Greek surrealist poets in English translation: problems, parameters and possibilities

David Connolly

I *Introduction*

Greek surrealist poets have been only partially and somewhat randomly translated into English in comparison with exponents of other modes of twentieth-century Greek poetry and there has been no systematic presentation in the English-speaking world of this group of highly influential poets. This is somewhat surprising if we consider the number of translations into English of poets such as Cavafy, Seferis and Ritsos. Presumably the reasons for this lack of attention on the part of British and American translators are not based on axiological criteria, as the surrealist poets represent one of the most important and influential groups in modern Greek literature with an impact on all subsequent generations of Greek poets.[1] My aim in this paper is to examine some of the peculiar features of these poets in order to ascertain to what extent these features offer themselves to translation – what translation problems arise and whether they can be adequately dealt with in English translation. How, for example, can we reconcile the conscious craft of the translator with a mode of poetry which is rooted in the subconscious, which aims at the irrational, and which uses a form of writing that is to a greater or lesser extent automatic?

There is no doubt that the Greek surrealist poets constitute one of the main factors in the renewal of modern Greek poetry and, regardless of whether or not they constitute a movement as such, what we have is a group of poets with common and obvious elements and features of surrealism – automatic writing, startling images, contradictory and logically unconnected

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[1] According to Nanos Valaoritis (1991: 116), there was perhaps no other surrealist group in the world (with the exception of France) that was more active or exercised more influence.

phrases, unexpected metaphors, lack of similes, exchange of properties between animate and inanimate objects, elliptical syntax etc. – all of which contribute to the immediacy of poetic communication by attempting to eliminate rational response. The translator's concern then is how and to what extent these features can be conveyed in the target language (TL). Of necessity, the examples I use in my discussion will be limited to only a very few of the leading exponents of surrealist poetry and to their earliest, perhaps most surrealistically orthodox, works.

II *Surrealist poetry and the problem of translation*

Meaning and function

The translator of poetry engages in a process that involves identifying semantic content (or, more questionably, deciding on the author's intended meaning), assessing the potential effect of this meaning on the source text (ST) readers and finding suitable if not similar stylistic means of conveying both content and potential effect to the target readers. The search for poetic meaning (i.e. the poem's content, effect and style) would seem to be even more hazardous, however, in the case of surrealist poetry which contains no logically developed theme, no narrative statement or message, and where all traditional poetic forms are abandoned and (theoretically, at least) aesthetic preoccupations disregarded. According to Embirikos (1980: 326), the most orthodox of Greek surrealist poets:

> A surrealist poem does not consist of one or more subjective or objective themes logically defined and developed along conscious lines, but it is a poem that might consist of any elements that arise in the flow of its creation, regardless of all conventional and standard aesthetic, moral and logical constructions... It is a poem-happening, rather than a succession of static descriptions of certain events or feelings, described using one or another artistic style.

How then is the translator to deal with such poetry in which poetic meaning is to be found in neither content nor form? What is it that he or she must reproduce in the TL so that the translation may be faithful to the aims and function of the original? One view of translation sees it as the translator's job to recreate in the TL the poet's original vision that preceded its

verbal expression. Such a view regards even the original poem as a "translation" of this vision. Yet is this approach applicable to surrealist poetry that, at least at its outset, was a product of automatic writing? And even those surrealist poets who do not make use of automatic writing in its original technical sense – and I am thinking here of Elytis who on his own admission never accepted this aspect of surrealism – are still guided by language itself into the expression of certain ideas rather than the ideas dictating the language used (Elytis 1975: 637).

I refer as an example to Embirikos's poem "Θρυλικὸν Ἀνάκλιντρον", translated by Kimon Friar (1973: 637) as "Legendary Sofa", which begins:

Ὁ εἱρμὸς τοῦ ποταμοῦ διεκόπη. Ἡ συνοχὴ ὅμως τοῦ τοπίου εἶταν τόση ποὺ καὶ ὁ ποταμὸς κυλοῦσε. Μέσα ἀπὸ τὰ φύλλα τῶν ἀγρῶν πρὸς τὸ γεφύρι ποὺ χτυποῦσε ὁ ἥλιος τὰ σπάρτα τὰ λευκὰ στήθη τὰ λουλούδια μέσα στὰ διάφανα πουκάμισα ποὺ ἀκουμποῦσαν στὰ χαράματα τὰ κορίτσια σκύβαν γυμνὰ ἢ σχεδὸν γυμνὰ νὰ συνθλίψουν καὶ να χαϊδέψουν γενικὰ τὰ σώματά τους καὶ τὰ σώματα τῶν ἀνθῶν...

The continuity of the river was cut off. The coherence of the landscape was such that the river still continued to flow. From within the leaves of the field toward the bridge smitten by the sun the esparto grass the white breasts the flowers within the transparent shirts they placed on dawn girls stooped naked or almost naked to hug and generally to caress their bodies and the bodies of flowers...

In his *Report to Andreas Embirikos*, Elytis offers an interpretation of this poem which does not concern us here, but he goes on to make the important point that any message or meaning arising from this poem was not something the poet had in mind before sitting down to write the poem. In surrealist poetry, Elytis says, "what happens is that the 'carbon copy paper' presents things that the poet himself was not conscious of, without this meaning that these things do not correspond to his deeper self. The deeper meaning of the poem is therefore somehow perceived 'καθ' ὁδόν' [en route], during the process of writing" (1980: 36). The aim or intention of such poetry is not the expression of either ideas or a particular aesthetic. Images are used to evoke a response in the

reader but without determining the nature of the response and this is achieved by the deliberate avoidance of every logically coherent association. Such poetry, according to Elytis (1980: 37), aims at neither an elegant style nor a philosophical view, but at creating in the reader a "vibration" or "upward thrust" in the spiritual sense. It is this function that is all-important in surrealist poetry and, in the translation process, this intended pragmatic effect takes priority therefore over content (and form).

Surrealism as a movement was not therefore an artistic standpoint but a theory of action, revolutionary in character. As such, surrealist poetry overturns the categories of conventional logic to reveal other relationships between the world and the self; it unlocks the world of the subconscious, using the written word to effect an experience (βίωμα) in the reader. "One doesn't write poetry, one lives it," says Engonopoulos (1977: 147). It is poetry that presupposes an emotive and intuitive rather than a rational response. It appeals emotively, through sets of related if elliptical images, to subconscious responses in the reader, with the aim of giving the reader a new vision of his integration in the world around him.

It is for others to examine the historical reasons behind this opposition to a reality based only on logic and reason. The translator's work, having established poetic meaning in the pragmatic effect that surrealist poetry is intended to have on the reader, is to examine the techniques used by surrealist poets to create this effect and determine ways of reproducing these techniques so that the translation may function in a similar or corresponding way. It is to these specific features of surrealist poetry that I will now turn.

III *Surrealist techniques and translation parameters*

Automatic writing
Automatic writing is probably the main feature of orthodox surrealism (if not the decisive definition).[2] Although it was soon

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[2] The recipe for *écriture automatique* was given in Breton's *Manifesto* (1924). The principle was of copying down from a kind of inner dictation whilst remaining "en dehors de toute préoccupation esthétique ou morale".

brought into question, it is, even in a modified form as a poetry of irrational surprise, a technique which, firstly, frees the poet from all rational and aesthetic constraints and the translator from all worries concerning the usual form-content dilemma. Though it must be pointed out that, in dealing with Greek surrealist poets, the translator is never dealing with strictly automatic writing, or if he is, then the conclusion is that the Greek subconscious is characterised by an inherent rhythm and aesthetic which the translator of Greek surrealist poets has to account for in his translation. For if automatic writing means a break with all traditional poetic forms and little or no concern for aesthetic effects, it also means that poets are free to use any means they wish to create the desired effect in the reader. I am thinking here in particular of Nikos Gatsos who makes use of traditional forms and fifteen-syllable verse in parts of *Amorgos*, which is purported to be a product of automatic writing (see Valaoritis and Pagoulatou 1991: 116). Hence, the translator is never entirely free from the problems of form and metre. Similarly, I might refer randomly to lines from Embirikos such as: "Ἱστάμενος ἀκουμπιστὸς στὴν κουμπαστὴ κοιτάζω" (from "Τὸ ῥῆμα ἀγναντεύω"), translated as: "Leaning against the bulwarks I look out" (Raizis 1981: 74), or "Ἄλσος ἀλκῆς μὲ τ' ἄλικα δέντρα σου" (from "Οἱ καρυάτιδες"), translated as: "O vigorous groves with your trees of crimson" (Friar 1973: 351), where the translations fail to reproduce the pronounced rhythm and alliteration of the originals.

Secondly, automatic writing means breaking with normal word order, something more easily accepted in Greek (or even in French) than in English, which, being a non-inflected language, relies upon a fairly rigid word order to convey meaning. This is a general problem pertaining to all translation from Greek to English, yet in surrealist poetry, particular importance must also be given by the translator not only to the order of the words but to the way these words are spatially arranged. This problem of spatial arrangement is particularly important in poets like Nikos Engonopoulos, who, in his early surrealist poems, will often isolate a single word in a line, often no more than an article, so that its own peculiar force might be felt. One of the main features of surrealist poetry is the illogical yoking together of the most disparate objects. Yet all these disparate

images have a central harmony in that they create a coherent atmosphere of their own and though they well up out of the subconscious, it is clear, as Kimon Friar remarks, that "they flow into the control of a highly conscious will" (Friar 1973: 77). So, for example, in "Τὰ κλειδοκύμβαλα τῆς σιωπῆς" ("The pianofortes of silence") (Engonopoulos 1977: 83) we find the words of a typical surrealist image arranged in the following way:

χάνομαι
μέσα σὲ
σκοτεινὲς σπηλιὲς
ποὺ κρύφτουν
βαθιὰ
ραφτομηχανὲς
καὶ ψάρια
κίτρινα
ποὺ μιλοῦν
σὰ λουλούδια

which I translate as:

I lose myself / in dark caverns / that conceal / in their depths / sewing machines / and fish / yellow ones / that talk / like flowers.

The spatial arrangement is all important and the translation should follow strictly – even, I would argue, contravening if necessary normal TL word order – for the reason that the spatial arrangement is itself meaningful, even if the content is not logical. The overall meaning derives from the association of the illogical elements in a seemingly logical regular structure. The meaning then is not *content bound* but rather, both the individual words and the association of ideas accumulate "meaning" as the poem is read, something which applies generally in the spatial arrangement in surrealist poetry.

Also particularly important in surrealist poetry is the syntax (or rather the absence of it) which follows the free flow of associations in the prose poems of both Engonopoulos and Embirikos, and which must be shown to do so in translation. For the sake of an example, I refer again to Embirikos's "Θρυλικὸν Ἀνάκλιντρον" ("Legendary Sofa"):

...Μέσα ἀπὸ τὰ φύλλα τῶν ἀγρῶν πρὸς τὸ γεφύρι ποὺ χτυποῦσε ὁ ἥλιος – τὰ σπάρτα – τὰ λευκὰ στήθη – τὰ λουλούδια μέσα στὰ διάφανα πουκάμισα – ποὺ ἀκουμποῦσαν στὰ χαράματα – τὰ κορίτσια σκύβαν γυμνὰ – ἢ σχεδὸν γυμνὰ νὰ συνθλίψουν καὶ να χαϊδέψουν γενικὰ τὰ σώματά τους – καὶ τὰ σώματα τῶν ἀνθῶν...

...From within the leaves of the field toward the bridge smitten by the sun – the esparto grass – the white breasts – the flowers within the transparent shirts – they placed on dawn – girls stooped naked – or almost naked to hug and generally to caress their bodies – and the bodies of flowers...

I am punctuating or normalizing the syntax of the image by the pauses I make when reading it. I should read it as it is written, without punctuation, if the free flow of associations is to be allowed to function as intended. This kind of syntax with no punctuation is a translator's nightmare, yet has to be reproduced as closely as possible, even bending the norms of the TL, and the translator should not inadvertently "punctuate" the image through altering or normalizing the syntax.

Thirdly, automatic writing seeks to join subject and object (the reader and the world) through language, without the mediation of the rational processes that make use of language as a category of logic. Automatic writing allows the operation of an "alchémie du verbe" that seeks to change the perception of life through the magical operations of language alone. By transcribing the words spilling over from the rich well of the subconscious, surrealism hoped to establish what Breton called "la fonctionnement réelle de la pensée". In literary terms, this produces what might be called a poetry of irrational surprise. What we find, then, in surrealist poems is the use of objects from mundane daily life (kitchen utensils, crankshafts, sewing machines etc.) next to strange and unusual objects – things that rationalism usually keeps apart. Surrealism links them together to build up a new logical order, challenging the very power of discourse. Individual words are, therefore, of the utmost importance and should not be sacrificed in the translation either to logic or the norms of the TL.[3] For example, in "Χειμερινὰ

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[3] Engonopoulos refers to a conversation between Degas and Mallarmé in which Degas is complaining that although he is full of ideas, he cannot

σταφύλια" ("Winter grapes"), we find the phrase: "Μὰ τὰ δεκατρία ριζικά της σὰν τὰ δεκατέσσερά της χρόνια ἐσπάθισαν τὴν φευγαλέα συμφορά" (But her thirteen destinies like her fourteen years smote the fleeting calamities). Here, the verb "ἐσπάθισαν" (literally, "run through with a sword") has been translated (Friar 1973: 346) as "smote" (a normal collocation with sword), whereas perhaps the verbs "pierced" or "penetrated" with their sexual connotations might be more in keeping with the original. The translator, in other words, must be equally daring, equally inventive in his choice of words.

Similarly, key words that recur in different poems have to be religiously respected and translated in the same way each time. I refer as an example to certain key words listed by Elytis (1980: 39) as recurring in many of Embirikos's early poems: στέαρ, εὐνή, χοάνη, βόστρυχος, θύσανος, θρυαλλίς, μαρμαρυγή (tallow, bed, crucible, tress, tuft, wick, shimmer) etc. and which should appear in the translation as the same words. One further aspect of this problem of individual words refers to the use of words invented by the poet for their magical or incantatory qualities. So in Embirikos, words such as: "Ράγκα–παράγκα" (from "Ράγκα–παράγκα ἢ ὅταν τὰ συνήθη λόγια δὲν ἀρκοῦν"), "Ἄρμαλα Πόρανα καὶ Βέλμα" (from "Στροφὲς Στροφάλων") should be left to perform their magical function in the translation (as Friar does), and the "strange and enigmatic words" in Elytis's *Axion Esti* (1974: 18): "ΡΟΕΣ, ΑΛΑΣΘΑΣ, ΑΡΙΜΝΑ / ΟΛΗΙΣ, ΑΙΑΣΑΝΘΑ, ΥΕΛΤΗΣ" (which are anagrams of some of his favourite motifs) should be translated as equally strange and enigmatic anagrams in English (as Keeley and Savidis do): "ROES, ESA, ARIMNA, / NUS, MIROLTAMITY, YELTIS".

The surrealist poet, then, does not apply automatic writing or its gradations simply to surrender himself to the flow of the subconscious but rather to bring into question fundamental laws of the way thought functions, producing texts where not only the words and their cognitive content but also their syntax and their deeper associations might deviate from conventional discourse, and it is this intended function that should guide the translator in his approach to this aspect of surrealist poetry.

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write poems. Mallarmé retorts that poems are written with words not ideas (see Engonopoulos 1980: 313).

The surrealist image and the basic translation unit
Surrealism does not seek to abolish reality or take refuge in another reality. Rather it seeks to cater for all aspects of reality including its irrational aspects. Its aim is to give the subconscious, dreams, the irrational, a place in the so-called reality. It creates a "surreality" which bridges the gap between the subjective and objective aiming at the creation of a new consciousness in the reader. The subject-matter of surrealism is not the physical world of external reality but the subconscious reality, the world of dream, where what prevails is the image. The poetic images from the dream world are charged with the power to shake the fixed structures of rational thought. The image is therefore the central thread in all surrealist poetry.[4]

The poetic image in surrealist poetry does not consist of two different but kindred objects, but two completely dissimilar things.[5] The image is not created by the comparison but by the juxtaposition of two dissimilar objects. Comparison presupposes a logical process whereas juxtaposition gives the freedom to the mind to apprehend without the intervention of rational thought, allowing a total perception of reality, including its irrational aspects. In surrealist poetry, the more unlikely the juxtaposition of objects or realities, the better the image. According to Embirikos,

> images move, communicate with each other and interact... none of this is confined within a strictly defined framework. The relation between them is not determined by any conscious mechanism. They are autonomous, and their arrangement is not the result of imposed will, but of an automatic and unconscious act which escapes the control of the conscious self – as in dreams.... One image might coexist with another, may imprint or superimpose itself on a previous one without erasing it (1980: 329-30).

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[4] Breton's definition of the image is based on Pierre Reverdy: "L'image est une création pure de l'esprit [...] Elle ne peut naître d'une comparaison mais du rapprochement de deux réalités plus ou moins éloignées [...] Plus des rapports des deux réalites rapprochées seront lointains et justes, plus l'image sera forte – plus elle aura de puissance émotive et de réalité poétique."
[5] Or, as Éluard says: "Tout est comparable à tout."

I might refer, for example, to the long and autonomous images, connected only by a free flow of associations in Embirikos's poem "Κλωστήριον νυχτερινῆς ἀνάπαυλας" ("Spindle of nocturnal repose") (see Friar 1973: 347).

What does all this mean for the translator of surrealist poetry? A problem central to the translation of all texts is that of establishing the basic translation unit. The translation unit (TU) has been defined as "the smallest segment of the utterance whose signs are linked in such a way that they should not be translated individually" (Vinay and Darbelnet 1995: 21). This question of the TU is bound up with the traditional distinction between free and literal translation in that usually we can say that the freer the translation, the larger the TU; the more literal the translation, the smaller the TU, the closer to the word (as is often the case in poetry). In dealing with surrealist poetry, I would suggest that the only reasonable TU is the image – regardless of how long or short this may be – and that each separate image must be translated strictly even if it conflicts with naturalness of expression in the TL, as the pragmatic effect here again takes priority over both the cognitive content and the aesthetic factor.

The free flow of associations is simply the ability to juxtapose the image created by one word followed by a new image arising from the last word of the previous image, regardless of whether this appositional syntax corresponds to some logical progression or not. So, for example, in Embirikos's "Η Στιλβιδών" ("The resplendence"), we see how this free flow of associations works and how the translator must be careful not to lose these associations if the text is to function as in the original. Embirikos writes: "Τὰ χέρια τους μᾶς σφίγγουν / Καὶ ἡ σφὶγξ μᾶς συνθλίβει ἐπὶ τοῦ στήθους της". These two lines have been translated as: "Their arms hug us / And the sphinx clasps us to her bosom" (Friar 1973: 352), which is not only devoid of any cognitive meaning, but also fails to reproduce the flow of associations. A possible solution might be: "Their arms hold us fixed / And the Sphinx clasps us to her bosom" (my translation) where the free flow of association based on sound effects is more evident.

The poetic image is the picture conjured up by the metaphor. Metaphor demonstrates a resemblance, a common semantic area

between two (more or less) similar things – the image and the object. In surrealist poetry, however, it is not resemblance but dissimilarity and the identification of these two objects or realities that creates the force of the image. This is why surrealist poetry is largely free of standard similes using "like" or "as". Analogy gives way to identification, thus creating an image of irrational surprise. What the poet says, this is the way it is, and such images should be religiously translated. So when Elytis writes "ἡ μνήμη καίει / ἄκαυτη βάτος" (1974: 40), the memory that burns *is* an unconsumed bush and does not burn *like* an unconsumed bush as it has been translated (Keeley and Savidis 1980: 44). So also, when Embirikos writes: "Εἶναι οἱ πόθοι μιναρέδες στυλωμένοι" (in "'Αφρός"), the desires *are* minarets erected. If images may occasionally be altered in translating other kinds of poetry (for the sake of naturalness in the TL), this should not be the case in surrealist poetry and this constitutes another important factor in the translation process.

Tone as a factor in translation
One further factor in the translation process requires religious respect on the part of the translator and this is the question of tone. A common feature of surrealist poets is not only in the aims and techniques used but in the general tone of the poems. The very nature of surrealist poetry with its revolutionary character and its rebellion against all accepted forms of describing reality could not but lead to a tone of provocation, iconoclasm and ridicule of traditional values (partly responsible for the uproar and satire with which the poems were first greeted). The other side of this is, of course, a tone of renewal and optimism, of hope and change. This general tone has to be reproduced in the translation. It will influence the translation process and constitute another factor in the translator's choice of diction.

In addition to this, what one finds in the early poems of Greek surrealist poets is a particularly pronounced erotic tone. The titles of Embirikos's poems never seem to announce the theme; the images follow one another syntactically but without any seeming coherence and yet there is a sense that some central thread binds them together. This central thread is more often than not an underlying tone of eroticism. As Elytis puts it:

> In the whirl of the extremely iconoclastic expressions contained
> in his [Embirikos's] first two collections, what we see
> continually emerging with almost mathematical precision is Eros:
> not in the form of a small boy that we know from mythology but
> in the form of a most beautiful young girl – "our hope for the
> future" (1980: 45).

It can be seen then how this erotic tone is ultimately linked with
the iconoclastic yet optimistic tone I have already referred to.

The erotic tone may lie in the image itself or in certain words
recurring throughout the poem; words which, according to Elytis
(1980: 39), not only produce "a vibration, an upward thrust, but
also an ejaculation" (sic). Without being perhaps quite so
ambitious, the translator must be in a position to judge the
connotative aspects and weight of these words in finding
corresponding words in the TL and must be careful to retain the
erotic tone in the images themselves. For example, in
"Κλωστήριον νυχτερινῆς ἀνάπαυλας", Embirikos writes: "...ὅπως
μιὰ γυναίκα δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ κάμη τίποτε χωρὶς τὴν πυρκαγιὰ ποὺ
κλείνει μέσα στὴ στάχτη τῶν ποδιῶν της". This has been
translated (Friar 1973: 347) as: "just as a woman can do nothing
without the fire she encloses in the ashes of her feet", where a
translation something along the lines of: "without the blaze she
encloses in the embers of her legs" (my translation), might do
more to retain the obvious erotic tone of the original.

IV. *The Greek context*

Most of the factors I have discussed so far concern the translation
of surrealist poetry in general. I want now briefly to look at those
factors in the translation process that are specific to Greek
surrealist poetry. There are two main problems here: the one
linguistic, referring to the use by Greek poets of *katharevousa*,
the learned or purist language, the other concerning cultural
factors referring specifically to the Greek context.

The problem of katharevousa
Greek surrealism affirms the general principles of international
surrealism, but manifests its originality within the framework
of Greek culture, historically and also linguistically, making
full use of the Greek language in all its aspects: the learned, the

demotic, the colloquial, the ecclesiastic, the ancient. One of the first reactions to the tenets of surrealism on the part of Greek poets such as Embirikos and Engonopoulos is connected with the use of *katharevousa*.

In poetry characterised by automatic writing or, at least, by irrational surprise, it would be unreasonable to exclude *katharevousa* as being a part of the Greek consciousness and perhaps we could also say of the subconscious. Just as Greek surrealism gave the same weight to the logical and absurd, the significant and insignificant, it could not ignore either demotic or *katharevousa*. Such an admixture of the popular and purist languages cannot be reproduced in English which contains no corresponding phases in its historical evolution. The only solution for the translator, as Friar (1973: 660) remarks, "is to impose on a basic English, colorations taken from the colloquial, literary and formal usages. A note of the purist may occasionally be indicated by the use of rather stilted words or expressions derived from the Latin or Greek and which, against a general Teutonic structure and diction, may sometimes take on a formal and even exotic note."

Katharevousa simply offers to the Greek poet another linguistic key with which to play and juxtapose various layers of expression rather as in a collage. Sometimes this results in an appearance of seriousness, sometimes rarity, sometimes humour. Embirikos's use of *katharevousa*, for example, rather than giving a learned tone to a poem often has exactly the opposite effect. The translator must be aware of this in each case and attempt to reproduce the pragmatic effect. One solution for the use of *katharevousa* is the use of latinate words to give a higher register to the English but this cannot be done in cases of humour, where a coarser Anglo-Saxon idiom might be more appropriate.

In other surrealist poets, however, the use of *katharevousa* does indeed add a learned or pompous tone to the poetry and can be dealt with using a higher English register. Engonopoulos, for example, uses a basically demotic idiom, punctuated with words and phrases taken from the purist, which adds a tone of formality and pedantic scholasticism which the translator has somehow to reproduce. A striking example is in the poem "Μὴν ὁμιλεῖτε εἰς τὸν ὁδηγόν" ("Do not talk to the driver") (1977: 13-14), where a pompous and pedantic tone is introduced in the line:

"Κι' αὐτὸ διότι Ἰταλός τις, ἀκούων εἰς τὸ ὄνομα Γουλιέλμος Τσίτζης, καὶ ἐπαγγελλόμενος τὸν ἐπιδιορθωτὴν πνευστῶν ὀργάνων...", which should be made equally pompous and pedantic in English: "For a certain Italian gentleman, answering to the name of Guillaume Tsitzes, and professing to be a repairer of wind instruments..." (my translation). Similarly, in Gatsos's *Amorgos*, part V marks a sudden switch to the formal tones of *katharevousa*. According to Tasos Lignadis, "this entire part is a surrealist reference to linguistic freedom, and the reference to the magnetic linguistic fields of Embirikos and Engonopoulos is obvious" (1983: 138). It should, of course, be equally obvious in translation. But is it? Sadly not! In the two translations I examined (Friar 1973: 627; Keeley and Sherrard 1981: 180), there is no indication that this part is written in a higher register than the rest of the poem. This does not imply criticism of the translators concerned. We simply have to accept that in English, this extra key is missing from the range of language.

Culture and translation strategies

According to Elytis, the appeal of surrealism to Greek poets was as a weapon to destroy the Western rationalist view of Greece and reveal the true face of Greece. "Surrealism," he says, "with its anti-rationalistic character helped us to make a sort of revolution by perceiving the Greek truth. At the same time, surrealism contained a kind of supernatural element and this enabled us to form a kind of alphabet out of purely Greek elements with which to express ourselves" (1975: 631). It is precisely these Greek elements that cause problems for the translator as any attempt on the part of the translator to make use of cultural equivalents in the translation would be to deprive Greek surrealist poets of their peculiar Greekness. If surrealism proved fruitful in Greece, this was because the Greek poets did not imitate the French, but adapted surrealism to the Greek reality. What we find then are not the complexes of the subconscious but the ecstasy. Greek surrealist poetry is characterised by a certain "ἑλληνομαγεία" or "Greek spell", to quote Nanos Valaoritis (1991: 116), consisting of things sensual, intoxicating, legendary, commonplace, of flowers, place-names, perfumes, insects, angels and sun – a particularly Greek reality

where, it might be said, irrationality (τρέλλα) is a way of life rather than a neurosis.

The translator should attempt to retain this "Greekness" in the poems without making concessions to the TL reader. The problems caused by cultural references and traditional Greek formalistic elements are nowhere more obvious than in Gatsos's *Amorgos*. According to Friar: "Although the images and meaning of this surrealist poem caused endless controversy, all agreed that the language and rhythms showed a mastery of the demotic tongue [...] , deeply rooted in the best traditions of folk song and legend" (1973: 79). Part III is written in quatrains and the traditional fifteen-syllable verse of the demotic song – yet is perhaps the most surrealistic section of the whole poem with characteristically shocking and anti-aesthetic images such as: "Καὶ νυχτερίδες τρῶν πουλιὰ καὶ κατουρᾶνε σπέρμα" ("And bats eat birds and piss out sperm" [Keeley and Sherrard 1981: 177]; "And all the bats eat birds and piss their sperm" [Friar 1973: 625]). The problem is how to render this verse into English. One solution that has been put forward is to render Greek fifteen-syllable verse using English blank verse as being a cultural equivalent (see Raizis 1981: 24). Whatever the solution, the translation should be in a traditional verse form. In Part III, there is also a cultural reference to what is immediately recognisable in Greek as a song of Death with its recurring opening lines of "Στοῦ πικραμένου τὴν αὐλή", variously rendered in the English translations as "In the courtyards of the sorrow-stricken" (Friar) and "In the griever's courtyard" (Keeley and Sherrard). Apart from the connotative loss in translation and hence the loss of pragmatic effect, I would also question the translation of "αὐλή" as "courtyard", which creates totally different associations in English. Even ostensibly simple words like sun, bread, olive tree etc. have completely different associations for the Greek and English reader (see Elytis 1975: 637) and this is a major problem in surrealist poetry where the associations evoked are all-important.

Cultural references are, of course, one of the basic problems in literary translation. From antiquity, the many and varying strategies for dealing with cultural references can be divided into two basic categories: domesticating and foreignizing. A translation may conform to values currently dominating the TL

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