, you lack the gallant persuasion of exquisite desire and belong to the lower order of lovers, sit and guard her beauty in your foolishness and fear till she herself reveals her hidden and private charms and in a way both unbecoming and imprudent.[16]

Although the translator presents the fruit of his labours as "done into plain English by David Connolly," the complex syntax he uses, much more complex than in the original, is intended to enhance the alienating effect, as indicated in the above extract. The translations of the *Kama Sutra* and the *Perfumed Garden* also provided solutions for rare and obsolete terms for body parts, which Yatromanolakis frequently uses. More importantly, their stylistic stagnation recreates that comic effect that the archaisms of Agapios' style have for the contemporary Greek reader.

The intertextual shift that takes place in translation can produce random reverberations and unexpected transformations. Being much more dependent on equivalents from sensual literature, *Eroticon* in English has experienced a generic mutation, as it has been marketed as a sensual novel. Interestingly, in England it is shelved under erotic literature, whereas in Greece it is shelved under fiction.[17] The

different covers in the Greek and English editions also support this argument (figs. 1 and 2). Whereas the cover of the Greek edition, ornamented with cupids, alludes to Renaissance manuscripts and presents the text in the scholarly conventions of that time, the cover of the English edition is plainer, lacks the formal presentation of the work (which is moved to the title page instead) and is illustrated by a painting entitled "Oh! Calcutta! Calcutta," which is a pun on the French phrase *"O quel cul t'as!"*[18]

As has been said in this volume's outline, recent theories have revised the concept of translation as an act reflected as such on the effect of a literary work, rather than as a process—concealed from the reader—aiming at reproducing the work's original effect. This suggests that what was previously believed to be the text's original effect is rather a potentiality, which makes it susceptible to different readings. The translator's task then would be to recreate this potentiality and then deliver the work to the readers who will actualise it. This process of recreation, however, interacts to a great extent with cultural circumstances beyond his control. The shift of emphasis from the cultural to the sensual in the English version of *Eroticon* can be read along these lines. The outcome of translation is not only dependent on the translator's decisions; it is a combination of various reading factors, such as the reader's experiences and expectations. Marketing policies can also be considered to be reading choices for the particular work. Thus, a translation is not the product of one man's labours; it is the product of different interpretative decisions that contribute to the meaning of a text as different textual roles. The open nature of this interaction perhaps supports the argument that translation as a concept is in a position of enriching a text by recreating the very idea of its textuality in a different language.

Notes

[1] Yoryis Yatromanolakis, *Eroticon* (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, *Towards an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. Timothy Bahti, introduction by Paul de Man (Brighton: Harvester, 1982).
[4] Extracts of this novel have been translated by Kay Cicellis (*Aegean Review* 6, 1989, 57-62), and recently in David Ricks, ed., *Modern Greek Writing: An Anthology in English Translation* (London: Peter Owen, 2003), 370-5.
[5] Jorge Luis Borges, "Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote,*" *Labyrinths* (London: Penguin, 1970), 66.
[6] On the subject of intertextuality in *Don Quixote*, see E. Michael Gerli, *Refiguring Authority: Reading, Writing and Rewriting in Cervantes* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1995).
[7] See for example John Rutherford's (Penguin, 2001) and Edith Grossman's (Secker and Warburg, 2004) translations, both containing introductions and notes.
[8] Yatromanolakis' output before *Eroticon* includes the novels *Spiritual Meadow* (1974), *The Fiancée* (1979), *A History of a Vendetta* (1982), *A Report of a Murder* (1993). *The Fiancée* and his latest novel *The Valley of Athens* (2000) have not been translated into English.
[9] My translation.
[10] Under Venetian rule Crete possessed a strong literary tradition, which was extinguished when the island was occupied by the Ottomans in 1669. On that subject see David Holton, ed., *Literature and Society in Renaissance Crete* (Cambridge University Press, 1991).
[11] *Eroticon* can be regarded as the concluding part of Yatromanolakis' Cretan trilogy, which includes *A History of a Vendetta* and *A Report of a Murder*. *History of a Vendetta* relates the chronicle of a Cretan vendetta and *A Report of a Murder* is based on the true story of a Cretan postgraduate, who murdered in cold blood two members of the academic staff of the University of Crete. These two texts present a strong locality in terms of customs and topography respectively; *Eroticon* completes the tribute to the author's homeland as reference to its cultural heritage.
[12] Yatromanolakis, *Eroticon*, 186.
[13] Dionysios Solomos, "The Cretan," trans. Roderick Beaton, in Peter Mackridge, ed., *The Free Besieged and other poems* (Nottingham: Shoestring Press, 2000), 3-5.
[14] The alienating effect could also exist for Greek readers who are not familiar with Solomos' "The Cretan." This raises a whole different series of interesting issues that would be too complicated to tackle here. However, it is important to point out that locality and alienation are not only caused by cultural limitations.
[15] J. P. Spencer, *Eroticon* (London: Star, 1985).
[16] Yatromanolakis, *Eroticon*, 175.
[17] This is not the only instance of generic transformation regarding the output of Yatromanolakis. Other novels by him, such as *Spiritual Meadow* and *A Report of a Murder* have been classified in England and America as fantasy. This can be ascribed to publishing politics, but also indicates the open-ended character of literary genres that can translate differently across cultures.
[18] The painting used in the cover appeared in a censored version on the poster for the off-Broadway musical *Oh! Calcutta!* (1969).