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POETRY AS RECOMPOSITION:
ODYSSEAS ELYTIS TRANSLATING SAPPHO

Odysseas Elytis's introduction to his essay on Theofilos, the Greek painter of naive art, focuses on a highly sensual perception of the 'legendary' Lesbian landscape, which is viewed as woman and is described (in a lyrical manner) as such.[1] The connection or intersection of landscape and woman is typical in surrealist poetics, in which nature is transformed into woman, a universal principle of life and death, and of movement and stasis.[2] Surrealist poetry and art explore the metamorphoses of the instant,[3] while metaphor constitutes the principal device employed in surrealist aesthetics for the recomposition or the reconstitution of reality.[4] Yet, the legendary land of Aeolis is not only the homeland of Theofilos and the fatherland of Elytis, but also the dream-like and indefinite feminine χώρα (as described in Plato's Timeus 52), which has been associated, both historically and culturally, with the love poetry of Sappho. Actually, the textual description of the Lesbian landscape mentioned above is materialized visually in Elytis's collage *Ο κόλπος της Γέρας*, which appears in the very beginning of his book entitled *Σαπφώ*.

Sappho was published in March 1984, after a long period of gestation that dates back to 1968.[5] This and Elytis's book that brings together his translations of Krinagoras's epigrams[6] constitute his most complete studies on ancient Greek poetry.[7] A new edition of Sappho came out in March 1996, and this includes the eleven illustrations that appeared only in the first seventy-seven numbered copies of the original edition. Yet, both editions contain the same Introduction, Epilogue and 'Bibliographical note'. The traditional classification of Sappho's work into nine books is abandoned. Following its content and form, the corpus is classified into seven unities, which bear titles that have

been selected by drawing on the original texts. The terms 'recomposition' (*ανασύνθεση*) and 'free translation' (*απόδοση*), which appear next to the name of the translator on the title page, point to his perspective, method and aims.

In his influential essay 'The Task of the Translator' (1923), Walter Benjamin stresses the belated nature of translation, its relation to the afterlife of the original.[8] In his view, both the original text and the mother tongue of the translator are always subject to the passing of time; even the relation between the content and the language of the original, and the content and the language of the translation undergoes continual change. Subsequently, the task of the translator is not to reproduce (a 'resembl[ance of]') meaning, but to give expression to the original text's 'mode of signification, thus making both the original and the translation recognizable as fragments of a greater language' and to 'giv[e] voice to the intentio of the original not as reproduction but as harmony'; translation ought to aim at 'linguistic complementation', at releasing the linguistic energy that the original text includes.[9] It would be useful to bear in mind these observations, not only in order to study the main formative factors and the conditions regulating translation in different times and cultural environments, but also to be able to perceive the great distance that separates the original Sapphic text from its translation by Elytis, as well as from other translations of Sappho's poetry into modern Greek or into other languages.[10] Also, the above theoretical approach encourages the development of a common consideration of the translation of ancient Greek poetry and that of modern non-Greek poetry. Elytis's theoretical attitude and his practical choices, which are more or less the same in both cases, present particular interest to the student of comparative literature. The poet explains the difference between free translation and literal translation (*πιστή μεταγλώττιση*) in the introduction and the afterword to his book Second Writing (*Δεύτερη γραφή*) – the 1976 collective edition of his translations of European poetry of the 19th and the 20th century –, as well as in an interview he gave around the same period, in which he comments on his views.

As he specifies, his aim was to preserve the particular traits of the personal style of each translated poet (such as 'embedments, condensations, gaps, verbose expression, problems with syntax'),[11] but primarily to produce translations that would 'make up [modern] Greek poems', that is, that would function effectively in the target-language, without giving the impression that they were actually translations.[12] His approach to Sappho's poetry was similar. In the respective epilogue, he explains that his main concern was to create new poetic units (by which he means poems, or even, in the particular case of Sappho, fragments); in fact, this is why he attempted the arbitrary connection of the fragments, yet without complementing the ruined parts or the semantic gaps with any possible words or phrases.[13]

In my view, the effectiveness of his free translation of Sappho's work is based precisely on the innovative and creative exploitation of the method of recomposition, that is, of the original connection of the fragments into the larger seven unities, as well as into the particular textual entities that figure as independent poetic units or are suggested to be such by the translator. Recomposition is influenced by French Surrealism[14] and constitutes a fundamental principle in Elytis's poetics. The term is employed in his essays to refer to surreality, the reconstitution of the elements of tangible reality into an ideal, visionary view of the world.[15] Recomposition also refers us to his visual collages, which he calls 'syneikones' ('συνεικόνες', i.e., communicating images), in an obvious effort to indicate that they are independent images that are brought together in order to co-exist in a new, previously non-existent image. In an essay that bears the same title, he explains that he used his 'syneikones' to achieve the 'alarm of the natural elements; their suspension in the air of the imagination; and their settlement in a different, unanticipated, non-utilitarian recomposition' ('Ναι, αυτό ήταν. Να σημάνει ο συναγερμός των φυσικών στοιχείων? ο μετεωρισμός τους στον αιθέρα της φαντασίας? και το κατακάθισμά τους με μια διαφορετική, απρόβλεπτη, μη ωφελιμιστική […] επανασύνθεση').[16] Therefore, recomposition is also related to the illustrations that accompany his translation of Sappho's poetry and appear to be the result of the application of the collage technique, since they have been created by use of coloured papers that were cut and then pasted on sketches done by the poet.

The structuralist Polysystems Theory, which was developed in the 1970s by Itamar Even-Zohar and his colleagues at the University of Tel-Aviv,[17] liberated translators from the authority of the original text, by favouring the target-system. The Manipulation School, which around the mid-1980s advanced translation studies to its poststructuralist stage, regards translation as the result of a central operation of textual manipulation and transformation.[18] As Theo Hermans points out, the metaphorical language used by translators in their introductions and in other relevant texts reveals the strategies they followed and their aims.[19]

In his introduction to Sappho, next to the collage that bears the title Mytilene and depicts a non-chronological view of the city, Elytis points out: 'Two and a half thousand years ago, back on [Lesbos], I still see Sappho as a distant cousin, with whom we used to play together in the same gardens, around the same pomegranate trees, over the same cisterns. A little older than me, dark-skinned, with flowers on her hair and a secret album full of verse, that she never let me touch. Of course, [I feel this way] because we both lived on the same island. Because we both have had the same sense of the natural world, […] because we worked – each according to his/her ability – with the same concepts, not to say with about the same words. […] So, you have to forgive me for speaking about

Sappho as if she were a contemporary of mine.' ('Δυόμισι χιλιάδες χρόνια πίσω, στη Μυτιλήνη, βλέπω ακόμη τη Σαπφώ σαν μια μακρινή εξαδέλφη που παίζαμε μαζί στους ίδιους κήπους, γύρω απ' τις ίδιες ροδιές, πάνω απ' τις ίδιες στέρνες. Λιγάκι μεγαλύτερη στα χρόνια, μελαχρινή, με λουλούδια στα μαλλιά κι ένα κρυφό λεύκωμα γεμάτο στίχους, που δεν μ' άφησε ν' αγγίξω ποτέ. Βέβαια, είναι που ζήσαμε στο ίδιο νησί. Που είχαμε την ίδια αίσθηση του φυσικού κόσμου, […] που δουλέψαμε – στα μέτρα του ο καθένας – με τις ίδιες έννοιες, για να μην πω περίπου με τις ίδιες λέξεις. […] Ας μου συγχωρεθεί, λοιπόν, να μιλήσω για τη Σαπφώ σαν για μια σύγχρονή μου').[20]

Indeed, in Elytis' translation, the reader discovers a modern expression and is easily introduced to the fictional world of Sappho's poetry without feeling that he/she is a stranger to it. However, these are indications, not only of Elytis's familiarization with Sappho's work, but also of its manipulation, a manipulation that he justified by signaling his intimate feelings for the poetess, his 'distant cousin'.[21]

According to André Lefevere, in all its forms, re-writing constitutes a strategy of adaptation of the original work to the target-system; at the same time, this adaptation of the original reveals information about its reception.[22] Although Elytis made a free translation, he made no intervention on those poems that tradition has preserved in their greater parts. Yet, by recomposing the scattered fragments into new poetic units and by dividing Sappho's corpus into seven unities, he essentially proceeded to its re-writing: Thus, on the one hand, he offered the target-system (in this case, Modern Greek language and literature) the possibility to familiarize itself with Sappho's work and, on the other, he came up with a new œuvre, an œuvre that is actually adapted to the system of his own poetics. While scholars have attempted to fill in the gaps by inserting missing letters or words to the fragments (always taking care to respect the text as much as possible, based on the information provided by traditional research), Elytis opted for a much more daring and highly innovative approach, in the history of the reception of Sappho's work. His recomposition of it, as well as his translation (which is controlled by recomposition), constitute a bizarre operation on the body of Sappho's poetry: his is an approach that actually highlights the implied dissection and consequently accentuates the mystification of woman-author as an enigma, or her identification with the unconscious (the non-semiotic real and death), the 'forbidden Other'.[23] Elytis's approach to Sappho's work is an example par excellence for the unconscious process whose inherent elements of eroticism and violence are exposed by Jacqueline Rose's eloquent paraphrase of Lacan; according to her, woman 'comes to represent two things – what the man is not, that is, difference, and what he has to give up, that is, excess'.[24]

Taking into acccount Rose's political statement, one may realize that, in the particular case examined here, the relationship between desire and interpretation bears only the

mask of the 'alter-ego' illustrated by Aristophanes in the myth of the androgyne (Sympo-
sium 189e ff.). In reality, the relations developing between the creative (writer-as-) reader
and his beloved 'relative' are not but exercises of literary strength (also following Harold
Bloom's theory of the literary fight or agon)[25] or, in other words, a display of sexual
power.[26] Elytis reconstitutes the fragments as if it were a puzzle of anagrams; he rejects pre-
scribed order to insist, on the one hand, on syntax, and on the other, on the creative
process itself; in this way he affirms the surrealist origins of his practice.[27] A 'love story'[28]
develops between the Modern Greek text and the mutilated body of the ancient poetry, a
love story that does not conceal but by contrast foregrounds the insoluble enigma, the
mystery of the dispersed or lost body members. Focusing on the synchronic dimension
stressed by Elytis, or in other words, on the result of this intra-familial affair (a process
undoubtedly envisaged by Bloom), I will now set on to examine not the success of the
translation by comparing it to the ancient text, but what this recomposition and transla-
tion reveal, as regards Elytis's own poetics.

Commenting on his translation of Sappho's poetry, Andonis Decavalles maintains that
the poet uses these fragments as small precious pebbles in order to compose poetic
mosaics. Already a few years earlier, poet Stratis Paschalis referred to the 'method of the
mosaic' that in his view Elytis practiced; Paschalis specified that this method developed
by 'joining together a number of poetic pieces of mosaic, which are dense and auto-
nomous and are grouped together around a nucleus that is rather vague and abstract'. In
his turn, Paschalis here seems to evoke another conclusion reached earlier by Alexandros
Aryiriou, who pointed out that 'Elytis's lyricism is formed as a sum of linguistic systems,
that constitute complete but limited thematic nuclei, which instantly recall their com-
plementary part, which makes richer or often perfects the initial idea'.[29]

    The composition of poetic mosaics in Sappho by exploiting the above method, that is,
the joining together of autonomous thematic nuclei, shows that there is an obvious consis-
tency in Elytis's poetic thought; this has not been pointed out by the critics mentioned
above, but seems to me to be most evident in his essays. In fact, the recomposition of
Sappho's poetry constitutes an application of his ideas on prismatic form. These ideas were
the object of his systematic studies on poetry during his formative years (1944-1960) and
were based on the poetic ideas of the Surrealists and on Gaston Bachelard's theories on pro-
jective poetry.[30] Elytis put his theories into practice first in his long poem The Axion Esti (Το
Άξιον Εστί, 1959), in the collection of poems Six and One Remorses for the Sky (Έξη και
μία τύψεις για τον ουρανό, 1960), as well as in those poems of his poetry collection entitled
Step Children (Τα ετεροθαλή, 1974) which were composed around the same period with the
above poems. All in all, these same theories condition and determine his later poetry.

The idea of prismatic form appears for the first time in his essay on 'Romanos the Melodist', which was published in the literary magazine *Ekivolos* in the summer of 1986, but was composed or completed in 1975, that is, while the translation of Sappho's poetry was still in progress. However, in embryonic form, the conception is already apparent in his essay 'The true physiognomy and the lyrical boldness of Andrea Calvo' ('Η αληθινή φυσιογνωμία και η λυρική τόλμη του Ανδρέα Κάλβου'), which was completed in 1942 or 1943 and was published in the Christmas issue of *Nea Estia* in 1946. In this essay, Elytis perceives in Calvo's *Odes* a 'virtue of density', which is achieved through constituent coordination, within the same uniform and balanced whole, that is, the poem, of a multitude of brief and autonomous images, that highlight a central image or idea.[31] The examples he offers (as well as the observation that Calvo has never completely applied this principle) show that he refers to assemblages of images that constitute complex metaphors. This idea is further and more analytically developed in his essay on Romanos the Melodist, in which he observes that the homeric rhapsodies and lyrical, and epic poetry (at the time of their peak) 'are organized around nuclei that project themselves and which finally keep the whole together'.[32] The individual nuclei function independently from each other, while simultaneously revolving around the central nucleus of the poem, which thus acquires a prismatic form.[33] The poems that are composed by following this method 'have a double effect on the reader, not only with their forms as wholes, but also with their fragmentary parts and fragmented manner, due to these preeminent elements, these crystals'.[34]

It is precisely these preeminent elements or crystals that Elytis sought to highlight in the fragments of Sappho's poetry; his views are put into practice in *Sappho* and in his book of poems *The Little Mariner* (*Ο μικρός Ναυτίλος*), probably because they were written while he was working on the final formulation of his theory in his essay on Romanos the Melodist. Indeed, it is most clearly evident in those of his poems that have been composed to present an intentional fragmentary or antique ('αρχαιοπρεπή') form and are included in *The Little Mariner*. The book was published in 1985 (about twenty months after the publication of *Sappho*), but the poems it includes date from the period 1970-1974. In my view, the ancient fragment, both as idea and form, is associated here with the theory of prismatic form. Illustrative examples are the self-referential poems 8, 11, 17 and 20.[35] The arabic numbers in the place of titles point to the enumeration of Sappho's extracts and of other ancient Greek lyrical poetry. These four poems appear in the unity entitled 'Both with Light and Death' ('Και με φως και με θάνατον'), which I believe has been intentionally borrowed from the poetry of Calvo.[36] In poem 17, lexical forms dating from different periods of the history of the Greek language are grouped together. Here too, the poet seems to have applied the method of recomposition. It is

interesting to mention that the critic Andreas Belezinis believes that poem 17 is a 'linguistic compilation' that points to the linguistic style of Alexandros Papadiamantis through the use of at least four or five lexical units.[37] It must be noted however, that Belezinis does not connect this poem to Elytis's translations of Sappho's poetry. Yet, on another occasion, he pointed out that Elytis attempted a 'recomposition of Calvo's work'. According to Belezinis, by citing passages from Calvo's poetry in his 1946 essay, and by intertwining his own poetry – which points to the actual natural world or to a potential ideal reality – with lines drawn from Calvo's poetry [...], he neglects the latter's strophic unity or its semantic context, in order to make it reflect a positive approach to life, a sense of paradise, which is Elytis's own.[38] To expand this thought of Belezinis, one may add that already in 1946 Elytis seems to have attempted to put his method of recomposition to the test.

But the lexical units used in poem 17, which are unusual or even foreign to modern demotic Greek, also evoke implicitly the anagrammatic (or neo-lexical or anti-lexical) constructions that Elytis used in *The Axion Esti*. These constructions vividly illustrate his experimentation with the theory and the poetic practice of the Surrealists. The poet's aim was to undermine the very foundations of conventional language and invalidate traditional means of viewing reality.[39] As regards the expression 'αρχαιοπρεπή', which I used to describe the above poems of *The Little Mariner*, I have borrowed it from a commentary by Elytis, in which he explains why he used the anagrams of the 'Genesis' part of *The Axion Esti* («ΡΟΕΣ, ΑΛΑΣΘΑΣ, ΑΡΙΜΝΑ/ ΟΛΗΙΣ, ΑΪΣΑΝΘΑ, ΥΕΛΤΗΣ»).[40] According to his explanation, he tried to give to easily recognisable words (that is, the words ΕΡΩΣ, [LOVE], ΘΑΛΑΣΣΑ [SEA], ΜΑΡΙΝΑ [MARINA], ΗΛΙΟΣ [SUN], ΑΘΑΝΑΣΙΑ [IMMORTALITY] and ΕΛΥΤΗΣ [ELYTIS]) 'an antique colour' ('αρχαιπρεπές χρώμα').[41]

The capital letters arranged continuously on the line (without spaces), which are used in poem 11 of *The Little Mariner* recall the 'capital fine letters [which] composed a graphic representation simultaneously translucent and mysterious' ('λιγνόκορμα συμπαγή κεφαλαία [που] συγκροτούσανε μια γραφική παράσταση διαυγή και μυστηριακή μαζί') in the Sapphic fragment that once attracted his attention at the British Museum.[42] In poem 11, the poet chose the same typographical arrangement, the column, which he also used in *Sappho*. In his epilogue to this book, he points out that he selected it in order to achieve the 'emotional correspondence with the mystery that emanates from the ancient columns and the papyri, precisely because of the difficulty that their reading presents; and also [he attempted to] liberate [him]self from the disjointed surface of the pages, so as to accomplish a balanced and unified result'.[43] In my view, this passage explains why Elytis wished to give an antique colour to the anagrams of *The Axion Esti*; also, his retrospective search into the various linguistic phases of the Greek language, which obviously followed,

and finally his typographic innovations. Poems 8 and 20 of *The Little Mariner* materialize his conclusions regarding the independence of the individual expressions of prismatic form: their fragmentary character is apparently inspired by his readings of the fragments of ancient Greek poetry.

Elytis followed the opposite process to recompose Sappho's fragments. As with the above accumulation of lexical units and the recomposition of Calvo's poetic work, his aim was to make manifest his own poetic voice through the verses of the poetess. Nevertheless, in this particular case, he did not have to stress the already existent positive, physiocratic and erotic conception of life, but those elements that, in his view, give Sappho's poetry a modern character. Without filling the missing parts of the poems (gaps, lacunae), he left lines suspended, accentuating thus the elliptic nature of the poems and the function of poetic language as signifying practice (*signifiance*), the modernist transposition to the reader, the mallarméan *lecture* in the place of *écriture*.

Elytis's intentions are not made manifest in the first publication of the hymn and the invocation to Aphrodite, as well as of the two poems dedicated to Anaktoria, all of which have survived in their greater parts. This version of the hymn to Aphrodite was published in *Aiolika Grammata* in 1978.[44] Verses and stanzas are arranged here after traditional versification. The capital letter is used to indicate the beginning of a new sentence and punctuation marks follow formal usage. The hymn was published for a second time, together with the other three poems, in the November-December 1983 issue of the journal *I Lexi*,[45] with a few minor revisions; for instance, as regards the end of each line, the division of the poems into stanzas, punctuation and the usage of new words in the place of initially chosen ones. The typographic arrangement into columns in the book (*Sappho*) that was published three months later (as well as the insertion of vignettes in order to divide *or unite* the fragmentary verses and the stanzas, and also the elimination of capital letters and commas) were most certainly conscious choices and did not result from a hasty decision of the last hour.

It seems to me that the typographic arrangement into columns in particular was also dictated by the principle of recomposition. This is so because, given that the translator did not fill in the missing parts with words that would supposedly complete meaning, recomposition could only function effectively if these missing parts went unnoticed, that is, if the text was continuous, as, for instance, his own poem 11. Probably, it was for this same reason that Elytis did not mention his employment of a pause, that is, of a blank space in variant parts of a line. Such blanks are used mainly in his collection *The Light Tree and the Fourteenth Beauty* (1971), but the principle was adopted firstly in the poem 'Helen of Crete facefront and profile' ('Η Ελένη της Κρήτης με το πρόσωπο και με το

πλάι', 1962),[46] under the influence of Pierre Reverdy's poetic theory and specifically his cubist typographical syntax.[47] In the last unity of *Sappho*,[48] the pause is used as a discreet recalling of the actual fragmentary state of the recomposed verses, which is indeed denoted in the transparent title: «παντοδάπαισι μεμειχμένα».

Finally, this same technique is followed in the collages that accompany *Sappho*. The first of them is a portrait of the poetess and appears on the cover of the book. The two collages that follow, *The Gulf of Yera* and *Mytilene* (*Ο κόλπος της Γέρας* and *Η Μυτιλήνη*), as well as the last one, *The Cape* (*Το Ακρωτήρι*), surround the poetry, defining its natural environment. Each of the remaining seven collages appears at the beginning of one of the seven unities of poems and/or fragments, but it is not necessarily connected semantically with the unity that it accompanies. Some of them are only intented as comments on certain motifs (in a similar manner to the titles of the respective unities): the collage *The Pomegranate Garden* (*Ο κήπος με τα ρόδια*), whose main theme is the embracing of the two women, is probably related to the third unity and specifically to the fifth and the fifteenth poetic units. The collage *Aphrodite's Dream* (*Όνειρο της Αφροδίτης*) is related to the second unit of the first unity, in which the poetess says that she dreamed she was discussing with goddess Apphrodite, and the collage *The Dance* (*Ο χορός*) is related to the first poetic unit of the second unity, in which the girls from Crete dance while stepping on flowers. The rest of them (*Τα σκιάδια, Στο λουτρό, Στην παραλία, Εσωτερικό*) contribute to making the poetry of Sappho appear familiar and modern, by casting glimpses on the everyday life of the women that constituted the poetess's circle – which is not described as very different from the everyday life of any woman in any age –, just as the poetic fragments do. The exploitation of René Matisse's collage technique (*papiers collés*), which is apparent here,[49] through an intertextual reading also adds a modern finishing touch to Elytis's collages and takes the reader back to the basic idea supporting his employment of the method of recomposition: paradise is made of the same materials with reality – only in a different arrangement.

NOTES

1 See Odysseas Elytis, *Open Book* (*Ανοιχτά χαρτιά*), Ikaros, Athens (3rd ed. 1987): 257-58.

2 See Xavière Gauthier, *Surréalisme et sexualité*, Gallimard, Paris (1971): 139-40.

3 See Mary-Ann Caws, *The Poetry of Dada and Surrealism*, Princeton University Press, N.J. (1970): 33-34.

4 See Andrew Rothwell, '*Le Surréalisme et la peinture*: Breton's Spatial Hermeneutics', in *André Breton: The Power of Language*, ed. Ramona Fotiade, Elm Bank, Exeter (2000): 106.

5 See Odysseas Elytis's relevant observations in Dimitris Daskalopoulos, '*Χρονολόγιο Οδυσσέα Ελύτη* (1911-1986)', *Chartis* 21-23 (Nov. 1986): 273.

6 See *Krinagoras* (*Κριναγόρας*), trans. into Modern Greek by Odysseas Elytis, Ypsilon, Athens (1987).

7 In his book *Αλεξανδρινή Ποίηση*, which was published in 1943, Konstandinos Trypanis included around fifty translations of poems from the Palatine Anthology, made by Elytis; this caused the poet's reaction, since he had been unaware of Trypanis's intention to publish them and did not consider them but only «*προσχέδια μεταφράσεων*», as he explained; see Odysseas Elytis, «*Η Αλεξανδρινή Ποίηση*», *Nea Estia* 35 (15 Jan. 1944): 118-19.

8 See Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn, Fontana Press, London (1992): 72.

9 Ibid.: 74, 76, 79-80; my emphasis.

10 For the earlier translations that Elytis studied see his Bibliographical Note in Odysseas Elytis, *Sappho* [*Σαπφώ*], Ikaros, Athens (2nd ed. 1996): 165-66.

11 See Odysseas Elytis, *Second Writing* (*Δεύτερη Γραφή*), Ikaros, Athens (2nd ed. 1980): 11, 207.

12 See Elytis's interview with Yorgos Pilichos, *Ta Nea*, 26 Nov. 1976. Although Elytis appears to hold a different view than that expressed by Benjamin, who maintained that a successful translation ought not give away the impression that it is not a translation but an original text written in the target language (op. cit.: 79), this is not actually true. In reality, in his choices the Greek poet seems to agree with Benjamin, according to whom translation must be transparent: that is, made in a way that it does not conceal the original text, but allows pure language to reflect through the original as best as possible. In his view, this may be achieved by means of a literal rendering of syntax (as long as words and not sentences constitute the principal tool of the translator).

13 See Odysseas Elytis, *Sappho*, op.cit.: 163.

14 André Breton stressed the need to cut up reality into its constituent elements, and subsequently to recompose it in new combinations. He approved of the anti-rationalist undermining of conventional thought by surrealist literature and art, the de-contextualisation of the objects of tangible reality from their intellectual and social conformism. See André Breton, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 1, ed. Marguerite Bonnet avec la collaboration de Philippe Bernier, Etienne-Alain Hubert, José Pierre, Gallimard, Paris (1988). Elytis evokes Sappho's anti-conventional attitude in his essays «Ποιητική νοημοσύνη» (1944) and «Πρώτα-πρώτα…» (1972). See Odysseas Elytis, *Open Book*, op. cit: 477 and 11, respectively.

15 According to Elytis, one is capable of creating one's own paradise, 'from the same materials that hell is also made. What is different is each man's conception of the way these materials should combine […]. If reality […] does not permit […] the *other architecture*, or otherwise said, the

revolutionary recomposition, then it is the mind that always remains free and, in my view, the only one that can undertake it' (ibid: 9-10; my trans.; his emphasis). It is the poet, in particular, who has 'to recompose the world literally and metaphorically' (ibid: 36). Cf. also his following observation: 'natural elements […] constituted the alphabet of another world, which nevertheless is contained within this one. My mission was through their different composition to built another, ideal world, one that would correspond to the degree of magic that I used to perceive and I still perceive to the present day'; see Odysseas Elytis, *Oral Self-portrait* (*Αυτο-προσωπογραφία σε λόγο προφορικό*), Ypsilon, Athens (2000): 28; my trans.

16 See Odysseas Elytis, *Carte blanche* (*Εν λευκώ*), Ikaros, Athens (1992): 259-60 (my trans. and emphasis).

17 See Itamar Even- Zohar, 'Polysystem Studies' (esp. the sections 'Polysystem Theory' [1979] and 'The Position of Translated Literature within the Literary Polysystem' [1978]), *Poetics Today* 11.1 (Spring 1990): 9ff. (esp. 9-26, 45-51).

18 See José Lambert and Rik Van Gorp, 'On Describing Translations', in *The Manipulation of Literature*, ed. Theo Hermans, St. Martin's Press, N.Y. (1985): 42-53.

19 See Theo Hermans, 'Images of Translation: Metaphor and Imagery in the Renaissance Discourse on Translation', in *The Manipulation of Literature*, op. cit.: 103-35.

20 See Odysseas Elytis, *Sappho*, op. cit.: 10;my trans.

21 Apart from their common origin, it is also Greek language and the way they treat nature and love in their poetry that enhance their relation of kinship, acknowledged by the Elytis. Cf. his relevant comment about Giuseppe Ungaretti, who in Elytis's view represented his times by drawing on his natural environment, as did Sappho and Ibykos in antiquity (see Odysseas Elytis, *Carte blanche*, op. cit.: 637). Elytis claims that, by contrast, it was Krinagoras's alienation from a physiocratic conception of life that hindered his poetic development (see Odysseas Elytis, *Krinagoras*, op. cit.: 11).

22 See André Lefevere, 'What is Written must be Rewritten: Julius Caesar: Shakespeare, Voltaire, Wieland, Buckingham', in *Second Hand; Papers on the Theory and Historical Study of Literary Translation*, ed. Theo Hermans, *ALW-Cahier* 3 (1985): 88-106.

23 See Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire XX, Encore*, Seuil, Paris (1975). It is noteworthy that in his preface to *Sappho*, Elytis expresses his admiration for her technique and her aphorisms by noting that 'one would not have expected them from a woman' (see *Sappho*, op. cit.: 13-14).

24 See Jacqueline Rose, *Sexuality in the Field of Vision*, Verso, London (1986): 219, in which Lacan's original phrase is also quoted.

25 See Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence; A Theory of Poetry*, Oxford University Press, Oxford (1973): 8, 57 and Harold Bloom, *A Map of Misreading*, Oxford University Press, Oxford (1975): 1-30.

26 See Ross Chambers, 'Alter ego: Intertextuality, Irony and the Politics of Reading', in *Intertextuality; Theories and Practices*, eds. Michael Worton and Judith Still, Manchester University Press, Manchester & N.Y (1990): 143-58.

27 French Surrealists engaged in similar revolutionary practices, in order not to increase disorder, but to show the importance of the conception of the creative process as signifying practice. Indicative examples are the anagrams and the anagrammatic texts by Louis Aragon, Breton and Paul Eluard, the collages by Max Ernst and the anagrammatic dolls of Hans Bellmer.

28 In her book *Histoires d'amour* (Denoël, Paris 1983), Julia Kristeva presents the idea that the ideal character of the love object plays a decisive role in the constitution of the subject.

29 See Andonis Decavalles, *Elytis; From the Golden to the Silver Poem* (*Ο Ελύτης από το χρυσό ώς το ασημένιο ποίημα*), Kedros, Athens (1990): 160, Stratis Paschalis, 'Elytis as Leaf-Oracle' ('*Ο Ελύτης ως φυλλομάντης*'), *Chartis* 21-23 (Nov. 1986): 461-62 and Alexandros Aryiriou, *Commentary on the Poetry of Odysseas Elytis* (*Ανοιχτοί σχολιασμοί στην ποίηση του Οδυσσέα Ελύτη*), Kastaniotis, Athens (1998): 68.

30 For a more analytical discussion of these issues see Elena Koutrianou, *Light as Axis: The Emergence and Crystallization of the Poetics of Odysseas Elytis* (*Με άξονα το φως: Η διαμόρφωση και η κρυστάλλωση της ποιητικής του Οδυσσέα Ελύτη*), Kostas and Eleni Ouranis Foundation, Athens (2002): Introd. and Chs. 3 and 4.

31 See Odysseas Elytis, *Open Book*, op. cit.: 88.

32 Cf. Odysseas Elytis, *Carte blanche*, op. cit.: 49-50.

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid: 50.

35 See Odysseas Elytis, *The Little Mariner* (*Ο μικρός Ναυτίλος*), Ikaros, Athens (1986): 61, 64, 95, 98.

36 The unity 'Both with Light and Death' ('Και με φως και με θάνατον') includes 21 poems enumerated continuously, but it is divided by the rest of the unities, that are inserted, into three groups of poems, each consisting of seven poems. The poems that are relevant here appear in respective positions, in the beginning of the second group of poems and in the end of the third one. It is significant to point out also that the title of one of the unities of this collection is the phrase 'όττω τις έραται' (each to one's own beloved), which is taken from Sappho's work.

37 See Andreas Belezinis, *The Mature Elytis* (*Ο όψιμος Ελύτης*), Ikaros, Athens (1999): 211-17.

38 Ibid.: 193-210.

39 For the employment of anagrams in Elytis's poetry, as well as instances of antilexism and neolexism see Elena Koutrianou, *Light as Axis*, op. cit.: Ch. 6. According to Elytis, anagrammatic and neolexical enunciations resist the mimetic reproduction of reality and do not reflect it by means of a symbolic naming, but aim at its recomposition and the foregrounding of the noble content and the lean form of the Greek language (see Odysseas Elytis, *Open Book*, op. cit.: 328-29). Cf. the poet's ideas on the notion of 'correct spelling' (*ορθογραφία*), which he presents in his essay 'The public and the private' ('Τα δημόσια και τα ιδιωτικά', 1983/1989), in Odysseas Elytis, *Carte blanche*, op. cit.: 365-66.

40 See Odysseas Elytis, *The Axion Esti* (*Το Άξιον Εστί*), Ikaros, Athens (13th ed. 1980): 18.

41 See Yorgos Kechayoglou, 'An Unpublished Commentary by Odysseas Elytis' ('Ένα ανέκδοτο υπόμνημα του Ελύτη για το 'Άξιον Εστί'), *Poiisi* 5 (Spring 1995): 27-65.

42 See Odysseas Elytis, *Open Book*, op. cit.: 25; my trans.

43 See Odysseas Elytis, *Sappho*, op. cit.: 164.

44 See *Aeolika Grammata* 43-44 (Jan.-April 1978): 7.

45 See *I Lexi* 29-30 (Nov.-Dec. 1983): 919-22.

46 See Odysseas Elytis, *Step Children* (*Τα ετεροθαλή*), Ikaros, Athens (2nd ed. 1980): 35-36.

47 See Elena Koutrianou, 'The *Axion Esti* and Cubist Aesthetics' ('Το *Άξιον Εστί* και η αισθητική
    του κυβισμού', in *Sixteen Essays on the* Axion Esti (*Δεκαέξι κείμενα για το* Άξιον Εστί), Ikaros,
    Athens (2001): 36-55.
48 The third and the fourth poetic units constitute indicative examples. See Odysseas Elytis,
    Sappho, op. cit.:147, 149.
49 Cf. for instance Elytis's collage *Όνειρο της Αφροδίτης* with the 1952 series of René Magritte's
    Blue Nudes.

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ABSTRACT

In his recomposition and translation of Sappho's poetry into Modern Greek, Odysseas Elytis offers a reconsideration of her poetics, by stressing those aspects of her poetry that, in his view, are also found in modernist aesthetics. Elytis ignored the traditional classification of the poems and fragments into nine books and rearranged the corpus into seven unities, drawing on surrealist thought and poetic practice. The outcome constitutes not only an impressive innovation in the history of the reception of Sappho's work; it is also particularly useful in the study of Elytis's own poetics.

Petro Alexiou

DIASPORA AND COLONIALISM IN AUSTRALIA IN THE 1920S: THE CASE OF ALEKOS DOUKAS'S MIGRANT 'VOYAGE SOUTH'

I

'History is the subject of a structure whose site is not homogeneous, empty time but time filled by the presence of now.'

(Walter Benjamin *Theses on the Philosophy of History*)

This essay aims to locate a Greek migrant subject in Australia in the interwar years at the intersection of two tangential but related discourses of European settlement, that of the dominant white colonial discourse and that of the Greek diaspora which mediated the existence of Greek communities in Australia in the early decades of the twentieth century. The approach is biographical in the sense that it tracks the personal narrative of Alekos Doukas[1], an Asia Minor Greek refugee, on his migratory voyage to Australia in 1927 and his first ten months in the country. The narrative is based on his letters home to his family and brother, the writer Stratís Doukas, in Greece.

Benjamin's essay on the philosophy of history introduces the critical idea that history writing is a continuing process of contestation rooted in the present. This idea also informs Nicholas Thomas's approach to colonial history in the region and he has argued that in the analysis of colonial discourse differentiation between older and newer, more subtle forms, is imperative if we are to subvert and expose the notion of 'historical progress' which excises racist colonialism from the 'liberal present' into an insulated