1. Deconstruction and reconstruction in theory

Jacques Derrida acknowledged the impossibility of defining deconstruction, attesting that it is neither a method, nor a discipline, it is not even knowledge or science, but simply ‘plus d’une langue, more than a language’. This pseudo-definition signals, in a preliminary manner, his thought not only on language, but also on the nature of translation as theory and praxis together, denoting that it is linked to his ideas about deconstruction. Indeed, Derrida does not aim at a different method of analysis concerning the act of translating, but instead expands the conceptual structure that has always been the main concern of his theoretical thought and research, by shifting the centre of gravity from unitary to multiple, from a fixed meaning to an unstable and lacunary meaning, focalising on difference, interaction and integration, and no longer on identity and presence. He assigns a primary and central place to translation, which is no longer a copy of any text, no longer left in the background and relegated to a secondary role of serving the original.

All translation theories from the Roman times to the 20th century, from Cicero to the recently-founded science of translatology with all its current trends are based on antinomies, for example, letter/spirit, word/meaning, verbo/senso, faithful/free. The most recent are based on the vague concept of equivalence between the original and its translation, pointing out the impossibility of an ideal version which would faithfully transpose the true meaning of the message from one language to another. However, would this ‘true’ meaning not imply a link to a set meaning of the words living in an aseptic and fixed lexicographic environment? Hence, the acceptance that any transposition inevitably alters the true significance of words, and that all acts of translating are destined for failure. But what does failure in translating mean? If aiming for an exact transposition either in form or content of any signified as an absolute equivalent to perfect fidelity and reproduction of content, then failure is inevitable. Derrida affirms concerns about issue: ‘we will never and, in reality, we have never dealt with the transport of any pure signified into another language, or even into the same one.’

Even André Breton attacked the verbal theology and the metaphysics of language, wishing to free words from their bondage; those words which “were asking to no longer be treated as the

1 ‘…deconstruction is not simply a philosophy, nor is it a group of theses, not even the question of Being, in the heideggerian sense. In a certain manner, it is nothing. It cannot be a discipline or a method. Often, it is presented as a method, or it is transformed into a method, with a set of rules, procedures that can be taught, etc. It is not a technique, with norms and procedures. […] in its very principle, deconstruction is not a method. […] deconstruction is not a methodology, that is, not an application of rules.’ (the translation is mine, the original passage is as follows: ‘…la déconstruction n’est pas simplement une philosophie, ni un ensemble de thèses, ni même la question de l’Etre, au sens heideggérien. D’une certaine manière, elle n’est rien. Elle ne peut pas être une discipline ou une méthode. Souvent, on la présente comme une méthode, ou on la transforme en une méthode, avec un ensemble de règles, de procédures qu’on peut enseigner, etc. Ce n’est pas une technique, avec des normes ou des procédures. […] Mais, en son principe même, la déconstruction n’est pas une méthode. […] Mais la déconstruction n’est pas une méthodologie, c’est-à-dire l’application de règles.’ Cf. Derrida 2004.

3 See on this subject Derrida 2001, 174-200.
4 Derrida 1972, 31f.
little auxiliaries they had always been taken for\(^5\), since, according to Breton, the modes of expression are established and founded on the rules of logic, which bind us to designate objects using their precise name accepted by common sense and asserted in the dictionary.

The impossibility of the production of a single transparent and adequate translation is already discernible, in an emblematic way, in the very use of the word ‘translation’. First of all, it appears more complex at the descriptive level in reference to the phenomenon identified by the theoreticians. Second, at the verbal level, it is a term whose restricted sense is still relevant today.

In terms of definition a taxonomic effort has already been made by Roman Jakobson, who has sought to divide and describe, in a summing up and imperious manner, the act of translating, by designating the three known categories\(^6\): the interlinguistic or translation as such, that is the transposition of words from one language to another; the interlingual translation or reformulation which is concerned with the interpretation of linguistic signs by means of other signs of the same language; and, the intersemiotic translation or transmutation, that is the interpretation of linguistic signs by means of non-linguistic signs. However language is not a homogenous, closed, fixed (static) and immutable system, and the passage of words from one language to another is neither linear nor devoid of obstacles. What happens, for instance, with certain poetic Greek texts of the 20\(^{th}\) century which present synchronically the entire Greek language in its diachronicity: from ancient Greek, through Byzantine, to Modern Greek, and whose reformulation is necessary before approaching translation as such? How to translate a text that incorporates reactivated and semantically redefined linguistic signs which are nothing but echoes of the past, a sort of palimpsest of the Greek language? Should, in this case, translating, paraphrasing, and re-wording not coexist? Is this not an instance of the existence of many languages in a single linguistic system?

To further highlight the absence of frontiers between languages and linguistic systems and, as a result, point out the elliptical and restrictive aspects of the categorisation proposed by Jakobson, we would like to put forth the special case of Assia Djebar’s language, which we addressed when translating her novel **Ombre sultane**\(^7\) from French into Greek. Assia Djebar uses a language which admirably unites oral and erudite elements with poetic expressions and colloquial turns of phrase. We also find in her language the intervention of Arabic words and popular expressions filtered through her seemingly uniform and fluid French. A language represents relics, echoes of other languages and speech patterns, but it also constitutes a centre of multiple energies connoting a correspondent challenge for the translator. Thus within the same linguistic system we uncover many tongues and languages.

And what could be said of texts including quotations in different languages (such as the case of Italo Calvino in *American lessons*), or of those that blur the identity of language by inserting words of other languages, signs which interact with those that surround them,

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5 André Breton, ‘Les mots sans rides’, in *Les pas perdus*, Paris, Gallimard, 1969, p. 131. The converging point in Berton and Derrida thought is to be found in Derrida’s claim that «translation does not seek to say this or that, to transfer such or such content, to communicate a certain load of meaning, but to point out the affinity between languages, to exhibit its own possibility» (the translation mine; the original passage is as follows: «la traduction ne chercherait pas à dire ceci ou cela, à transporter tel ou tel contenu, à communiquer telle charge de sens mais à remarquer l’affinité entre les langues, à exéhir sa propre possibilité», Derrida 1987, 220).

6 Jakobson 1963, 79f.

abolishing *ipso facto* the meaning of dictionaries in their altering presence? Should one translate them or leave them as they stand? And if they retain their original characters, is the altering effect not increased? The issue intensifies, for instance, in the Greek case through having a different alphabet. What should then be the choice of the translator? Through our examples we attest that the three categories coined by Jakobson do not correspond to the abounding linguistic reality of texts and to the various practices of translating; consequently, the entire conceptualisation of translation is being questioned and seems problematic.

According to Derrida, this is indeed one of the limits of theories on translation, to the extent that they do not take into account the possibility for ‘languages to be involved *in more than in twos* in a text’. Hence the following questions: ‘How to render the plurality effect? And if we translate in many languages at the same time, should we call that translating?’

However, if we briefly survey the twists and turns of the terms used to define the act of translating from Roman antiquity to the 14th century, when the word ‘translation’ first appears in the Roman languages, we see that through a series of lexical transformations, there is a loss in meaning, a restriction in its semantic field, and an impoverishment of the term itself. The Greek word *hermeneia* conveyed expression, explanation, performance of a theatrical play, an act of extroversion by means of the voice and, consequently, active participation. The Latin words *translation* and *interpretation* replaced this Greek term.

These terms have remained in effect since the Renaissance. But, Eugene Valence asserts that the word *interpretatio* has lost the notion of ‘productive activity’, which existed in the Greek term, and still exists in the modern Greek, also signifying recitals and interpretations of musical works. On the contrary, *translatio* covers a vast semantic horizon; it derives from the past participle of the verb *transferre*, which means ‘to move from one place to another, to transfer, to drive, to transport’ but also ‘to postpone, to differ, to apply, to translate, to transform, to change’. And indeed, ‘transferre’ also means ‘to differ’, being very close to the Greek ‘dia-ferein’, having in common ‘ferein’ – ‘ferre’ in Latin (to carry) but also the same prefix ‘trans-dia’. The Latin verb ‘traducere’ was introduced at the beginning of 15th century by Leonardo Bruni, and replaced many terms used until then (‘converto’, ‘imitar’, ‘redere’, ‘translator’), signifying ‘to transport’ or ‘to guide’. Nevertheless, we observe that it has lost the notion of interaction and productive activity that the Greek term ‘ermeneia’ possesses, and similarly the notion of transformation/change of the Latin terms *transferre/translato*. Thus it has only kept the sense of ‘to transport’ and maybe its modern derivatives ‘translation/traduzione’ of the Roman languages, highlighting in effect, the impoverishment of the unilateral and unidirectional dimension of the passage/transfer from one language to another. We observe that the same limiting conception of translation emerges in terms relative to texts and languages: we speak of ‘source-language’ and ‘target-language’ as if they have to do with the mobility of merchandise. We talk about source-language text and target-language text as if there is a kind of transcendental insight emerging from a primordial elsewhere to be attained or pursued.

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8 The following passage is given as an example: «Perciò continuo a preferire la versione riportata da Barbey d’Aurevilly, nonostante la sua rozzezza un po’ patched up»; in Calvino 1988, 36.
10 *Ibid*.
11 Liddell, Scott 1996, 690.
However, we have seen that the term ‘translation’ does not encompass all the dimensions or multiplicity of the phenomenon. The word ‘meta-frasi’ in ancient and medieval Greek signified formulation of a text in a different phrasal manner or in a different style, for example, a paraphrase; and it is currently attached to Jakobson’s intralinguistic system. But the distinction between intralinguistic and interlinguistic practices is not apparent in a language like Greek which stretches in time and space, surviving within modern Greek without having suffered the same breaks as those of the Latin and Roman languages. The distinction of the limits between these categories of translation practices, as well as between translation as such and paraphrase, is never clear. The term ‘metafrasi’ is currently used in modern Greek for any translation covering all acts of translating. This word, closely linked to the synthetic conception of the ancient Greek language, extends over the limits of the terms examined and their translating dimension; it could be nearer to the complex and polyphonic phenomenon of the activity of translating.

With a single linguistic element, the prefix-conjunction ‘meta’ two conceptual elements emerge, two meanings closely linked to their different constructions: the meaning of between, of amidst and of with, together with the genitive which promotes the meaning of participation (sin + praxis), in common, along with; as well as ‘lato sensu’ with the accusative promoting the meaning of ‘between two’ or ‘between many’. This has to do with the Greek ‘ana-meson’, ‘anamesa’. It is this economy of in-betweeness Derrida speaks about as the relation between the text to be translated and the translated text. Furthermore, the construction with the accusative plural links the meaning of ‘among’ as well as that of ‘succession’, of ‘continuity’, of various elements the designation and the range of which do not differ; among them and with them. This designates therefore an in-between that separates while uniting, and at the same time is a relation and a distance, marking an interaction and a cooperation. In order to reconstruct and rehabilitate the lost meanings of the term, we would like to propose the Greek term ‘meta-frasi’ which, according to its etymology, is a sin-praxis, a communion, a participation of various phrases/languages/texts, a mental and practical act involving plurality and parity.

This concept aims at treating the text to be translated and its translations in terms of equality, without granting primacy to the original, synonymous with the authentic and the first, whose successive appearances in other languages are inevitably attached to the idea of reproduction, copy or fake. Walter Benjamin asserts that translation is a form Übersetzung ist eine Form” In this sense maybe the word ‘prototype’, which in Greek means ‘first form’, the principle of the form (see archetype), renders the idea of plurality of forms which follows in successive translations without granting primacy or supremacy to the original, or assigning a secondary place to the translated texts.

By definition, the traditional translation theories, through the terminology adopted, as well as in their conception, predicate on the singularity of the original and its emanating meaning, on the power exercised and preserved by the proto-text on and within the meta-text, and, consequently, on the clear and imperative distinction between translated text and text in

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14 Liddell, Scott, op. cit., 1118.
15 Ibid., 1108f.
16 W. Benjamin 1972, 9.
translation. Supporters of the target language\textsuperscript{17} (i.e. Ladmiral) and of the source language\textsuperscript{18} (i.e. Berman) alike have interposed an unfathomable distance and have considered the text in translation as derived which always follows from a model. As such it is this inimitable and irreproachable \textit{unicum}, which we could render and recreate inaccurately, depending on the freedom or the respect we allow ourselves within either the source or the target language. Thus, any process of translating would only reproduce a mirror reflection, an imperfect double, defective in comparison to the original. But, what about the text without its translation? Would it qualify as an original? What would then be its ontological dimension? And, what if translation does not depend on the original but the original upon its translation? What if intrinsically texts need and demand translating to continue to live, and the translations then guarantee their survival and subsistence?

These are fundamental questions about the classical conception of translation that resumed reflecting the uproar that Derrida caused in literary circles. They have affected the translation scene, our way of thinking, and even the act of translating itself. The translator speaks at least two languages and who, according to Derrida, is ‘never enclosed in the column of one single tongue’.\textsuperscript{19} That explains why in translating the translator makes unities and pairs interact with each other; he creates this precious space of cohabitation, and aesthetic and linguistic regeneration, of continuous rebirth of the translated text via the text of its translation. His translation act is an act of faith and love towards the text, although he knows that each word is a locus of multiple translations and realises the absence of all static and immutable sense. He treats the text to be translated as a dearly departed who asks to emerge out of forgetfulness, and the translator with whom he enters into discussion, reinforces his presence-absence by integrating him into his own life. The text of the translation comes into the world and the translated text is re-born under a different form of life, transformed and saved from the immobility in which it was relegated by tradition and the temporal dimension.

From the moment that the signified of the same signifier varies depending on the context of the same language as well as in other languages, and, according to Derrida, the difference between signifier and signified is never pure, absolute and clear, thus indicating that language is always in movement and in exile. He describes language as chains of continual signification interacting and feeding each other reciprocally. The philosopher claims that the two possibilities of immobilising the meaning of a word or of exceeding its polysemy, that is to say, on the one hand, the possible existence of an immutable significance despite its semantic transformations, and on the other, the strict designation of context, remain problematic in a language whether it is an inert or a living one. Thus, completeness does not exist in languages and each word, polysemic by definition, becomes a locus of multiple possibilities/\textit{technes} of translation; that is why translation in itself concerns less what is to be translated and the meaning of the text itself, and more who each translator is: each translator reads in it, sees in it, hears in/between/through the words, and that which he does not manage to conceive, distinguish, catch. And

we can grant that every letter and every term admits of a Babel of different, and often incommensurable, translations, and that these different translations are therefore joined in the

\textsuperscript{17} The theories favouring the target-language do not accept irregularities in the translated language and are linked to a kind of ethnocentrism, since they tend to refuse anything foreign in the text of the translation which has to read as if it was originally written in the target-language. On this subject see Ladmiral 1986, 33-42.
\textsuperscript{18} The theories favouring the source-language tend to keep, in the translation, the structure of the original language, since it is the foreign element that has to be felt in the translation and the translated work has to bear the traces of its origins and its belonging to another culture. See Berman 1984.
\textsuperscript{19} Derrida 1986 quoted by Tavor Bannet 1993, 591.
Indeed, we could bring the *confusio linguarum* closer to the *divisio linguarum*, which is felt by the translator as a condition *sine qua non* of his proper existence, even though he lives it in a painful manner through the practice of his profession. If, according to Jakobson, ‘the meaning of a word is nothing but its translation by another sign which can be substituted for it,’ and if all readings are translations, this implies that, even more so, the act of translating is a double translation. Through its reading-comprehension the translator mentally decodes, deconstructs, dismantles and translates by paraphrasing and reconstructing the meaning of the text. This mental translation, a kind of abstract writing, takes place a thousand times in the translator’s mind and precedes the actual writing and the translation itself which is accompanied by doubts, lacunae, indecision.

2. Deconstruction and reconstruction in praxis: Giacomo Leopardi’s *Infinite*

So to approach the phenomenon of dissemination of the meaning of the original in its translations and Derrida’s ‘undecided words’, meaning two contradictory things at the same time and presenting itself as the necessary condition for the re-semantisation of the metaphrastic space, we are now going to examine Leopardi’s *Infinite*. Although there are many translations in French, we are going to examine Sainte-Beuve’s historic translation of 1844, and the more recent one given by René Char and Franca Roux in 1966. Oddly enough, *I Canti* have not yet been translated into modern Greek in one volume and have not been edited in their entirety; thus we do not have at our disposal many examples of Greek translations. We will therefore take into account Marino Siguro’s translation of 1955, a native of Zakinthos of Italian descent on his mother’s side, and the translation given by the Greek professor Nasos Vaghenas in 1990. The poem is a kind of emblematic locus of fundamental issues such as: finitude and its hard rules relating to the human condition, the dichotomy between eternal and ephemeral, life and death, or even the spirit’s exile from matter. Consequently, it presents a number of difficulties about apprehending its meaning and its linguistic units, and reconstructing it, transformed into another language.

We are going to focus on four fundamental words, which form the basis of the poem’s approach to the issues it addresses: ‘ermo’, ‘mirando’, ‘mi fingo’, and ‘mi sovven’. Firstly, ‘ermo colle’ does not only refer to a site but, as specialists have already explained, it refers to a *situation*, a necessary element for the search from the visible to the invisible, from the tangible to the intangible, an implacable search of the poetic ‘I’ which will end in ruin. ‘Ermo’ means at the same time a deserted, uninhabited and abandoned place, as well as lonely and solitary, coming from the Greek ‘erimos’. And, by their separation these two meanings demonstrate two solutions: the one given by Sainte-Beuve, ‘déserte’, and the other by Char, ‘seule’.

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20 Tavor Bannet, *op. cit.*, 592.
21 Jakobson, *op.cit.*, 79.
22 Leopardi 1981, 119f.
26 Νέοτερη Ευρωπαϊκή Λογοτεχνία (*Modern European Literature*) 1998, 94.
27 See on this subject Amoretti 1978, 81; et Valentini 1989, 440.
28 Liddell, Scott, *op.cit.*, 687.
However, with this double locative and existential meaning, could ‘ermo’ not be linked to the solitude of the hill as well as to the solitary and exiled soul of the poetic ‘I’? Could this same soul, impoverished and deserted in its isolation, not be reflected in the poem, in a desire to identify itself to this height? Is there not an agreement, a psychological harmonisation between these two states that become lexicalised with the adjective ‘caro’ (dear), present in the first verse? Maybe we should unite the two meanings. The word ‘ermo’ in Greek gives us this possibility since it means ‘alone’, ‘solitary’, ‘deserted’, but also ‘unhappy’, ‘poor’ terms which characterise any suffered solitude. On the contrary, ‘erimos’ means only ‘desert’, ‘empty’ and has no affective content.

Furthermore, the poetic ‘I’ sits passively in a state of immobility; its vision cannot surmount this hedge that hides much of its horizon, and the verb ‘mirare’ in the translations of Siguro and Char is rendered by the verb ‘to look’, which is a contradiction, a paradox from the point of view of common sense. Sainte-Beuve bypasses the problem by paraphrasing ‘the thought which has surmounted the hedge’. Thus, he makes the meaning explicit by means of a sort-of version that does not respect the economy of language, the rule of ‘oikos’, quantitative and qualitative of all ‘relevant’ translation, according to Derrida29.

If we explore the etymology of the word ‘mirare’, we find it comes from the Latin ‘miror’ and that it does not mean simply ‘to look’ but induces a state of marvel30, an internal situation in the sense of looking with admiration, being stupefied, wondering in amazement or even failing to understand. It is then a gerund that poses serious problems to the translator and especially if we take into consideration the verb ‘mi fingo’. Sainte-Beuve transforms it in the following phrase: ‘me sont comme un abîme’ (they are to me like an abyss), and transporting the thought on the side of the hedge, he introduces arbitrarily the word ‘abyss’. On the contrary, Char uses the word ‘to create’ (créer) and keeps the thought in its place in order to underline the impossibility without it to feel, to have the experience of the endless expanses and the superhuman silences.

Indeed, this can only happen in thought with the help of the imagination. Even more so, since the verb in question existed in Latin31 and meant ‘to imagine’, ‘to represent’. We also find it in Crusca’s Dictionary of the 19th century meaning to create through the imagination. Siguro thus opts for the translation of representing (parastatinei), whilst Vaghenas tries to join the two meanings of ‘mirare’ and ‘fingere’ with the verb ‘oramatizomai’ which, however, means ‘to see visions’ and ‘to aim’. We could probably fill the lacunae and its semantic deviations by introducing in place of ‘mirare’ the verb ‘θωρώ/θεωρώ’ in modern Greek, meaning ‘sense’32, ‘to consider’, and containing the verb ‘οράω-ω’ in the sense of looking inwardly33. And, in place of ‘mi fingo’ we could use the verb ‘πλάθω’. Indeed, the verb

29 Concerning the principle of economy he argues that it ‘signifies two things, property and quantity: on the one hand, what concerns the law of property (oikonomia, the law–nomos–of the oikos, of what is proper, appropriate to itself, at home–and translation is always an attempt at appropriation that aims to transport home, in its language, in the most appropriate way possible, in the most relevant way possible, the most proper meaning of the original text […] and, on the other hand, a law of quantity–when one speaks of economy, one always speaks of calculable quantity.’ (Derrida 2001, 178f).
31 D’Arbella, op.cit, 422.
32 The verb ‘θεωρέω/θεωρώ’ in ancient Greek means looking towards something, observe, but also ponder, study. See Stamatakos 1972, 450.
33 As a transitive verb it means ‘to observe, to comprehend something,’ but has also a metaphorical use, connected with the vision of the mind, and means ‘to discern, to observe, to comprehend.’ See ibid., 700.
‘πλάθω, πλάσσω’ and in ancient Greek ‘πλάττω’ means, according to Liddell & Scott, ‘to mould’, ‘to fabricate’, ‘to form an image in the mind’, and in modern Greek it retains all these correspondences, adding to the meaning ‘to imagine’, ‘to meditate’, ‘to reflect upon’.

However, confronted with the infinite, endless space, with the inaccessible and the unknown opening like an abyss, the heart fears, and looks to overcome its fear and a kind of cosmic terror. The poetic ‘I’ brings together the silence of the sky, the atemporal dimension, the absolute peace, to the voice of the wind, to what we can hear, to what is close, to what is sensed.

But, at the same time the rustling wind awakens the feeling of uneasiness, of this being which exists in the ephemeral world, imperfect, finite; it frightens him, and our mind then goes to the ‘dolce e chiara è la notte e senza vento’. The rustling wind seems hostile and the comparison with endless silence that had scared him previously reinforces its conflicting presence. The contemplation of these endless spaces could be an attempt to escape from the visible and natural world, a kind of reverie which gives the possibility of escape and to find refuge in peacefulness, in the unperturbed cosmic nothingness. We thus do not know if what follows, ‘mi sovviene l’eterno’, associated with the temporal dimension of the past and the present, to the dead seasons and to the one present, creates relief or increases the sentiment of anguish. And, if we think about the correspondence between past and silence, and between the voice of the wind and the season rustling and full of life, we cannot give an exact meaning to the verb in question and decide about its translation. This is even more relevant if we think about the interpretations of specialists like Thilger, who claims that: ‘the poet leaves the level of intellectual comparison and glides towards a new reverie with his eyes open, towards a dream that is a memory’; or, like Fubini who notes: ‘sovvenire is used for the past, but in the poem’s atmosphere of dream, even the present emerges like a memory’.

Others still are in favour of the meaning ‘in mentem venire’ and maintain that ‘mi sovviene’ does not mean ‘I remember’ but rather ‘it comes to my mind’ based on the fact that the expression is related to the present time and as such we cannot remember it. Sainte-Beuve translates the verse in question with ‘le grand âge m’apparaît’ (the great age appears to me), quite close to the epiphany of the unknown, and Char ‘me souviens de l’éternel’ (I remember the eternal). Vaghenas using the verb ‘αισθάνομαι’ (feeling) approaches the unknown through one’s senses as if it were something tangible, neighbouring, familiar, involving no mental effort. For his part, Siguro uses the verb ‘to ponder’, although in a popular form, intellectualising any effort to give form, to embrace the infinite through the creative force of the imagination. Increasing even further the ambiguity and the obscurity of this verse, one should add the etymology of the verb: it comes from the Latin ‘sub-venio’ which, according to Leopardi, is equivalent to ‘sopravvenire/sovvenire’, (‘vengo da sotto in su’), maybe then ‘to resurface’, ‘to emerge in the mind’ or ‘in the memory’. Furthermore, ‘sovvenire’ comes from ‘subvenire’ which means ‘to help’, ‘to rescue’, ‘to provide for’, but also from ‘succurrere’ that is ‘come to mind’.

34 LSJ, op. cit., 1412.
35 Tilgher 1979, 186 quoted by Valentini 1989, 446.
37 Blasucci 1985, 104f.
38 Leopardi, Zibaldone (3003), 2007, 594.
We therefore find ourselves at an impasse that Derrida calls ‘un-decidable’. Comparable to the one in question, the thought that a single verb is so mysterious through presenting two correspondences which multiply the possibilities of translation by disseminating its meaning, prompts the translator to stop translating and to stay immobilised in front of this metaphrastic aporia. Some English translators have used the verbs ‘to recall’\(^{39}\), ‘to ponder’\(^{40}\), ‘to occur’\(^{41}\), which are close to the meaning of ‘coming to mind’ and ‘arriving’, but have not considered the meaning of ‘memory’.

However, man is enclosed in the finite, the definite and the limitations of the earth, of the hedge, of the ultimate horizon, and seeks other realities which could elevate him above tangible reality to redeem himself from his incompleteness. The emergence of other realities occurs through the contemplation of the infinite, made possible by the means of the power of poetic speech. After the initial terror of confronting immense spaces and superhuman silences, man confronts this same endless silence in the voice of the wind and seems to be appeased by a move of reconciliation with the unknown. Then, in some sort of amplification, this voice becomes the sound of reason, which is present and embraces the dead seasons, but is also eternal. It is a call to the infinite, an attempt to grasp it, but also to get help through its invocation as if it were an ancient god. And, it seems to us that ‘mi sovviem’ should mean ‘come to mind’ in accordance with upwards and backwards in the hope of managing to touch, even just ever so slightly, the idea of the infinite. This complex idea might possibly be expressed with the Greek verb ‘ανατρέχω’ which means ‘to run back’, ‘to revert’\(^{42}\), and combines the backwards and upwards movement by means of the preposition ‘ανα’, meaning ‘upwards’.

Human desire to rise above the reality as if it were a hill, a tower uniting the low with the high, results in wreckage but it is a sweet wreckage. It is maybe the desire of the text itself to be translated by calling to its translator (who has the capability) to surpass the linguistic frontiers and seek the profound union of languages, even though he knows that there will always be shadowy, grey zones, unsolvable questions.

Translation being neither a science nor a secondary activity, is a creative act, a \textit{techne}; according to Wittgenstein ‘the translation of a lyrical poem resembles a mathematical problem: we can solve it but there does not exist a single systematic method to get to its solution.’\(^{43}\) Translator has to deconstruct in significant pieces the work of the foreign writer and after that to build with them a new work in order to reconstruct it in the new language. But is this the work of an artist in general? Does he deconstuct life and reconstucts it in a new form creating a new meaning, isn’t he?

\(^{39}\) Frederick Townsend (1887), J. M. Morrison (1900) and Alastair Fowler (1987).
\(^{40}\) Kate Flores (1966).
\(^{41}\) Francis Henry Cliffe (1903).
\(^{42}\) Liddell, Scott, \textit{op. cit.}, 124.
\(^{43}\) Wittgenstein 1967, 121, cited in Steiner 2004, 464 (the translation is mine).
Poems in reference

L’infini
J’aimai toujours ce point de colline déserte,
Avec sa haie au bord, qui clôt la vue ouverte
Et m’empêche d’atteindre à l’extrème horizon.
Je m’assieds : ma pensée a franchi le buisson ;
L’espace d’au-delà m’en devient plus immense,
Et le calme profond et l’infini silence
Me sont comme un abîme ; et mon cœur bien souvent
En frissonne tout bas. Puis, comme aussi le vent
Fait bruit dans le feuillage, à mon gré, je ramène
Ce lointain de silence à cette voix prochaine :
Le grand âge éternel m’apparaît, avec lui
Tant de mortes saisons, et celle d’aujourd’hui,
Vague écho. Ma pensée ainsi plonge à la nage,
Et sur ces mers sans fin j’aime jusqu’au naufrage.

*Translated by C.A. Sainte-Beuve, 1844* 44

L’infini
Toujours chère me fut cette colline si seule
et cette haie qui, par tant de longuers,
dérobe au regard le dernier horizon.
Mais quand je m’assieds pour la regarder,
Par ma pensée se créent au-delà d’elle
D’interminables espaces, des silences surhumaines,
Une paix très profonde ; où peu s’en faut
Que mon cœur ne s’effraie. Et lorsque
J’entends le vent bruire dans les plantes,
Je vais comparant l’infini de ce silence
A cette voix, et je me souviens de l’éternel,
Des saisons mortes, et de celle présente
Et vivante, et de son bruissement. Ainsi
Dans cette immensité s’anéantit ma pensée :
Et naufrager m’est doux en cette mer.

*Translated by René Char et Franca Roux, 1966* 45

44 Leopardi 1988, 21.
45 Ibid., 36.
Το άπειρο
Αγαπημένος μου ήταν πάντα αυτός ο λόφος
ο έρημος, κι αυτά τα δέντρα που μου κρύβουν
tον μακρινόν ορίζοντα. Μα εδώ που στέκω
οραματίζομαι τις αχανείς εκτάσεις
t’ ουρανού και την υπερκόσμια γαλήνη
και ανατριχιάζω. Και καθώς ακούω
μέσα απ’ το φύλλωμα το θρόισμα του αέρα
συγκρίνω την αμόλυντη σιωπή του απείρου
μ’ αυτόν τον ήχο. Κι αισθάνομαι το αιώνιο,
και τις σβησμένες εποχές, και τη δική μας
που ζει και πάλλεται. Κι ο στοχασμός μου
πνίγεται στη βαθιά απεραντοσύνη.
Σ’ αυτή τη θάλασσα γλυκό είναι το ναυάγιο.

*Translated by Nasos Vaghenás, 1990*47

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46 Leopardi 1988, 18.
47 Νεότερη Ευρωπαϊκή Λογοτεχνία (Modern European Literature) 1998, 94.
Το άπειρο
Αγαπημένος μου ήταν πάντα ο έρμος αυτός λόφος,
κι αυτή η πρασιά που από παντού
το βλέμμα μου αποκλείει από τον έσχατο ορίζοντα.
Κάθομαι όμως και θωρώ το απέραντο το διάστημα
Που απλώνεται μακριά της, κι ο νους μου πλάθει
Την υπερκόσμια σιγή, τη βαθύτατη ηρεμία που
Σχεδόν φόβος την καρδιά μου την αγγίζει. Κι όταν τον άνεμο
Ακούω να θροίζει μέσα σε τούτα τα φυτά,
την άπειρη σιγή με τούτη τη φωνή αναμετράω:
και ανατρέχω στην αιωνιότητα,
και στις περασμένες εποχές και στην παρούσα,
ζωντανή μαζί με την ηχώ της. Ο νους μου
πνίγεται σ' αυτήν την απεραντοσύνη.
Σε τούτη εδώ τη θάλασσα γλυκό είναι το ναυάγιο.

Translated by Maria Spiridopoulou

Vocabulary

a) mirando < mirare < from the Latin miror = a state of marvel, an internal situation in the sense of looking with admiration, being stupefied, wonder in amazement or even failing to understand.

Siguro and Char: looking
Sainte-Beuve: the thought which has surmounted the hedge

Mirare = θωρώ, θεωρώ (+ οράω-ω): consider, looking from a distance and with admiration, looking inwardly.

b) mi fingo < from the Latin fingere = imagine, represent
Fingere in the 19th century: create by means of the imagination (simulate)

Siguro: represent (παρασταίνει)
Vaghenas: mirare+mi fingo = οραματίζομαι (seeing visions, aim)
Sainte-Beuve: (the thought which has surmounted the hedge)
are to me like an abyss
Char: create

Mi fingo = πλάθω, πλάσσω (in ancient Greek πλάττω) : mould, fabricate, from an image in the mind
In modern Greek all those meanings and the meaning of imagine, meditate, reflect upon.

  1. I remember?
  2. come to mind (in mentem venire)?

48 Our translation proposal for the purpose of this paper.
< from Latin sub-venio = sopravvenire/sovvenire (vengo da sotto in su, this maybe resurface, emerge in the mind or in memory.

Sovvenire < subvenire = 1. help, rescue, provide for  
2. succurrere = come to mind

Sainte-Beuve: the great age appears to me
Char: I remember the eternal
Vaghenas: αισθάνομαι (feel)
Siguro: συλλογιούμαι (ponder)

Mi sovvien: come to mind, tend upwards and backwards in the hope of managing to touch, even if only just ever so slightly, the idea of infinite (see the Greek verb ανατρέχo)

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