PALAMAS AS VERSE TRANSLATOR: 
A STUDY OF ΞΑΝΑΤΟΝΙΣΜΕΝΗ ΜΟΥΣΙΚΗ

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Kostis Palamas was a prolific verse translator. In his anthology of translations entitled "Ξανατονισμένη μουσική" there are 98 poems in total written by poets of different nationalities, mainly French. From all these poets, Sully Prudhomme is most represented one. The second most represented poet is Victor Hugo. Most of Palamas’ translated poems are unrhymed sonnets written in the demotic and in the iambic fifteen-syllable. The reasons for Palamas’ choice to translate sonnets in the demotic and his preference for using the fifteen-syllable without rhyme form an important part of any macro-level analysis of his aims as a translator. However, this paper concentrates on a micro-level examination of two poems translated by Palamas. The French source poems are compared with their Greek versions on a lexical and morpho-syntactical level. This comparison permits the identification of Palamas’ main translation strategies as well as his predilection for certain translation techniques. This examination also evinces that Palamas is a capable and skilful translator.

Keywords: Kostis Palamas, Victor Hugo, Sully Prudhomme, comparative literature, verse translation.

Palamas, apart from a great poet¹, prose writer, critic², philosopher (Vezani 1930), historian of Greek literature (Apostolidou 1992)³, playwright (Puchner 1995) and a key figure in Greek letters, was also a prolific verse translator. His translations are found in “Ξανατονισμένη Μουσική” (volume 11 of Άπαντα) published in 1930. Palamas mostly translates the work of French poets, like Victor Hugo, Sully Prudhomme, Paul-Marie Verlaine and Charles Marie René Leconte de Lisle.

1. Deservedly Palamas has been considered the National poet of Greece, not in the sense of a poet emblazoned the Nation but as a man humbled by the pleasures and hardships of his motherland, and in the sense of being if not the most, one of the most precious intellectual persons in Greece of the contemporary times (Vezanis 1930).
2. The most coherent work on Palamas as a critic is found in Voutouris (2007).
3. Basically Apostolidou (1992) discusses that element of Palamas' criticism which is literary-historical in nature.
In this paper I attempt a brief analysis of Palamas’ translation practice through a micro-level examination of the poem “Οι στίχοι μου” (“Mes verses fuiraient”) by Hugo and “Η τέχνη λυτρωμός” (“L’art sauveur”) by Prudhomme. The vocabulary, syntax and morphology of the target texts (TT) will be analysed in comparison to their source texts (ST). The examination of the way Palamas’ translations are related to their source texts shows the degree of his faithfulness as a translator. The translator is after all first a reader and then a writer and in the process of reading s/he must take a position (Baker 1998). This micro-level analysis unveils Palamas’ skills as a translator and his translation strategies. The two poems analysed here, follow the dictum “l’art pour l’art” (“ποιήματα ποιητικής”); in both poems poetry is presented as a means for the praise of love and beauty.

1. The poem Mes vers fuiraient - Οι στίχοι μου

Mes vers fuiraient, doux et frêles,
Vers votre jardin si beau,
Si mes vers avaient des ailes,
Des ailes comme l'oiseau.

Ils voleraient, étincelles,
Vers votre foyer qui rit,
Si mes vers avaient des ailes,
Des ailes comme l'esprit.
Près de vous, purs et fidèles,
Ils accouraient nuit et jour,
Si mes vers avaient des ailes,
Des ailes comme l’amour.

Victor Hugo, “Les contemplations”

Οι στίχοι μου
Στο λαμπρό σου κήπο οι στίχοι μου,
Λεπτοκάμωτοι, ιλαροί,
Θάφευγαν, αν είχανε φτερά,
Φτερά σαν και το πουλί.
Θα σπιθοβολούσανε προς τη
gελαστή γιωνίτσα σου, ω!
Αν οι στίχοι μου είχανε φτερά,
Φτερά σαν το λογισμό.
In the poem "Mes vers fuiraient" we note that a clear structure is consistently followed. It is based on the grammatical shape of three past conditionals, each one found in the three verses. Each strophe is constructed over by only one verb (if we exclude the main verb of the past conditional avaient / είχαν which is repeated once in each verse) and there is one simile at the end of each verse. Palamas keeps this poetic structure unchanged in the TT and this testifies to his fidelity towards the ST’s general structure.

The verbs of each verse (here I am referring to the verbs excluding the main verb of the past conditional), although synonyms, differ in terms of their intensity. These are presented in the ST in an upward escalation starting with the less emphatic and ending with the more vivid: fuiraient, voleraient, accouraient (would flee, would fly, would flock). In the TT, the first verb is translated in a literal way but this is not the case with the other two. Instead of translating the second verb as “θα πετούσαν”, Palamas chooses to replace it with “θα σπιθοβολούσανε” (would sparkle). He sacrifices the accurate translation of the word in order to use a compound verb. Overall, Palamas’ obsession with compounds (something against which the modernist poets turn) is something which has wide implications for his translation strategies. The general meaning of the ST’s verse, however, remains the same because this compound verb was created by the combination of the ST’s verb and its following noun (vole-raient, étincelles/ would fly, sparks). As for the third verb, we witness a weakness in Palamas’ translation as “accuraient” becomes simply “θα πετούσανε” (would fly). In this way, the intense and vivid meaning of this verb is not reflected. Palamas manages to compensate for this loss in a skilful way by making another deviation that has to do with the verse sequence. Palamas reverses verse 9 with 10 and in this way the verb “θα πετούσανε” is found at the beginning of the verse which, thus, releases an emphatic breath and colour. In this way he creates equally the same effect of vividness.

Not only does Palamas manage to preserve the vividness of the ST and create lyricism while remaining faithful to the meaning of the ST, but he also creates more emphatic, emotionally intense and poetical verses. In the first
stanza for instance, the verb “Θάφευγαν” is moved from the first verse to the third. One point of this strategy is to delay information. Moreover, Palamas probably aims to produce an illocutionary effect emphasising the phrase “στο λαμπρό σου κήπο οι στίχοι μου.” Simultaneously, by changing the normal syntactic pattern Palamas opts to create a poetic flow in his translation.

Another example is the addition of the interjection “ω” in verse 6 with an exclamation mark at the end, which is the only deviation by Palamas on the level of punctuation in the whole poem. This sound effect is also a stylistic expression of feeling. Although such words/expressions make no sense, i.e. they carry no exact semantic sense, they do definitely convey a certain emotion—in this case the emotion of despondency because of unfulfilled desire. With this deviation Palamas creates a more emotionally intense verse than the corresponding one in the ST. In Greek poetry, words and expressions are used aplenty, and Palamas was aware of this from his personal experience and engagement with poetry. So, the fact that he himself was a poet plays a significant role in his effort to translate.

Moreover, emphasis is created in the last verse of this poem by the alternation between the verb and object on the syntactic level, as the following table shows:

| 1st v.          | Φτερά σαν / des ailes comme | Αν είχανε φτερά / si mes vers avaient |
| 2nd v.          | Φτερά σαν / des ailes comme | Αν (οι στίχοι μου) είχανε φτερά / si me vers avaient |
| 3rd v.          | Σαν (τον έρωτα) φτερά / des ailes comme | Αν (οι στίχοι μου) φτερά είχανε / si me vers avaient |

While Palamas in the first two verses follows the standard syntactic form of the French poem, in the last verse he reverses it and this results in focusing the attention of the audience on that point. This syntactic deviation is in accordance with the general meaning of the poem constructed over the desire lines to obtain wings like the ones of oiseau, esprit and amour (bird, spirit and love). Like the verbs of this poem, each noun is presented in each verse respectively, in an upward escalation with the notion of the last noun (love) to be the most important and the strongest. By altering the syntactic structure Palamas wants to place even more emphasis to the already emotionally strong noun “love”. The image of the wings of love here evokes Cupid.
Finally, Palamas’ treatment of the adjectives in Hugo’s poem conforms to his strategy to remain faithful and create vividness. The transliteration of adjectives in the translation process is central because it exposes a real difficulty for any translator: “It is less the difficulty of finding an equivalent as the difficulty of finding an affinity of outlook” (Ricks 1990: 278). Palamas achieves both as we conclude from his manipulation of all the adjectives in the poem: *doux* is rendered into ιλαρός which has overtones of liturgical language and describes in a faithful and poetic way the meaning of the French epithet, *frêles* is translated by the compound adjective λεπτοκάμωτοι which is more delicate and lyrical than its literal translation εύθραυστος. Also *beau* is turned into λαμπρό (bright) which is more intense than its literal translation óμορφο, while *purs et fidèles* are literally translated into αγνοί and πιστοί respectively. So Palamas manages to remain faithful to the sense and meaning even of the thoroughly descriptive and elusive adjectives of the poem.

### 2. The poem *L’art sauveur* - Η τέχνη λυτρώμος

*L'art sauveur*

S’il n’était rien de bleu que le ciel et la mer,
De blond que les épis, de rose que les roses,
S’il n’était de beauté qu’aux insensibles choses,
Le plaisir d’admirer ne serait point amer.

Mais avec l’océan, la campagne et l’éther,
Des formes d’un attrait douloureux sont écloses;
Le charme des regards, des sourires, des poses,
Mord trop avant dans l’âme, ô femme! il est trop cher.

Nous t’aimons, et de là les douleurs infinies:
Car Dieu, qui fit la grâce avec des harmonies,
Fit l’amour d’un soupir qui n’est pas mutuel.

Mais je veux, revêtant l’art sacré pour armure,
Voir des lèvres, des yeux, l’or d’une chevelure,
Comme l’épi, la rose, et la mer, et le ciel.

*Sully Prudhomme, Les Épreuves*

*Η τέχνη λυτρώμος*

Αν ο ουρανός κ’ η θάλασσα μόνα είτανε γαλάζια,
μόνα ξανθά τα στάχυα, μόνα ρόδινα τα ρόδα,
αν η ομορφάδα στ’ άψυχα φεγγοβολούσε μόνο,
tου θαυμασμού κ’ η απόλαψη πικρή δέ θά είταν. Όμως
αντάμα με τις θάλασσες, τους ουρανούς, τους κάμπους,
θωρίες ανθούνε με γητιές που συφορές γεννούνε.
Κορμοστασιές, χαμόγελα, ματιές, το μάγεμά σου
μας τρώει κατάβαθα, ω γυναίκα, ακριβοπλήρωτο είναι.
Τις πίκρες τις απέραντες η αγάπη σου τις φέρνει.
Γιατί ο Θεός που μ’ αρμονίες την
έπλασε τη χάρη,
γέννησε από ένα στεναγμό που αντίχτυπο δεν έχει,
τον έρωτα. Μα με την τέχνη αρματωμένος θέλω
να είν’ ουρανοί και θάλασσες, τριαντάφυλλα και αστάχυα.

Kostis Palamas, Ξανατονισμένη Μουσική

Like the previous poem, this poem is about the art of Poetry and belongs to
the category of Poems of Poetics. Specifically, one of the ideas expressed is
that through poetry we can see the world in an embellishing way. Prud-
homme in this poem refers to poetry as a sacred and redeeming art and he
considers it an armour for a poet who can praise love and feminine beauty as
well as the beauty of nature through it.

The poem L’art sauveur starts with a negative conditional sentence which
Palamas translates as an affirmative conditional sentence and because of this
deviation, the word μόνα is repeated three times in the first two verses. Thus,
verses 1 and 2 of the translation are linked by the stylistic and aesthetic poet-
ic element of repetition (Myers c1989; Boase-Beier 1995), something that
does not happen in the ST, while the meaning of the ST remains unchanged.
Palamas also preserves the repetition of the words rose and roses in verse two
by choosing two words in Greek ρόδινα and ρόδα which have the same mean-
ing with the ST’s words. Moreover, in the French poem we can notice that all
the nouns of the first two verses are found in the last verse of the poem. In the
translated poem we observe that all these nouns are repeated in verse 5 too,
with an exception: τριαντάφυλλα instead of ρόδα, for reasons of variety and
for keeping the iambic fifteen-syllable. So, Palamas keeps the ST’s repeti-
tions and creates even more, without losing the meaning of the ST.

Apart from repetitions, we can also find many examples of internal rhyme
in Palamas’ translation. For instance, in the 6th verse there is an internal
rhyme between the verbs ανθούνε and γεννούνε. In the next verse internal
rhyme is also achieved between the nouns γητιές and ματιές and in this way,
the 6th and 7th verse are rhythmically linked. In order to achieve all the aforementioned internal rhymes, Palamas does not hesitate to use some translation shifts as we can observe in the 6th verse: two verbs ανθούνε and γεννούνε instead of the one verb écloses, the noun συφορές instead of the adjective douloureux, grammatical shift of the noun phrase d’un attrait into the plural form γητιές and change of its syntactic role: from possessive genitive into nominative. However, he keeps the meaning of the words wherever possible i.e. the nouns regards, sourires, poses are literally transferred. His penchant for high register and literary words is also overt as we conclude from the use of the scholarly word γητιές, the literary noun θωριές and the choice of the word αντάμα (for the word “avec”), which is more scholarly than the word μαζί (Babiniotis 1998: 202).

There are notably some more deviations at the lexical level in Palamas’ translation. For example, in the third verse of the poem the verb était is translated as φεγγοβολούσε. This lexical deviation strengthens the meaning of the third verse and makes it more intense. In the next verse, the word point which means καθόλου is omitted in the translation as Palamas wants to keep the iambic fifteen-syllable. Palamas could also put ωκεανούς—which is the literal translation of the French océan—rather than θάλασσες but this choice is implemented in order to keep the repetition of θάλασσες in verses 5 and 14 that exists in the corresponding verses of the ST with the noun la mer. This deviation is part of his effort to domesticate the poem as the picture of sea is more familiar to Greek readers whereas if he had chosen ωκεανούς it would have had a different resonance for Greek readers. So the significance of his choice is that he goes for a more everyday, folksy, familiar word, rather than one with literary and mythological connotations. Moreover, in verse 5, the word éther which is a French loan from Greek, instead of been translated as αιθέρας which is also more poetical, is translated as ουρανούς. Palamas makes this

5. The word αντάμα is also chosen metri causa.
6. For the perception of Ωκεανός (ocean) see the mythology of Ωκεανός (Smith 1849) and Kalvos’ ode Χ Ο Ωκεανός (1997: 159).
7. According to the Dictionnaire historique de la langue française (Rey 2000: 1325) :
“éther est un emprunt ancien au latin aither, lui même emprunt au grec aithêr ‘région supérieuse de l’air’ [...] Repris en français avec le sens du grec, éther désigne poétiquement l’air le plus pur, les espaces célestes [...] Dans ce sens éther a des dérivés littéraires.”
deviation in order to avoid a word that belongs to *katharevousa* while he again achieves the repetition of the word ουρανούς in verses 5 and 14 which is correspondingly found in the ST.\(^8\)

Apart from lexical deviations, Palamas deviates at the syntactic and morphological levels too. At the syntactic level there is a change of the word order in verse 5: instead of “l’océan, la campagne et l’ether”, Palamas puts “τις θάλασσες, τους ουρανούς, τους κάμπους”. In the same verse a grammatical deviation is also made as all nouns are put in the plural form. With this deviation the word “θάλασσες” matches with the words in verses 6 and 7 which end in -ες and is repeated in verses 5 and 14 like the noun ουρανούς does as we previously mentioned.

A notable grammatical deviation is found in verse 12 where Palamas translates the noun *armure* (πανοπλία in Greek) with the participle αρματωμένος. This change has many consequences. First, with the use of a participle a personal character is given and in this way the meaning becomes more emotionally charged. Secondly, he creates the same alliteration between the Greek and French word (αρματωμένος). Also, the word άρμα is a medieval word more literary than πανοπλία (Babiniotis 1998) and it is used many times by Cavafy i.e. in his poems Πριάμου Νυκτοπορία (1893), Η κηδεία του Σαρπηδόνος (1898). Nevertheless, we can say that the general meaning of the verse is not altered by this word change and so Palamas remains faithful to the ST’s meaning.

Furthermore, in the poem Η τέχνη λυτρωμός we witness an extensive use of compound words as a mechanism of intensification of the poem’s lyrical aspect. In his study of Palamas’ language, Andriotis (1943) highlights the function of compounds as an effective stylistic device of epic poetry, but in Palamas’ translations, his predilection for compounds is a key part of his effort to build a demotic lyric poetry. Compounds as a lyrical device were also extensively and often fruitfully exploited by Sikelianos and Elytis (Loulakaki-Moore 2010). In order to preserve the richness of the ST, Palamas employs the compound word φεγγοβολούσε for était that augments the effect of the equivalent word ήταν would have. Also, Palamas translates many words as compounds that multiply the effect of the ST like κορμοστασιές, κατάβαθα, ακριβοπλήρωτο, αντίχτυπο. Compounds beginning with κατα- also intensify

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\(^8\) The noun ουρανούς like the noun θάλασσες are found in the singular form in the first verse and in verses 5 and 14 in the plural form.
the effect of the second part of the word. Sometimes compound words are redundant, since the ST word is not a compound (for example in verse 11 Palamas translates the phrase “qui n’est pas mutuel” with the phrase “που αντίκτυπο δεν έχει” instead of the phrase όμοιο δεν έχει), and in most cases there are one or more equivalent words in Greek i.e. trop cher – ακριβοπλήρωτο. More often than not, compounds offer the translator the opportunity to express the meaning in a compressed way, i.e. “Mord trop avant dans l’âme” – “μας τρώει κατάβαθα”. So Palamas exploits the synthetic capacity of the Greek language for brevity and in order to create a more solid verse.

The translation mechanisms identified here are internal rhyme, repetitions, alliterations, though the characteristic figure of this translation is the extent use of compounds as a lyric device by Palamas. Another translation strategy implemented in this poem is the creation of internal rhyme wherever possible. Also, Palamas’ strict use of the demotic language is obvious from his strain to avoid any words belonging to katharevousa. In this self-reflexive poem there are many deviations, some of which are warranted by Palamas’ effort to keep the iambic fifteen-syllable and enrich it by creating more sources of harmony like sound repetitions and internal rhyme. Some other liberties were also made for reasons of variety and for creating vividness. The fact that the negligible character of these deviations does not affect the general meaning of the ST evinces Palamas’ characterisation as a faithful translator.

To conclude, two of Palamas’ translated poems were analysed on a micro-level in comparison to their French source poems. Some of Palamas’ stylistic preferences were revealed, such as repetitions and internal rhyme. Furthermore, his predilection for certain mechanisms like the use of compounds was noted, which are characteristic of his own poetry too. Palamas often deviates from the ST because he opts to:

- replenish the absence of rhyme, keep and enrich the fifteen-syllable
- intensify and emphasise the meaning of the ST verse
- create sources of harmony like repetitions, assonance and alliterations, internal rhyme, enjambments, compounds
- create more dynamism
- make use of vocabulary specific to the Greek language and culture

However, these deviations do not distance the translations from their ST. The vocabulary Palamas uses deviating from the original and embodied in the target language, would illustrate a way of a domesticating strategy according
to Venuti’s (1995) terms. Yet Palamas respects Hugo’s and Prudhomme’s way of writing, notably the meticulous handling of the adjectives. Therefore, Venuti’s terminology cannot do justice to Palamas’ case.

But I could undoubtedly say that the use of vocabulary items specific in the demotic and the various similarities to folk songs are examples of Palamas’ particular strategy to make his translations read like original poems in Greek. He recreates the work as a poem in its own right in Greek. Finally, Palamas is preoccupied with such a detail as this micro-level elaborate analysis proved, and he sees getting these subtle aspects of Sully Prudhomme in Greek as more of a challenge than simply reproducing the French poet’s themes.
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