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Ares Alexandrou: The Balancing Act of Translating Dostoevsky into Greek

Ares Alexandrou (1922-1978) is the central figure in more than a century of Fyodor Dostoevsky's translation history in Greece; Dostoevsky's name being "inseparable" from that of Alexandrou in Greek culture.¹ Since their publication in the 1950s, Alexandrou's *Crime and Punishment* (*Πρεστυπλευνιευ και νικαζανιευ*, 1866), *Demons* (*Βεσυ*, 1871), *The Idiot* (*Ιδιουτ*, 1869), and *The Brothers Karamazov* (*Βρατβυα Καραμαζουβυ*, 1880) (with the exception of *The Idiot*, all the first Greek translations directly from Russian) have been the authoritative editions of Dostoevsky in Greek, achieving the status of "classic texts" in Modern Greek translated literature.²

Alexandrou's translations of Dostoevsky's four major novels are characterised by a uniform, distinct style which gives voice to the original's polyphony in Greek. In his posthumously-published monograph *The Dramatist Dostoevsky* (*Ο Δραματουργουσ Δουστουεβσκυ*, 2012), Alexandrou described translating Dostoevsky's intangible style as a balancing act ("I had thus to balance on a tightrope").³ This balancing act led him to form his theory of Dostoevsky as a dramatist, where dialogue took priority, as it would in a stage play. To express this aspect of Dostoevsky's poetics (what he defined as his *dramaturgy*), I argue that Alexandrou developed his particular translational style of pronounced orality and frequent colloquialisms. Alexandrou's strategy of vernacularisation along with his interventions in the text arguably transformed the original. This interventionist attitude aligned with Alexandrou's philosophy of translation, whereby the only solution for the translator to avoid betrayal of the original was through (re)creation.

- 1 Kostas PAPAIOURGES, "O Dostoevsky tou Are Alexandrou" [Ares Alexandrou's Dostoevsky], *Lifo*, 25 April 2012 <<https://www.lifo.gr/culture/vivlio/o-ntostogiebski-toy-ari-alexandroy-apo-ton-kosti-papagiorgi>> (accessed 30 September 2024).
- 2 Katerina I. ANESTE, "Dostoevsky phlegomenos apo avevaioteta kai apistia" [Dostoevsky in the Fire of Uncertainty and Unfaithfulness – interview with Manoles Velitzanides, i.e. the publisher of Editions Indiktos], *Lifo*, 20 November 2008 <<https://www.lifo.gr/culture/vivlio/ntostogiefski-flegomenos-apo-abebaiotita-kai-apistia>> (accessed 30 September 2024).
- 3 Ares ALEXANDROU, *O Dramatourgos Dostoevsky* [*The Dramatist Dostoevsky*] (Athens: Gostotes, 2012), p. 26.

The aim of this article is to provide an argument for translation as a lens through which one can examine Fyodor Dostoevsky's reception within a foreign culture, by stressing the role of individual agents in this process. In the case study presented here, my focus is on Ares Alexandrou due to his lifelong intellectual engagement with the Russian author's work and his centrality in Dostoevsky's translation history in Greece. First, I examine the publishing house Editions Govostes and the entrepreneurial publisher Kostas Govostes (1904-1958), who employed Alexandrou and commissioned the translations. I then turn to Alexandrou's biography focusing on the way Dostoevsky was tied in the Greek translator's memory with crucial moments of his own biography. Next, I discuss Alexandrou's translational credo and idiolect, first, by examining his monograph *The Dramatist Dostoevsky* where Alexandrou lays out his understanding of Dostoevsky's poetics and how it determined his discursive translation style; and finally, by analysing his translation strategies in his Greek versions of Dostoevsky.

Dostoevsky's Apanta in Edition Govostes

During the first decades of the twentieth century, a radically changed historic-cultural context expanded the popularity of Russian authors in Greece. The Russian Revolution of 1917 galvanised readers' interest in Russian literature, increasing demand for translations of their works.⁴ The rising demand for "everything Russian" inundated the Greek publishing world.⁵ Unprepared to deal with such high demand, publishers (themselves not so well versed in Russian culture) rushed to publish Russian and Soviet works in poorly curated and edited translations.⁶ Kostas Govostes noted the gap in the market and set up his publishing house in 1926 with the express purpose of providing the growing readership of Russian literature in Greece with good and affordable transla-

4 Philippos PAPPAS, "Logotechnike metaphrase kai Aristera: entypa, tomes, repertorio (1901-1950)" [Literary translation and the Left: Publications, Innovations, Repertoire (1901-1950)], in *Zetemata neoellenikes philologias, metrika, yphologika, kritika, metaphrastika* [Issues of Modern Greek Philology: Metric, Stylistic, Critical, Translational] (Thessaloniki: Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, 2016), pp. 603-611 (p. 605).

5 Kostas GOVOSTES, "E Ekdosis tes istorias tes rosikes philologias" [The Publication of the History of Russian Literature], in Louis Leger, *History of Russian Literature*, transl. by Ad. D. Papadema (Athens: Govostes, 1929), pp. vii-xi (p. vii).

6 As the publisher Kostas Govostes wryly wrote in 1929: "Today, those who are interested in Russian literature and culture and in everything Russian, are so many, that Greek businessmen do not want to miss the chance to take advantage of them" (GOVOSTES, p. viii).

tions.⁷ Govostes inaugurated his publishing house with Dostoevsky's *Dream of a Ridiculous Man*, the first translation of the short story in Greek.⁸

Govostes' far-reaching plan to acquaint Greek readers with "the most beautiful works of world intellect" and "to disseminate literature and make it accessible to everyone" culminated in the publication of Dostoevsky's *Apanta* (*Collected Works*) between 1938 and 1958.⁹ The project survived the Nazi Occupation (1941-1944), the Greek Civil War (1946-1949), and the politically volatile period that followed, during which Govostes' designated Dostoevsky translator, Ares Alexandrou, spent many years in island prison camps for his ties to the Communist Party.

Govostes' editions of *Apanta* were a turning point in the Russian author's Greek translation history. These editions provided Dostoevsky's major works in Greek, translated directly from the Russian original for the first time. Until then, as my research has shown, the vast majority of Greek translations of Dostoevsky used intermediate sources (predominantly French translations).¹⁰ Despite Dostoevsky's popularity with Greek readers (Dostoevsky was the third most translated author in Greek between 1900 and 1950),¹¹ very few works had been translated directly from Russian until the 1950s, while many works – most notably, *Demons* – remained untranslated. In his editions of Dostoevsky's *Apanta*, Govostes sought to remedy this gap by enlisting Russian-speaking translators such as Ares Alexandrou, but also the two most active Russian-speaking translators at the time, Athena Sarantide and Koralia Makre, to

7 For Govostes, "the preconditions for the development of literature" were "publishing editions at low prices given how the economic crisis has shrunk the public's purchasing power" and "quality of the content", [Kostas GOVOSTES], "Gia to vivlio" [On Books], *To Chroniko tou Vivliou*, 6, May 1936, p. 6.

8 Fiodor DOSTOEVSKY, *To Oneiro enos geloiou* [Сон смешного человека / *Dream of a Ridiculous Man*], transl. by Giorgos Semeriotis (Athens: Anatole, 1926).

9 While Govostes titled his 1938-launched Dostoevsky series, *Apanta* – 'apanta', which literally means 'everything' in Greek, is used to describe the edition of an author's complete works – he did not in fact publish all of Dostoevsky's fictional and non-fictional works. For that reason, I will translate henceforth *Apanta* as 'collected works' instead of 'complete works' to be precise.

10 As my doctoral research revealed, at least two thirds of translations published before Editions Govostes launched their Dostoevsky series, relied on French intermediate sources: Christina KARAKEPELI, *The Translation History of Fedor Dostoevsky in Greece (1886-1992)* (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Exeter, 2024), <<http://hdl.handle.net/10871/137217>> (accessed 30 December 2024).

11 Konstantinos G. KASINES, *Vivliographia ton ellenikon metaphraseon tes xenes logotechnias 1901-1950* [A Bibliography of Greek Translations of Foreign Literature, 1901-1950] (Athens: Syllogos pros Diadosin Ophelimon Vivlion, 2013), p. xxv.

retranslate Dostoevsky from the Russian original.¹² Govostes promoted these translations – especially those authored by Alexandrou – as “the real Dostoevsky” vis-à-vis previous translations which had “mistreated” and “abused” Dostoevsky’s works.¹³ Alexandrou’s versions were advertised as a “restoration” of the Russian text, which transferred it into Greek “complete, without any cut, straight from the original [...] preserving the spirit, the style, and the atmosphere of [the original]”.¹⁴

Govostes published in 1938 the first volume of *Apanta: The Gambler* in Athena Sarantide’s translation.¹⁵ Before the Second World War broke out, Govostes had published the following titles in his Dostoevsky series: *Netochka Nezvanova* (transl. by Koralia Makre) in 1939, *The Eternal Husband* (transl. by Athena Sarantide), and *Notes from Underground* (transl. by Koralia Makre) in 1941. The series continued throughout the war, by 1944, Editions Govostes had published *The Honest Thief, White Nights, The Humiliated and Insulted* (all three translated by Koralia Makre), and *Notes from the House of the Dead*, which was Ares Alexandrou’s first translation of Dostoevsky.

Alexandrou’s addition to the translation team in 1942 allowed Govostes to aim higher and to prepare for publication the behemoths of Dostoevsky’s oeuvre: *Crime and Punishment, Demons, The Idiot, The Brothers Karamazov*. Even though the upcoming translations authored by Alexandrou were announced as early as 1945, the translations were finally published between 1951–1954.¹⁶ There were two reasons for the delay. The first was an adverse historical reality: Alexandrou spent the years between 1948–1958 imprisoned for his affiliation to the Communist Party, as I will describe in the next section which

12 There are no birth or death dates for either Athena Sarantide or Koralia Makre. Neither of the two female translators have been the subject of a research study. My own research on Dostoevsky’s Greek translation history was able to uncover little information on their translatorial work. I was only able to confirm that both women translated from Russian and that they were employed by several publishing houses between the 1920s and 1930s prior to their cooperation with Editions Govostes.

13 Back cover of the third volume of *Crime and Punishment* (1951), transl. by Ares Alexandrou (Athens: Govostes, 1951); Back pages of the third volume of *Demons* (1953), transl. by Ares Alexandrou (Athens: Govostes, 1953).

14 Back pages of the third volume of *Crime and Punishment* (1951); Editions Govostes advertisement, *To Vema*, 26 May 1953, p. 2.

15 Fiodor DOSTOEVSKY, *O Paiktos [Παικτος / The Gambler]*, transl. by Athena Sarantide (Athens: Editions Govostes, 1938).

16 “In the Dostoevsky series, after Merezhkovsky’s critical work, published for the first time in Greece, *Demons* and *The Adolescent* in translations by Ares Alexandrou and Koralia Makre, will be published in autumn”. Editions Govostes advertisement, *Eleuthera Grammata*, 6 (24 August 1945), p. 15.

traces his biography. The second reason had to do with Govostes' rigorous and lengthy editing process, which involved several rounds of manuscript readings by the editing team before a text was approved for publishing.¹⁷ This intensive work meant that it took years for a translation to be published.

Govostes finally published the first volume of *Crime and Punishment* in Alexandrou's translation in 1951; the next two volumes appeared within the same year.¹⁸ This was the first Greek *Crime and Punishment* to be based on the Russian original; all previous translations were based on intermediate sources.¹⁹ A year later, in 1952, Govostes began publishing *Demons* in three volumes, the final one published in 1953. Previously only the excised chapter "At Tikhon's" had been published as "Stavrogin's Confession" (c. 1930).²⁰ Govostes followed *Demons* with *The Brothers Karamazov* and *The Idiot*, each published in four volumes between 1953 and 1954, both translated by Alexandrou. *The Idiot* had previously been translated once,²¹ and *The Brothers Karamazov* three times

17 Leonidas ZENAKOS, "To Cheirourgeio ton metaphraseon" [The surgery of translations], *To Vema*, 5 February 2006, p. 47.

18 Fiodor DOSTOEVSKY, *Enklema kai Timoria* [Преступление и наказание / *Crime and Punishment*], transl. by Ares Alexandrou, 3 vols (Athens: Editions Govostes, 1951).

19 Previous translations of *Crime and Punishment* in Greek included: Alexandros Papadiamantes' first translation of the novel based on Victor Derély's *Le Crime et le Châtiment* (1884). Papadiamantes' seminal translation was serialised in the daily newspaper *Ephemeris* between 14 April 1889 – 1 August 1889; it was republished in 1992 by Editions Ideogramma: see Eugenia MAKRYGIANNE, "Epimetro", in Fiodor DOSTOEVSKY, *To Enklema kai e Timoria*, transl. by Alexandros Papadiamantēs (Athens: Ideogramma, 1992); Stelios Charitakes' 1912 translation was also based on Derély's French version (*To Enklema kai e Timoria*, transl. by Stelios Charitakes [Chania: Gorgias P. Phortsakes, 1912]). Charitakes' translation was the first version of the novel rendered in the demotic variant of Modern Greek. Previous translators, following literary norms of the time, rendered Dostoevsky's works in *katharevousa*, the archaising variant of Modern Greek; and finally, Athanasios Boutouras' 1922 translation (*Enklema kai Timoria*, transl. by Athanasios Boutouras, 3 vols [Athens: Vivliopoleio G. I. Vasileiou, 1922-1925]) was likely based on the first German translation of the novel *Schuld und Sühne*, transl. by Wilhelm Henckel, 1882).

20 Fiodor DOSTOEVSKY, *E Exomologese tou Stavrogin's Confessions*, transl. by P., [unknown publisher], c. 1930. The translation of the title as "*Daimonismenoi*" (*The Demonised*) has been contested by some. The Russian scholar Metsos Alexandropoulos (1924-2008) claimed that in Greek "the meaning of the title was ruined": "[in the novel] it is Russia that is 'demonised' and 'demons' are set to destroy it": Metsos ALEXANDROPOULOS, *Daimones kai Daimonismenoi* [*Demons and Demonised*] (Athens: Delphini, 1992), p. 44. Nevertheless, Alexandrou's title of *Daimonismenoi* persisted; all retranlations since then have preserved the title as such.

21 *The Idiot* had previously been translated by Athena Sarantide from Russian in 1924, for a different publishing house (Athens: Vivliopoleio G. I. Vasileiou, 1924). Even though Gov-

based on French intermediate sources.²²

For Govostes, the pinnacle and conclusion of Dostoevsky's *Apanta* was the translation of *The Brothers Karamazov* which, along with *Crime and Punishment* and *Demons*, represented "the brightest stars in Culture's Constellation".²³ After *The Brothers Karamazov*, Govostes published Koralia Makre's translation of *The Adolescent* (c. 1955).²⁴ At Govostes' death in 1958, the publication of Dostoevsky's *Apanta* was complete, a work he hoped would "establish Greek translation as an undeniable cultural contribution to Modern Greek literature".²⁵ Editions Govostes published posthumously Alexandrou's translations of *Poor Folk* (1985), *The Village of Stepanchikovo* (1989) and *White Nights, Dream of a Ridiculous Man*, and *The Meek One* (2014). Overall, Alexandrou, along with Makre and Sarantide, translated most of Dostoevsky's fictional works. All these translations are still in print from Editions Govostes.

I will now move on to Ares Alexandrou's biography in order to trace his trajectory as a bilingual translator, pausing at critical moments of his life linked in the Greek translator's memory with the Russian author. This part serves as the backdrop of his translation work, which was conducted in adversity and which, I argue, explains Alexandrou's deep spiritual connection to Dostoevsky and the studiousness with which he tackled the task of rendering Dostoevsky's works in Greek.

Ares Alexandrou (1922-1978)

Ares Alexandrou, whose real name was Aristoteles Vasileiades, was born on November 24, 1922, in St. Petersburg (then named Petrograd).²⁶ His mother was

ostes had previously published some of Sarantide's translations, it is likely that he asked Alexandrou to retranslate the novel – instead of republishing Sarantide's – to ensure uniformity in language and style between Dostoevsky's four major novels.

22 Giorgos Semeriotēs' first translation (1922) of *The Brothers Karamazov* was based on the first French theatrical adaptation by Jacques Copeau and Jean Croué (*Les Frères Karamazov, drame en cinq actes d'après Dostoïevski*, 1911). Semeriotēs' second translation (1926-1927), as well as the 1927-1931 translations published by Georgios I. Vasileiou, were based on Mongault and Laval's 1923 French translation of the novel (*Les Frères Karamazov*, trad. par Henri Mongault et Marc Laval, Paris: Bossard, 1923).

23 Editions Govostes advertisement, *To Vema*, 11 November 1952, p. 2.

24 Fiodor DOSTOEVSKY, *O Ephevos* [*Ποδρρομοκ / The Adolescent*], transl. by Koralia Makre (Athens: Govostes, c. 1953-1959).

25 Editions Govostes advertisement, *To Vema*, 2 June 1952, p. 2.

26 All biographical information on Alexandrou is based on Demetres RAUTOPOULOS's bio-

Russian-Estonian and his father was of Russian-Greek heritage, born in the city of Trebizond (now Trabzon) on the East Black Sea, where Greek-speaking communities had lived since the time of Catherine the Great.²⁷ After the revolution of 1917, the family struggled to make a living under the Soviet regime, and in 1928, they decided to immigrate to Greece, where his father had relatives, and where they hoped for a better future under the progressive Venizelos government. They first moved to Salonika and finally they settled in Athens in 1930.

When they arrived in Greece, neither Alexandrou, then six, nor his mother spoke a word of Greek. Alexandrou picked up Greek quickly, showing aptitude in both language and literature. During his last year of high school, he translated Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin* and *The Captain's Daughter* from Russian to Greek as a personal creative exercise.²⁸ As soon as he graduated from high school, he joined the student branch of the Communist Party, showing early on a desire for political activism.²⁹ In October 1940, when Alexandrou was eighteen years old, Greece joined the Second World War on the side of the Allied forces. This fatal day (October 28, 1941) was connected in Alexandrou's memories with one of his first encounters with Dostoevsky's works:

I [once] read a small book by Dostoevsky, "The Grand Inquisitor" translated into Greek, which I found in a bookshop. [...] I wondered then "What is this story?" because I had never heard of a work like that by Dostoevsky (I hadn't yet read *The Brothers Karamazov*). It appeared that this was the result of an arbitrary decision by an unknown Greek publisher who had simply extracted a chapter from *The Brothers Karamazov* without explanation, creating the impression that this was a short but complete work.³⁰ I thought that Dostoevsky had written a sort of one-act play, a monologue or dialogue, since the Inquisitor addresses Christ who responds only with his eloquent silence [...]. The next day, the Italians [Mussolini's forces] invaded Greece. I remember that when I was woken abruptly by the cry of the sirens, the first thing I saw was this small book with its pink binding on my nightstand.³¹

graphy: *Ares Alexandrou o exoristos* [Ares Alexandrou the exiled], 2nd ed. (Athens: Soko-
le, 2004).

27 On Alexandrou's childhood, RAUTOPOULOS, pp. 76-79.

28 Both translation manuscripts were lost during the Occupation; on Alexandrou's early translations of Pushkin, RAUTOPOULOS, pp. 89, 100-101, 400.

29 *Ibid.*, pp. 87-88.

30 Alexandrou probably referred to a 1928 edition of *The Grand Inquisitor*, transl. by A. Basilare (Athens: N. Tilperoglou, c. 1928). In 2015, Editions Govostes published Alexandrou's translation of the chapter as a stand-alone edition.

31 ALEXANDROU, pp. 27-28.

By April 1941, the German Nazi forces had occupied Athens. In the first year of the Occupation, Alexandrou joined the Greek Communist Party (KKE), and the youth-wing of the National Liberation Front (EAM, a Party-affiliate organisation) established shortly after the war to organise the resistance against the Nazi occupiers.³² The poet Giannes Ritsos, who knew Alexandrou from shared political circles and was impressed by the latter's high-school translations of Pushkin, recommended Alexandrou to Govostes in 1942 as a prospective translator for his publishing house.³³ It was Ritsos who gave the young man born Aristoteles Vasileiades the pseudonym of "Ares Alexandrou" (to avoid confusion with another Govostes translator named Vasileiades),³⁴ thus becoming his "spiritual [god]father".³⁵ Govostes heeded Ritsos's recommendation and employed Alexandrou, inaugurating a three-decade-long collaboration.

Alexandrou's first translations for Govostes were from English: D. H. Lawrence's *The Rocking Horse Winner* (1942), and Jack London's *The Iron Heel* (the latter was censored by the Germans and was published after the war).³⁶ His first translation of Dostoevsky, *Notes from the House of the Dead*, managed to pass through the censors and was published in the first years of the Occupation.³⁷ Later, Alexandrou remembered this translation as "an act of resistance" against the Nazi occupiers:

During the [German] Occupation, I translated *Notes from the House of the Dead*. I believed (the young are often subject to self-delusions) that I was taking a sort of stand – since this was a Russian novel – against labour camps, like the one the author described and where he had been sent to be punished for harbouring libertarian ideas. Dostoevsky did not say this clearly, but the informed reader would notice it. Dostoevsky was taking a stand against the authoritarian tsarist regime and by extension, I, as his translator, encouraged resistance against the Germans.³⁸

32 RAUTOPOULOS, p. 105.

33 *Ibid.*, pp. 100-101.

34 *Ibid.*, p. 101.

35 Giannes RITSOS, *Trochies se diastaurose: epistolika deltaria tes exorias kai grammata sten Kaite Drosou kai ton Are Alexandrou* [Trajectories at Cross-roads: Epistolary Cards from Exile and Letters to Kaite Drosou and Ares Alexandrou], ed. by Lizy Tsirimokou (Athens: Agra, 2008), p. 100.

36 RAUTOPOULOS, pp. 100-101.

37 The translation is dated c. 1940-1944.

38 ALEXANDROU, pp. 27-28.

After the war ended Alexandrou continued translating for Govostes and published his first poetry collection *Akoma toute e anoixe* (*This Spring, Still*) in 1946.³⁹ In the same year, Civil War broke out. With the Civil War still raging in 1948, Alexandrou, along with thousands of other Communist Party supporters, was interned by the right-wing government in prison camps on the islands of Lemnos and Makronesos, where prisoners were called to recant their Communist beliefs under torture. Alexandrou recalled the harrowing experience of seeing people tortured, etched in his memory as a scene out of Dostoevsky's mock-execution:

In Makronesos, they separated us into groups of six and led us to a slope and called each group to move to the front. [...] The prison guards fell on them and started beating them with clubs, one and sometimes two on each prisoner. I was watching, I remember, to make out all that I could of the clubs going up and down, I wanted to not miss a single detail. [...] I remembered then that exactly a hundred years before (in 1849), Dostoevsky would have been in one such group of six and would have seen his comrades tied to the stake ready to be shot (all staged as it turned out) but there was nothing staged here.⁴⁰

The recollection, shared in correspondence with a friend in 1974, reveals how Alexandrou saw himself as “a Dostoevskian hero in his tortured life.”⁴¹ Alexandrou was still preoccupied with Dostoevsky in the 1970s, more than two decades after he first translated the Russian author's novels. Around the time he wrote the letter cited above, Alexandrou was working on *The Dramatist Dostoevsky*, which I examine next.

Alexandrou spent the decade after the end of the Civil War in 1949 mostly in prison. In between his internments, he translated Dostoevsky for Kostas Govostes, who started publishing Alexandrou's translations from 1951. After he was released, Alexandrou translated numerous works of world literature from English and Russian for Editions Govostes, and published two more poetry collections – *Agonos Gramme* (1952) and *Euthytes Odon* (1959), which received little critical and commercial attention at the time.⁴² In 1967, a paramilitary

39 RAUTOPOULOS, p. 146.

40 Letter to Christos Theodoropoulos (19 May 1974), Athens, Hellenic Literary and Historical Archive (ELIA), Archive of Ares Alexandrou (A.E. 15/06), fol. 12.5.

41 Panagiotes DRAKOPOULOS, “Prologiko semeioma” [Introduction], in Th. TAMPÁKĒ-GEŌRGA and M. DĒMOPOULOU (eds.), *Spoude ston Dostoevsky* [A Study on Dostoevskii], (Athens: Imago, 1998), p. 7.

42 RAUTOPOULOS, p. 186 and p. 192.

group overthrew the government and established a military dictatorship on the pretext of safeguarding the nation from a supposed Communist threat. Alexandrou left Greece for Paris, as did many Greek intellectuals at the time. In Paris, he struggled to make a living, taking many different jobs.⁴³ While in France, he started to work on his first and only novel, *To Kivotio* (*The Box*). During this period, he translated Dostoevsky's *White Nights*, *Dream of a Ridiculous Man* and *The Meek One*, and worked on his monograph about Dostoevsky; all published posthumously by Editions Govostes.⁴⁴ When the military junta ended, in 1974, *The Box* was published to critical acclaim, hailed as one of the most important Modern Greek novels of the post-war era.⁴⁵ Four years later, Alexandrou died of a heart attack. He was fifty-six years old.

One of the most prolific translators of the post-war generation, in his thirty-year career, Alexandrou balanced translation and literary creation. His “linguistic crossings”, textual and geographical which took him from his mother tongue (Russian) to his paternal tongue (Greek), endowed Alexandrou with a singular sensitivity to the nuances of Modern Greek.⁴⁶ His translations of Dostoevsky, which demanded that he “balance[d] on a tightrope” to render the Russian’s “absence of style”, led him to create his own theory on Dostoevsky’s poetics, expressed in his posthumously published monograph *The Dramatist Dostoevsky* (2012).⁴⁷

The Dramatist Dostoevsky

The Dramatist Dostoevsky is an uncommon type of monograph within Greek literature on Dostoevsky: one of the very few critical studies to be written on the author by his Greek translators.⁴⁸ It can be considered a long translator’s

43 *Ibid.*, pp. 293 and 244-248.

44 Alexandrou was also preparing a translation of *A Writer’s Diary*, announced in 1958 after Kostas Govostes’ death, *To Vema*, 7 December 1958, p. 8; however, the translation was never published.

45 Roderick BEATON, “Land Without Novels?”, *TLS*, 12 October 2001, p. 14.

46 Lizy TSIRIMOKOU, “Eisagoge” [Introduction], in Ares ALEXANDROU, *Geia sou, Auraki: ennea grammata tou Are Alexandrou sten Aura Drosou* [Hello, Auraki: Nine Letters of Ares Alexandrou to Aura Drosou] (Athens: Morphotiko Idryma Ethnekes Trapezes, 2018), pp. 12-15 (p. 13).

47 ALEXANDROU, *The Dramatist Dostoevsky*, p. 26.

48 Ares Diktaios (1919-1983) who translated *The Adolescent* and *The Village of Stepanchikovo* in 1954, published an essay collection in 1961, where he discussed Dostoevsky along with Goethe, William Blake, Friedrich Hölderlin, Nietzsche, Shestov, and Arthur Rimbaud;

note, since Alexandrou never wrote translator's notes to accompany his versions of Dostoevsky. It was published by Editions Govostes in 2012, based on manuscripts from 1971. The (unfinished) essay covers Dostoevsky's biography, Alexandrou's own experience translating his works, and his interpretation of Dostoevsky's poetics. Writing about the difficulty of translating Dostoevsky into Greek, Alexandrou identified Dostoevsky's lack of style as his main obstacle:

When I was translating my first book by Dostoevsky, *Notes from the House of the Dead* (and similarly, when I was reading *The Idiot* – although translating and reading is not the same, you do not pay the same attention), I was surprised by the absence of what we call “style”; the absence of narrative flow, the absence of any sort of care on the author's part to create “literature” and more than that, “good literature”.⁴⁹

There were two “acceptable explanations” for Dostoevsky's elusive style. The first was that “Dostoevsky was forced to write fast to earn his living”; and the second that “one might easily neglect style when one is certain [one] has very important things to say”.⁵⁰ In trying to reconcile the “lack of correlation between the importance of the events [described] and the weight of words”, Dostoevsky was “consumed by expressiveness and hyperbole”.⁵¹ His authorial idiolect was one of “sonorous and rare words” which “create[d] phrases imbued with rhythm – almost imperceptible but certainly there – phrases that moved or flowed naturally like a great river, that poured out like a stream”.⁵²

Faced with the stylistic irregularities of the Dostoevskian text, Alexandrou “felt the need to interfere with the text”:

I used to interfere with the text, for had I left it the way it was, I would have been branded a sloppy translator. I had thus to balance on a tightrope, to intervene in the text in a way that the reader would think that I had altered nothing, and that that was how Dostoevsky himself would have written in Greek; that

Metsos Alexandropoulos, who translated the short story *Bobok* in 1995, has written several biographies of Dostoevsky (see the Conclusion for more analysis of Alexandropoulos's work). However, Alexandrou's *The Dramatist Dostoevsky* remains the only work written by one of Dostoevsky's major Greek translators, detailing the process of translating his works into Greek.

49 ALEXANDROU, *The Dramatist Dostoevsky*, p. 22.

50 *Ibid.*

51 *Ibid.*

52 *Ibid.*, p. 25.

is, that he would have written neglecting style, piling phrases on paper, as if the text was raw material to be refined later.⁵³

The breakthrough in how to translate Dostoevsky came in 1945, when Govostes commissioned Alexandrou to translate *Demons*. The following anecdote from Alexandrou's efforts to procure a Russian edition from the Soviet Embassy in Athens reveals the origin of Alexandrou's concept of Dostoevsky as a dramatist:

After the liberation from the Germans, my publisher asked me to translate *Demons*. As I could not find the novel in the only bookshop that sold Russian books [...] I went to the USSR embassy. [...] When I asked [the cultural attaché] whether they had Dostoevsky's *Bessy* [sic] in the embassy's library, he said no: "We don't have Dostoevsky's *Piessy* [sic]". I was at the point of explaining somewhat ironically that I wasn't looking for Dostoevsky's *Piessy* ("his theatrical works"), since it would be impossible to look for something that does not exist. However, influenced by the official atmosphere of the place, I explained with the most serious and natural expression that I was looking for *Bessy*, enunciating the word as clearly as I could. I implied that, while *Piessy* existed, I was not interested in them for now. I was looking for *Biessy* [sic]. The cultural attaché unimpressed said "We do not have *Biessy* [sic]". [...] I thought how funny it was to meet a Soviet cultural attaché who was not aware that Dostoevsky had never written plays. I kept laughing [...] until I finally realised its meaning while standing at the entrance to the stadium with its white amphitheatre [he is referring to the Panathenaic Stadium situated at the centre of Athens]. I stopped laughing and thought: "Why, yes! Comrade cultural attaché was right. Dostoevsky's *Piessy* do exist! Dostoevsky wrote nothing but plays. And what plays! Genuine tragedies that follow all of Aristotle's' rules".⁵⁴

In realising that Dostoevsky indeed wrote his novels as *пьесы* (dramas) Alexandrou started to approach Dostoevsky as a *dramatourgos*, a dramatist and

53 *Ibid.*, p. 26.

54 *Ibid.*, pp. 28-29; Alexandrou is referring to Aristotle's definition of tragedy in *Poetics* (1449b): "Tragedy is, then, a representation of an action that is heroic and complete and of a certain magnitude – by means of language enriched with all kinds of ornament, each used separately in the different parts of the play: it represents men in action and does not use narrative, and through pity and fear it effects relief to these and similar emotions". <<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0056%3A-section%3D1449b>> (accessed 30 September 2024).

playwright: “translating Dostoevsky, I had the feeling I was translating a theatrical play and not a novel”.⁵⁵ The inherently theatrical structure of Dostoevsky’s novels explained the many stage adaptations of his works: “Dostoevsky’s time is more akin to narrative time in theatre than in novels”.⁵⁶ In scenes like Marmeladov’s speech (*Crime and Punishment*), Hippolyte’s confession (*The Idiot*), the group scene in Stavrogina’s drawing room and Stavrogin’s confession (*Demons*), Dmitry Karamazov’s “Confessions of an Ardent Heart” and Ivan Karamazov’s confessions to Alyosha in “Pro and Contra” (*The Brothers Karamazov*),

the theatrical and dramatic element even reach[ed] the melodramatic [...]. We are dealing with old-school theatre and a type of old-fashioned acting. Even the spaces where the events take place – usually attics or humble rooms, and sometimes aristocratic drawing rooms in the capital or in the country – are described with very few details as if they are part of the setting.⁵⁷

Constrained in the claustrophobic stages Dostoevsky designed for them, his heroes were pushed to their emotional limits, impelled “to open their hearts, to make confessions that turn their souls upside down while realising at the same time their absurdity; they confess publicly their insignificance; they are self-flagellating and self-punishing”.⁵⁸ In these emotional confessions “under the strain of acute emotional pressure” their speech became “theatrical even in the narrowest sense of the word; in the sense that a skilled actor could very well play the corresponding part without the need of extra directions”.⁵⁹ Following the dramatist’s implicit stage directions, the characters acted “as if possessed by demons [...] against their will, only to wonder afterwards why they acted that way and not the other”.⁶⁰

“Are they [Dostoevsky’s heroes] then ‘marionettes’ at the hands of an author who moves them at will?”, Alexandrou wondered.⁶¹ “All heroes are ‘marionettes’”, he acquiesced, “playing a part prescribed to them by the author”.⁶² The puppeteer-author “blackmails” his heroes, operating them to “prove”, to voice

55 ALEXANDROU, *The Dramatist Dostoevsky*, p. 92.

56 *Ibid.*, p. 87.

57 *Ibid.*, p. 93.

58 *Ibid.*, p. 92.

59 *Ibid.*

60 *Ibid.*, p. 96.

61 *Ibid.*, p. 97.

62 *Ibid.*

his own ideas.⁶³ How did Dostoevsky then manage to create heroes that “escape [his] pre-defined plan and follow their own way, unpredictable to both them and the author?”⁶⁴ For Alexandrou, it all came down to the question of individual agency, with which Dostoevsky gifted his characters, despite them being his own creations: “This exact fact – that Dostoevsky let his heroes ‘escape’ or ‘get carried away’ in different directions – is what makes them believable irrespective of their ‘theatricality’ or exactly because of it”.⁶⁵

In Dostoevsky’s narratological experiment, the characters, from marionettes, transform into living humans with their own consciousness and responsibility for their actions:

It is at once evident that while they are indeed “acting”, these characters are living their part. They are improvising. Their passion is their own. They are not soulless marionettes after all but living creatures which have accepted – how else – their creator’s life-giving first breath and from then on, they live and act at their own will. Without the heroes’ “freedom of will” Dostoevsky’s novels would simply be a “lecture”, an “illustration” of philosophical or moral-religious ideas.⁶⁶

Alexandrou’s thesis on the freedom of Dostoevskian characters evokes Mikhail Bakhtin’s definition of the polyphonic novel. In *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, Bakhtin argued that Dostoevsky’s characters are not subjugated to the author: “a character’s word about himself [...] is not subordinated to the character’s objectified image as merely one of his characteristics, nor does it serve as a mouthpiece for the author’s voice”.⁶⁷ His heroes assume full-fledged independence: “Dostoevsky, like Goethe’s Prometheus, creates not voiceless slaves (as does Zeus), but free people, capable of standing alongside their creator, capable of not agreeing with him and even of rebelling against him”.⁶⁸ The “plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses” which Dostoevsky’s characters represent, gives rise to the “genuine” polyphony which is at the basis of Dostoevsky’s poetics.⁶⁹

63 *Ibid.*

64 *Ibid.*

65 *Ibid.*

66 *Ibid.*

67 Mikhail BAKHTIN, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, transl. by Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: Minneapolis University Press, 1984), p. 7.

68 *Ibid.*, p. 6.

69 *Ibid.*

The characters' detachment from the author's consciousness is what animates Dostoevsky's heroes, making them convincing. Their verisimilitude is further enhanced by what Alexandrou described as "the qualitative transformation through time".⁷⁰ We, as real human beings, Alexandrou argued, "transform" according to what Aristotle described in his *Poetics* as "eikos kai anankaion", (plausible or verisimilar, and necessary).⁷¹ For that reason:

We demand that a work of art should be "convincing", in other words to depict the qualitative transformation through time in such a way, that we never for a moment doubt that it was unavoidable for Oedipus, or Hamlet, or Raskolnikov to have transformed the way they did [...]. When we say that [...] a work of art [...] is convincing, we mean that its time, its inner time, the one expressed through the hero's qualitative transformations through time, the time "created" by the author, flows normally; that it is "proper" time conforming to our sense of the passage of time, neither slower or faster.⁷²

Thus, according to Alexandrou, Dostoevsky's works were convincing and his characters authentic, because characters' thoughts and actions developed according to "how we might have been subjected to the qualitative transformation of the novel's heroes under the conditions set by the plot".⁷³ He argued that readers identify and empathise with Dostoevsky's characters because it is easy to "imagine ourselves in the hero's place, and say that we would also have behaved that way, that we would have also suffered Ivan Karamazov's white fever or that we would have confessed our crime like Raskolnikov".⁷⁴

As these excerpts from *The Dramatist Dostoevsky* reveal, Alexandrou was intrigued by how Dostoevsky achieved the illusion of verisimilitude in his fiction; how he created believable characters who acted seemingly unconstrained by the author's intentions. In what comes next, I will investigate whether and how Alexandrou recreated the illusion of verisimilitude of the original in his own translations of Dostoevsky. To that end, I analyse his particular discursive

70 ALEXANDROU, *The Dramatist Dostoevsky*, p. 87.

71 ARISTOTLE, *Poetics* (1451b): "What we have said already makes it further clear that a poet's object is not to tell what actually happened but what could and would happen either probably or inevitably [*kata to eikos e to anankaion*]". <<https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0056%3Asection%3D1451a>> (accessed 1 April 2024).

72 ALEXANDROU, *The Dramatist Dostoevsky*, p. 87

73 *Ibid.*

74 *Ibid.*

strategy of “intervening in the text”,⁷⁵ and I discuss what I define as his hermeneutics of Dostoevsky.

Alexandrou’s Hermeneutics of Dostoevsky

Alexandrou’s translation strategy, to write “as Dostoevsky himself would have written in Greek”, was one of emphatic vernacularisation.⁷⁶ In his intention to translate transparently (“in a way that the reader would think that I had altered nothing”),⁷⁷ Alexandrou enforced a two-pronged discursive strategy: striving for the most colloquial rendering possible, even when the source text used more standard language; and intervening in the original by way of explicitation, which often resulted in semantic shifts. As I will argue, Alexandrou’s interventionist translation strategy (to consciously “interfere with the text”)⁷⁸ and its effect on the reader, can be better understood within a hermeneutics model of translation:⁷⁹ one where interpretation of the source text is not only warranted but is an inexorable part of the transformation to which the act of translation subjects the original.

The first strategy – that of an expressly vernacular translation – was in line with Alexandrou’s thesis on the theatricality of Dostoevsky’s style. As I showed above, Alexandrou understood Dostoevsky’s novels as *пьесы*, plays where characters speak like actors on the stage. This implied a high degree of orality in their speech that did not always conform to the norms of literary language or written speech. To achieve this, Alexandrou made frequent use of colloquial words, phrases, and idioms to render characters’ speech. Alexandrou increased the expressiveness of the original by selecting “sonorous” and “rare” words that created their own rhythm in Greek and carried particular emotional weight in order to render, what he termed, Dostoevsky’s “expressiveness” and “hyperbole”.⁸⁰ This overtly vernacularising strategy aligns with what Mikhail Bakhtin identifies as the *skaz*-like elements of Dostoevsky’s poetics, whereby *skaz* “refers

75 ALEXANDROU, *The Dramatist Dostoevsky*, p. 26.

76 *Ibid.*

77 *Ibid.*

78 Alexandrou, in his text, uses the verb *epemvaino* (‘to interfere’) which literally means ‘step/tread upon’; ALEXANDROU, *The Dramatist Dostoevsky*, p. 26.

79 Lawrence VENUTI, “Genealogies of Translation Theory: Schleiermacher”, transl. by Siobhan Brownlie, in Lawrence VENUTI (ed.), *The Translation Studies Reader*, 4th ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2021), pp. 486–500.

80 ALEXANDROU, *The Dramatist Dostoevsky*, p. 25.

to a technique or mode of narration that imitates the oral speech of an individualised narrator”⁸¹

The two examples below show cases of Alexandrou inserting colloquialisms in the target text, following his strategy to vocalise the character’s speech. The first excerpt is from the opening sentence of Ivan Karamazov’s legend of the Grand Inquisitor (*The Brothers Karamazov*, Part 2, Book 5, Chapter V). The mystique of Ivan’s *нелепая поэма* is immediately broken, as he exclaims “тъфу” (ugh!) in embarrassment at having to explain his fictional tale. Alexandrou extends his exclamation to “Phtou, na parei kai na sekosei”: ‘phtou’ is the onomatopoeic (mimicking the sound of spitting) Greek equivalent which expresses annoyance and exasperation; the colloquial phrase “na parei kai na sekosei” (may [the devil] take and lift [me]) is used when one is extremely irked or frustrated.

Russian:

Ведь вот и тут без предисловия невозможно, то есть без литературного предисловия, *тъфу!* (ПСС 14; 224 – here and in the following examples italics are by the author of this article).

Greek:

Omos kai edo de ginetai n’ archiso choris prologo, delade choris philologiko prologo. *Phtou, na parei kai na sekosei!*⁸²

[But here also it is not possible to start without a prologue, without a philological prologue that is. *Phtou, take and lift!*]

In the second example taken from *Demons*, Alexandrou takes his strategy of colloquialization a step further: he adds direct speech, not present in the source text. In the scene from Stavrogina’s drawing room, the scheming captain Lebyadkin grandly returns the twenty roubles gifted by Varvara Petrovna to his sister (*Demons*, Part 1, Chapter 5, IV). As Lebyadkin fumbles with the money and drops it, Alexandrou adds the angry exclamation “Aï sta kommatia!” (Oh, [may it fall] to pieces!), to express the character’s anger and exasperation.

Russian:

...заметив на полу вылетевшую бумажку, он нагнулся было поднять ее, но, почему-то устыдившись, махнул рукой (ПСС 10; 133).

81 ВАХТИН, p. 9.

82 Fiodor DOSTOEVSKY, *Adelphoi Karamazov*, transl. by Ares Alexandrou, p. 284.

Greek:

Vlepontas sto patoma to pesmeno chartonomisma ekane na skypsei na to parei, ma drapeke gia kapoio logo kai kounese to cheri tou *san na lege: "Ai sta kommatia"*.⁸³

[Seeing on the floor the fallen banknote he made to lean over and take it, but got embarrassed for some reason and waved his hand *as if saying: "Oh, [may it fall] to pieces"*]

The second strategy, that of intervening in the text, is more inscrutable with regards to Alexandrou's intentions. It could be that what Alexandrou perceived as Dostoevsky's lack of a particular style gave him the freedom to render the Russian text more liberally, engaging in a hermeneutics of translation. In the most abstruse parts of the novels, such as the legend of the Grand Inquisitor or Stavrogin's confession at Tikhon's, Alexandrou felt the need to interpret Dostoevsky's ideas, rather than his text. Following Lawrence Venuti's model of hermeneutic translation, I understand Alexandrou's interventionist strategy as the manifestation of his "critical dialectic" with Dostoevsky's text.⁸⁴ As Venuti has argued, translation is an inherently "interpretive act": the translator mediates (interferes with) the text by overlaying his personal interpretation of the original, which is "one among different and potentially conflicting interpretations".⁸⁵ As such, Venuti argues, the translation communicates not the foreign text, but "an interpretation of it" rendered in the translator's idiolect.⁸⁶

In the first example from *The Brothers Karamazov*, The Grand Inquisitor in Ivan's story imagines people, happy to have masters become their conscience, as a "стадо" (a herd) (*The Brothers Karamazov*, Part 2, Book 5, Chapter V). In Alexandrou's text the more compliant "стадо" turns into "agele" (a pack), a word mostly used to describe "a pack of wolves" (*agele lykon*), shifting thus the perspective of the leader of weak-willed humanity, from a shepherd to the head of a pack of wolves.

Russian:

И люди обрадовались, что их вновь повели как стадо (ИСС 14; 234).

Greek:

Kai oi anthropoi charekan pou tous odegese kai pali san *agele* kai pou sekosan

83 Fiodor DOSTOEVSKY, *Oi Daimonismenoi*, transl. by Ares Alexandrou, p. 178.

84 VENUTI, p. 296.

85 *Ibid.*, p. 288.

86 *Ibid.*

epitelous apo tis kardies tous to toso tromero doro pou tous ephere vasana.⁸⁷

[And people were happy that they led him again like a *pack* and that they lifted from their hearts that most horrible gift that brought them anguish]

In the second example from Stavrogin's confession to Tikhon, Stavrogin tries to talk himself out of his guilt, in finding the crux of his suffering in the persistent ghost-memory of Matryoshka shaking her fist at him after he raped her (*Demons*, "At Tikhon's", Chapter II). Stavrogin concedes that there is no escape: even if he does not have remorse for his crime, he has already been "judged" (осужден) by Matryoshka herself. Alexandrou imagines Stavrogin's fate differently: it is not the knowledge of being judged by the girl he raped that haunts him, but the thought there is no "soteria (salvation) for him, no Raskolnikovean absolution for his crimes.

Russian:

Не о преступлении, не о ней, не о смерти ее я жалею, а только того одного мгновения я не могу вынести. Никак, никак, потому что с тех пор оно мне представляется каждый день, я совершенно знаю, что я осужден (ПСС 12; 128).⁸⁸

Greek:

Auto pou den boro na ypophero einai monacha ekeine e stigmati sto katophli, den boro, den boro, giati te vlepo s' aute te stase kathe mera ki eimai sigouros *pos den yparchei soteria gia mena*.⁸⁹

[What I cannot bear is just that moment on the doorstep, I cannot, I cannot, because I see her in this stance every day and I am certain *that there is no salvation for me*]

87 DOSTOEVSKY, *Adelphoi Karamazov*, transl. by Ares Alexandrou, p. 296.

88 It is not clear from which Russian edition Alexandrou worked when translating *Demons*. Especially in the case of the excised chapter, "U Tikhona", Alexandrou seems to have consulted various editions, as well as Dostoevsky's notes on the chapter. Judging from the accounts of the editing process at Editions Govostes, the editing team was consulting various editions of the works. Here, I am using as a reference for the excised chapter volume 12 of ПСС, which includes "U Tikhona" and additional notes to the chapter.

89 Fiodor DOSTOEVSKY, *Oi Daimonismenoi*, transl. by Ares Alexandrou, p. 706.

Conclusion: Translation as a Balancing Act

Alexandrou's main concern as a translator was how to reconcile the inescapable unfaithfulness of translation with the ideal of linguistic equivalence. In personal correspondence, Alexandrou admitted that even "established" translators like himself were guilty of "vindicating the wise *traduttore traditore*":⁹⁰ "The notion of the translator-traitor might be hyperbolic but impossible to extinguish. The ideal would be for people to know all tongues or to speak the same language. As with all ideals, it is unattainable."⁹¹ Elsewhere, Alexandrou explained to the French translator of his novel *The Box*, Colette Lust, that equivalence was not a direct relationship between the word-signs of the source language and target language:

It is impossible to find the corresponding word-sign in another language, for the simple reason that it does not exist. But one can always find the equivalent to a word-sign, by using two or three word-signs, or even a whole phrase-sign. [...] It remains to be seen whether the words in the original are actually signs. In any case, this does not concern the translator. The author is the only person responsible for correcting his work.⁹²

Not privy to the author's intentions, the translator, even with the best of intentions and the highest degree of professionalism, always ran the risk of committing treachery against the original text. As such, for Alexandrou, strict equivalence between languages was not the translator's desideratum.

Venuti explained in *The Translator's Invisibility* that the incommensurable equivalence of word-signs in different languages inevitably leads the translator to "interpretation": "Translation is a process by which the chain of signifiers that constitutes the source-language text is replaced by a chain of signifiers in the target language which the translator provides on the strength of an interpretation."⁹³ In this hermeneutic model of translation, interpretation leads to a

90 Interview with Ares Alexandrou as part of the survey: "To Vivlio pernaei krise!" [Publishing under Crisis!], *Epitheores Technes*, 73-74 (January-February 1961), p. 100.

91 Letters to Aura Drosou-Thomopoulou (1974), Athens, Hellenic Literary and Historical Archive (ELIA), Archive of Ares Alexandrou (A.E. 15/06), fol. 11.2.

92 Letter to the French translator (Colette Lust) of *To Kivotio* (transl. in French as *La Caisse*), quoted in the journal *Metaphrase*, 1 (1996), pp. 132-134; Athens, Hellenic Literary and Historical Archive (ELIA), Archive of Ares Alexandrou (A.E. 15/06), fol. 12.2.

93 Lawrence VENUTI, *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation* (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 17-18.

creative reconstruction of the original: “conceiving of language use as a creative act thickly mediated by linguistic and cultural determinants so that it does not transparently express ideas or represent reality but rather constructs them”.⁹⁴ In reconstructing the original, the translated text acquires a “relative autonomy”.⁹⁵ The original disappears. As such, the translation does not afford “direct access to the foreign text but rather as a foreign-ism, an image of that text constructed from linguistic patterns and cultural traditions in the receiving situation”.⁹⁶

As Alexandrou himself conceded, an effective translation was less an issue of stylistics or equivalence but rather of how a translator’s idiolect measured against that of the original author: “I do not believe there is an English, a French or a Greek style [of writing]. There is – if there is something – a personal style, in this case mine. This personal style can be rendered in any language, as long as one finds of course a worthy translator”.⁹⁷

Alexandrou’s intention in constructing the original anew was to trick his readers into believing that he “had altered nothing, and that that was how Dostoevsky himself would have written in Greek”.⁹⁸ I believe that the popularity of Alexandrou’s translations lies in exactly that: his successful (re)creation of a Greek version so autonomous in its illusion of transparency that Greek readers had to accept it as if it was the original author’s work.

94 VENUTI, “Genealogies of Translation Theory”, p. 288.

95 *Ibid.*, p. 289.

96 *Ibid.*, p. 294.

97 Letter to Robert L. Crist (21 January 1976), Athens, Hellenic Literary and Historical Archive (ELIA), Archive of Ares Alexandrou (A.E. 15/06), fol. 12.3.

98 ALEXANDROU, *The Dramatist Dostoevsky*, p. 26.

