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The Translation Memoirs: A Meditative Exploration of Translation Theory

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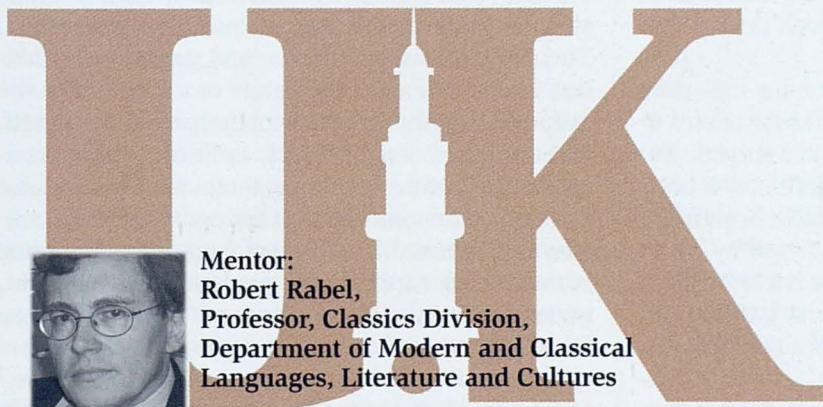


Last summer I traveled to Greece and other parts of Europe with the help of an Undergraduate Research & Creativity Grant from the University of Kentucky, and a grant from the UK Office of International Affairs. One of my goals for this trip was to work on my Gaines thesis, which at that time was titled "The Art of Translation: Translation Theory and Greek Poetry." I planned to work on my own translations, read other translations, and finally write about a translator's role as an artist. Another one of my goals was to surround myself with the Greek language, experience it in a way that pure text cannot offer. I decided to take a course in Modern Greek. I decided to see many of the places I had read about in school.

But the nature and thrust of my thesis work changed. I became less interested in writing a comparative study of translation and translation theory, and more interested in writing about how translation has been affecting my life. And, from that point I began to write, through personal narrative and academic scholarship, about the relationship between translation and transition. This thesis became more of a working meditation on life and change than any sort of academic curiosity.

I am almost 23 years old, and in one semester I will graduate from this University with a degree in Classics, having specialized in Ancient Greek. I am a graduate of the UK Honors program and from the Gaines Center for the Humanities.

Through all of my undergraduate work, I can easily say that this Gaines thesis has been the most challenging and rewarding endeavor I have ever undertaken.



Mentor:
Robert Rabel,
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Beginning with an interest in the translation of ancient poetry, Phillip Sauerbeck has proceeded to formulate his own theory of the nature of translation itself — an enormous undertaking for an undergraduate. He views the process of *translating* a poem as analogous to the process of *transition* in the living of a life. Perhaps the most significant aspect of his work concerns the analogous process of assuming responsibility for conveying accurately the contents of a poem and also taking responsibility for one's own motives and actions in the living of a life. In his work, translation emerges as itself an act of creation like the making of the original poem, and both poetic creation and the act of translation are closely connected, as they are for the novelist Margaret Atwood, with the facts of human mortality. Both poetic artist and translator assume responsibility for giving a voice to the spirits of the dead.

I have worked with Phillip over the past several years and have read his work as both poet and translator. As always, he takes ideas very seriously and is concerned with their concrete application to everyday life.

The Translation Memoirs: A Meditative Exploration of Translation Theory

I continue in the belief that I don't know how to translate, and that nobody does. It is an impossible but necessary process, there is no perfect way to do it, and much of it must be found for each particular poem as we go.

— W.S. Merwin (1989, pp. 139-140)

All of the choices in life that go on forever forwards and backwards through time are essentially rooted in creation and destruction. As one choice is made, another choice is often made impossible. As one person dies, another lives and continues in the cycle of thinking and acting. No creation can exist without destruction. Perhaps this is evident in a god's creation of a world in which people love and are inevitably hurt, grow and die, learn and forget. There is a discourse between creation and destruction, an oscillation between the two, a tai chi. That action is understood as embracing the past so as to live consciously in the present with aspirations for the future. In terms of work, devotion, life choices, and growing, translation is a most suitable way to illustrate the reality that all things are in transition — constantly dying and being reanimated in new forms.

God's joy moves from unmarked box to
unmarked box,
from cell to cell. As rainwater, down
into flowerbed.
As roses, up from the ground.
Now it looks like a plate of rice and fish,
now a cliff covered with vines,
now a horse being saddled.
It hides within these,
till one day it cracks them open
(excerpt from *Unmarked Boxes*,
Rumi, 1997)

Ένα

I thought that this would be the last day of my old life, but truthfully, I have been dead already for three months; floating between cities in Europe and floating back home only because it was part of some grand schedule in which everyone is strangely involved. My whole life has been a ridiculous component in a churning scheme. Whether I make a difference or not becomes irrelevant. Whether or not I love the girl I am sleeping with becomes irrelevant. So as I call the doctor and ask about my HIV results, I somehow expect everything to suddenly change. I think that I will somehow become enlightened to my situation, or become completely aware of the flux of things. But it doesn't happen that way. I begin to remember what it was like being in Crete, thinking about dying and about being the sole instigator of my demise ... breaking down. All of my other breaking downs seem pointless in comparison.

Δύο

I think that how I operate in respect to the rest of the world is not necessarily different from how anyone operates or has the potential to operate. But this morning, here in Paros, I feel secluded. I feel for one of the first times in my life, a sense of place. I am not referring to a certain role in life or to a feeling of home, but to something simpler: *existing* in a place. I feel present and aware of my location here on a small island, lying next to the girl I met in Athens. I am wide awake, and the white walls have become bright with late morning. I turn over and look at Neysa as she is still sleeping. The sun is coming in through the balcony door, beginning to warm the floor.

I begin to realize the absurdity of how my life is involving me. How I have been relating to almost everything is like how a flower relates to the wind, or how a smoothed stone relates to the water in a stream. My actions have always seemed inconsequential because I have never been interested in an action that would change anything. I have been interested in pleasing others, discovering what I want for myself by being caught up in the movement of things. Even though there is a lot to learn from allowing the world to wash over me, it is easy to lose balance and be taken downstream, out of control and unable to make a decision or a change that could really affect life.

I rarely have a concise understanding of consequences in my own life; and I have often been somewhat detached from my actions. A cause produces an effect, of course; an action, a reaction. But I never sincerely thought about cause and effect in my own life, or about my actions having a result for others. Because of that lack of connection between action and consequence, nothing is ever bad or good. Nothing is wonderful, nothing really destroys me. I rarely commit myself to a degree in which I can allow myself to be in a vulnerable position. I oftentimes attribute those nets and barriers that I have created to the experiences in my life that have caused me to want to protect myself from pain.

The way that I deal with consequences is by avoiding action or simply never disclosing how I really feel, even if I am hurt or wronged. By refusing to grasp the idea that all of my actions have consequences, I

begin to follow a path of life centered on self-promotion and ego-filled choices. I disregard social and spiritual responsibility because I am not connected to the world around me. Thus, I become careless with people dear to me; careless with my own body. I participate in life merely by watching in a lazy, passive manner.

Τρία

Watching the passing lives and the simple motions of other people has always been enough for me, it's enough for anyone not engaged in existence; but it becomes meaningless. The false meanings behind the things that I know vanish, but the things themselves remain. People who were also struggling in transition remain, and they are no longer inconsequential to me. In fact, because I recognize that they too are struggling, they become dearer and closer to me.

In seriously contemplating my relationship to the rest of the world, it becomes difficult not to think about dying, not to break down. But the breaking down of things, of old ways of thinking is the point of all this work and reflection. *The breaking down of things promotes possibility* (Ammons, 1997, p. 210): my uncle's heart attack, my grandfather's suicide, my breakup with Natalie. All of those breakings-down seem to promote life, but not just any careless life. Therefore, if I wish to pursue and promote possibilities, I need to enter into a state of transition for the purpose of establishing new opportunities for myself. Perhaps I can break out of this cycle of passivity, concern myself with sincere contemplation, not a false contemplation masking my laziness. Most every religion emphasizes the point of breaking down: the dying of the self, the earthly body, the desires, the life of sin, understanding that the ego does not exist; all of these in exchange for salvation, life in heaven, playfulness with God, or knowing that separation is impossible.

Again I feel aware that I am on a small island in the middle of the Aegean, in a one bedroom flat with a low bed, holding on to a girl who is sweet and playful, but in the larger scope, not someone that I can love sincerely. I will tell her that this whole thing is pointless.

Neysa is beautiful, though. She has the face of youth although she is several years older than I. Her whole body reflects her personality, which is playful and seemingly free from worries, at least from the things that I worry about, like sex and my body and how other people perceive me. She often wears a red sarong wrapped around her waist. The morning I first met her, she was sleeping with that sarong, using

it as a sheet. Her parents were both hippies, and many of her ideas about the pointlessness of school and believing in God were made evident by the stories she told me about her mother and father. One of her eyelids is slightly more closed than the other, which is seemingly the only flaw in her otherwise fit and well balanced body. I love her eyes, and that one which is slightly closed often makes me think that she is being sly with me, beckoning me. Her breasts are full and firm, and casual in some strange way. While we are in bed together, sometimes she positions her body so that her breasts rest on my arm, inviting me to be completely aware of their casualness. Her nose is beautiful also. I could watch her nose as she sleeps all night. It is an angular nose, but soft like the rest of her face.

τέσσερα

Most times during the day, we do our own separate activities. Neysa goes to a beach to lie out in the sun, while I go to a cafe to read and journal. Sometimes we agree to meet at one of the clear beaches on the other side of the island, but neither of us arrives, as we are basically not interested in each other for any reason other than sleeping together. Neysa commented this morning that our rendezvous was more like a week-long one night stand. She likes me, though. And I can see myself spending a good deal of time with her, perhaps even convincing myself that I am in love with her. But there are several reasons that I would not allow myself to love her. The greatest of those is that she reminds me of the first girl I slept with, the girl I broke myself over. They were both playful in a similar way; they were both connected to their sexuality, which made them seem confident and attractive. If I didn't know better, I would say that Neysa was in fact a reincarnation of Natalie, a psychic twin. Natalie had loved me in a way that I had never experienced before; she freely gave of herself and loved with her body, not solely with her mind, which is what I had done for most of my life. So when Natalie and I broke up, I began to set up barriers to keep me from devoting myself to anyone. I could have sex and say beautiful, rehearsed things, but the sincerity and devotion would not be there.

Natalie and I never broke up verbally — we tailed off, so to speak. And, if I am honest, I will say that I probably pushed her away when I began to feel paranoid about becoming like one of the other boys whom she had slept with. I knew about her ex-boyfriend

and how he was still clinging to her, and soon enough I began to realize that I was clinging also. Natalie enjoyed being with me, but I was constantly worried that I wasn't good enough for her, that I hadn't had enough experience with sex or love. I began to place blame, make up situations so as to ease separation, and think that she only wanted to be with me temporarily. So often I told myself that I would be hurt by this girl and that she was going to leave me at any moment — I perpetuated my own worries until they began to exist physically. When I think about what really happened, and what I thought was happening, I often feel sick. I often feel that I was manipulative and immature. I never told her how I really felt and, by doing so, I refused to be honest.

I look up from my book and I see Neysa walking toward me. She's late but it doesn't really matter. I close my book and watch as she approaches and sits down. As she smiles I begin to think about Natalie. More particularly, I think about how I should act in this situation that is uncannily similar to an excerpt from my past. It is difficult for me not to think that this girl and this escapade are being presented to me so that I can learn something that I missed in my relationship with Natalie; presented to me so that I can bring to an end a story that has gone on for much too long.

We decide to go to a restaurant in the middle of town, one that I saw earlier today directly off of a narrow, whitewashed ally. The natural canopy of the restaurant is lush, and there is only a metal gate separating the front tables from the ally. After my earlier reflection about Natalie, I decide to be assertive about some of the things that I need to say to Neysa. I tell her first that although I care about her, I don't love her. I tell her also about Natalie, and how the two of them are similar in many ways. I enjoy telling Neysa all of this and being open with her, and I think that she too enjoys hearing me speak about someone I do love, or did love.

My throat has been feeling sore all day, and I find it a bit difficult to drink the wine and swallow my food at the restaurant. I feel the sides of my throat and notice that my lymph nodes are inflamed. Neysa sees me rubbing my throat and asks me if I am alright.

"I don't know, I felt tired this morning and a bit ill, but I thought I just didn't get enough sleep. Maybe I'm coming down with something."

"Maybe it's the sun, sometimes people get sick from lying in the sun for too long. Maybe I gave it to you. I did have something like the flu last month. But it went away within a week. It's probably nothing."

I begin to worry, thinking that I have contracted something from this girl I barely know. We had never really talked about STDs, or anything like that. Everything suddenly seemed like a mistake. All of those sexual choices that I had made immediately seemed to be worthless and illogical. I don't know what to do or how to act.

"Neysa, I mean, before I left for Greece, I was checked for HIV and everything came back fine. I mean, just to let you know, since we never really talked about it."

She doesn't say anything. She simply puts down her glass and looks directly at me. I feel nervous and angry for the first time with her. I need her to say something, that she has been checked not long ago, that she's sure everything is fine. Slowly she speaks up, sensing my growing fear and anger towards her, "It's just as much your fault as mine. You should have asked me about that earlier. I don't recall you

bringing up anything while we were on top of the hotel in Athens.”

I feel like I am going to throw up. I feel as if the possibilities for the future are vanishing. I wonder how I am going to tell my parents. I wonder if I will die sooner than most people. I become aware for the first time in my life, that I have the ability to destroy myself through carelessness. I feel cold and I see my hands shaking, so I press them against my legs. Neither of us says anything. I push myself away from our table, and walk to the bathroom, all the while thinking *she is right to say this*.

I hold my hands under the faucet for a long while, looking at myself in the mirror. I want this to be over. I want to cry, cut off all of my hair, never see or talk to Neysa again.

Πέντε

As I walk Neysa to the port so that she can catch her ferry back to Athens, I think about how glad I will feel to be separate from her; but also about how lonely and scared I am already becoming. I kiss her for the last time, and I am sure she recognizes my detachment. On the verge of tears, I say good bye. I feel my face reddening and becoming flushed, and I see a glimmer of sadness in her face as she leans closer to me and kisses my cheek. I don't watch her board; I don't watch her ferry leave. I turn around and walk into the town, past several of the places we went together. I see a stray dog sleeping in the shade of an old windmill near the port, and I sit next to her, watching the other ships come and go.

Έξι

It has almost been a week since I left Paros, and now I am on the island Thira, the most famous of the Cycladic islands. I go to the archeological sites to take my mind off of Neysa for a while. But, I can only feel my body being weak with something like the flu, so I remain near my hostel for most of the days and sleep as long as I can. I often go to the black sand beaches, especially at night when the water and the sky and the ground all seem to blend into one continuous black, except for the stars which seem like illuminated coordinates — thousands of locations churning away in their own reactions, home to other things that exist. Occasionally, I will see a shooting star, and more often a satellite. The satellites remind me of home, ridge camping in the Red River Gorge with my best friend. The first time I saw a satellite, it passed over the two of us, slowly across the sky. Then it fell into the shadow of the earth, and disappeared. I see the flashing wingtip lights of a plane soaring overhead, and I begin to think about all of the people on board approaching their destinations. Everyone in this world is moving from one place to another or from one time to another very rapidly; and lives very different than mine exist and carry out their deeds, perhaps just as careless as I have been.

I decide that I need to leave this island and find a place where I will feel comfortable staying for a long while. I have to stop traveling because I am breaking down; I have to begin to understand why I have

continually chosen to be careless with my life and with the lives of others. I need some kind of reconstruction and transition so as to evaluate my motivations and to change the way I live. I will leave this island and work to analyze my reflexes so as to decide which of my 'natural' responses are actually benefiting me. Saying that it is my nature to be brooding, or lazy, or inactive, is a way that I trick myself into not attempting to change or grow. Saying, 'that's just the way I am' is an evasion of decision making and transition work.

Έπτά

In Ancient Greek the word “δουλεύω” (*douleuo*) means I am a slave, while in Modern Greek it means I work. The first relationship between these words is obvious; another relationship comes from knowing that many slaves in Ancient Greece would easily be called servants by modern terms. The most important thing to note about work and servitude is that they relate to each other in a deep way. Whether or not I love my work depends on whether or not I love being a servant of that work, or else I love my master. The important thing for me at this moment is to find out who my real master is, what my real motivations are. My notorious master is my self-promoting ego, which suggests that I do things for my own good first without regard for others. And, for a substantial portion of my life thus far, I loved that master. I thought that I was learning more and more how to love everything by only caring for myself. In doing so, I neglected the outside world where I lived and operated, I refused to allow myself to be close to anything.

I lurch forward by worrying the events of my life to death and, perhaps, this speaks of my psychological inadaptability to the world. Because of my inability to cope with my mistakes and my failed relationships, I either get caught up in a ridiculous cycle of discovering new inane traumas while attempting to remedy other ones, or I become trapped in stasis and I am unable to resolve or even recognize that I am stuck.

I found an epigram by Philodemus in which he wrote of his young sexually charged life compared to his current age of intelligence. He asks, “Whose fault is it I went mad¹,” referring to his youthful escapades.

¹“I fell in love. Who hasn't? I reveled. Who is not an initiate of revels? But whose fault is it I went mad? A god's isn't it? Let it go, for already grey hair rushes in to take the place of black — grey hair the proclaimer of the age of wisdom. And when it was right to play we played; and since it is right no longer, we shall lay hold of loftier thoughts.” Philodemus *Epigram 5* (Sider, 1997). For alternative translations, see Economou, 1983, and Haxton, 1999.

The key word in that line is *fault*, implying that because he is now older, he has matured and grown out of childish things that are of lesser importance. It could also be asking, 'Whose fault is this growing up that destroys my childhood?' Either way, the poem hinges on that word; pointing to a sorrowful nostalgic reminiscing. Perhaps that is what originally drew me to the poem. That sort of writing in which the poet revisits old loves and moons about in an almost pathetic way is something I am particularly good at rendering. I often think I would be an optimal translator for poems of this nature, and I was excited that I had found it. In actuality, it seems as if the poem found me; as most all translated poems find their translators. As Merwin said: "I think that the actual choice of material has more to do with the outcome of the translation than is usually admitted, and that there are poems that might be managed by someone and not by someone else. Juarroz seems to me extremely familiar, somehow. I feel I can hear the poems clearly when they are poems I want to translate." (Merwin, 1989, p. 139). A translator can't translate just anything successfully. I keep an open ear to the sound and heart of the language being used in an original (or possibly in a literal English version) until I find something that I can begin to formulate poetically in English. Oftentimes it is possible to hear how I would like to write the lines of my English translation before I even begin translating.

As I reread the Philodemos epigram in the Greek several weeks after my initial reading in English, I realize something. The original never had *fault*. The Greek directly says, ἀλλ' ἐμάνην ἐκ τίνος; (*all' emanen ek tinos?*); 'but my madness was from whom?' The absence of that word *fault* in the original changes the thrust of the whole poem. Philodemos is no longer contrasting a youthful age with a mature, wise age, but comparing them; embracing them both. Aside from that, it occurs to me that I had been reading into the poem what I wanted to hear, keeping the *fault* in my mind because it made the poem's language and idea more appealing to me. Is it possible that I could be reading sorrow into my whole life? Am I forcing myself to worry about issues that are for now out of my control? I soon began to work on a new translation of the epigram that reflected my discovery in the language and my subsequent sensibility to what was happening in the Greek.

I loved as everyone does,
I worshipped anything carefree or playful.
Who made me that way? A god?

I should let it go.

The gray hair moves in for the black
Saying, it's time for *this* age of intelligence.

You and I
when we were kids,
we simply knew how to play and explore.
And now we are touching consciousness
bettering our awareness.

ὈΚΤῺ

I feel it necessary to question my motivations for translating. Am I doing this work primarily for praise of my own language and abilities? In a strange way, I start to look at my whole life as mental, sexual, and psychological pursuits of self-indulgent praise. For the first time I stop forcing my language and thoughts on the original poem (as much as possible). I begin to allow the act of translating to teach me about the relationship between thought and action and consequence.

What does it mean to be a "translator" and what are his or her responsibilities? I feel that it is immediately important to answer those questions because the job of a translator is not dissimilar to that of someone attempting to enter into a period of transition, attempting to grow, and to learn from the past.

It is necessary for a translator to be completely engaged in thoughtfulness in respect to the sacred work in which he or she partakes. For within that engagement the key to translation is housed. Of course, the act of engaging oneself with the combination of thought and action is essential to countless other types of work and devotion. It is most important to note that the process of continual thoughtfulness and awareness is present in the act of any sincere translating; analogously, it is also present in the act of sincere poetry writing.

The thought-processes involved in translating and poetry writing are essentially similar. And in both translating and poetry writing it is possible to recognize the relationship between thought and action because the translator and the poet continually places himself or herself in a situation in which he or she makes intellectual, but reflective, decisions and then acts on them, or in regard to intuitive sensations, reacts. Like the poet who writes because of inspiration from an experience or because of the need to become clear and close to the subject of the poem, the translator translates because of an essential experience with the original poem to which he or she is drawn. "To undergo an experience with something — be it a thing, a person, or a god — means that this something befalls us, or comes over us, overwhelms and transforms us" (Heidegger, 1971, p. 58).

Both the translator and the poet are transformed by the work that they do, because they continually press themselves to work consciously, in the most sincere way possible — the way that is the most appropriate to the language, their own life, and the life of the poem. In turn, they learn from the process of translating or poetry writing, and grow because of it. Translating, like poetry writing, should not always be concerned with producing a complete translation or a complete poem if the original goal is to learn how to translate or how to write poetry. A

conscious poetic objective can obscure the poem by making the language sound contrived and forced.

Becoming a master of poetry writing or translation is not about mastering language, but about being a servant of language — listening, honoring an experience, allowing the poem and the process to guide. There is no perfect way to write a poem, and just as Merwin reminds us, “there is no perfect way to [translate], and much of [the process] must be found for each particular poem as we go” (Merwin, 1989, p. 139). That is why all of those actions involved in the servitude of language, which I do not believe to be dissimilar, are so essential.

It is necessary for a translator to have a real experience with the original poem so that the opportunity of translation, adaptation, transition, or transformation can occur. But if there is to be that kind of connection, it must be understood that a real experience occurs when the reader and the poem engage each other. A real experience is more than simply glossing the poem, more even than noting sound or assonance or meter. A real experience that is useful to the translator comes from paying attention to the emotions evoked by the poem and to the tone of the poet’s voice. A translation that seeks to be close to the original without regarding those subsurface workings of the language fails. Concern only for the metrics and structure of the poem rather than the psychological space that is created by a few lines of language does not allow for a close translation because it does not consciously make room for the psychological experience.

There is not a more correct experience of a poem, as there is not a more correct way to experience pain, love, or life, as long as it is not disregarded. But it is clear that in a real experience of a poem, in a transcendental experience so to speak, there is a gut response to language, tone, emotion, and awareness that occurs during the *experience* of reading the poem. That is to say, if the reader is conscious of his or her experience, he or she engages to language in a way that he or she normally would not. When people are reading a dinner menu or talking on the phone, they are generally not conscious of language or their experience with language. The time most often in which we are conscious of language and our relationship to it is, “curiously enough, when we cannot find the right word for something that concerns us, carries us away, oppresses or encourages us. Then we leave unspoken what we have in mind and, without rightly giving it thought, undergo moments in which language itself has distantly and fleetingly touched us with its essential being” (Heidegger, 1971, p. 59).

The translator, unlike the casual reader of any poem, maintains a certain level of linguistic consciousness. But more important than linguistic consciousness is consciousness of motivation. For each individual poem, the translator should ask him- or herself, why am I translating this poem; can I translate and still maintain the integrity of the poem along with my own integrity? How am I affecting the original poem? How is the poem affecting me, guiding me, and causing me to make these decisions? “In what relation do I live to the language I speak?” (Heidegger, 1971, p. 58). The point is that there is a relationship between the process of translation and the process of understanding. And the process of translation cannot be completely grasped until it has been ingrained in everyday life. Once it has been ingrained, once it has become more than an intellectual curiosity or an academic endeavor, it begins to take on the role of a teacher, a potentially active link to another

soul and time. This is a fantastic feat that requires mindfulness. It is an exercise in devotion, discipline, and actualization. And, being mindful of the process of thought involved in translation can be helpful in understanding the purpose and role of transition in life; understanding, also, what it means to engage in conscious, constructive transition.

To engage in constructive transition is to take on what is presently stagnant and to change it so as to render it more alive. In terms of translation, to say that the original poem is presently stagnant does not necessarily mean that it no longer has pertinence or meaning to the modern audience, but rather that the modern audience does not read or speak Ancient Greek. Therefore, there is a need for the original to be translated; translated again and again for each generation. For the translated poem, unlike the original, is doomed to pass to another version while the original remains. And as long as there are people who are interested in historical literature, very literal translations will be produced. As Lowland put it, “I think that people who are really interested in poetry, and who have an historic sense, will do that work ... I believe firmly in new translations for every generation” (Lowland, 1989, p. 72).

It is important to accept the fact that creations will pass on and that the work that is done will one day be replaced or considered obsolete. But those ideas should not discourage translation. The fact that all things come to an end should not discourage action. On the contrary, passing should be embraced along with transition. Death promotes life, and life promotes death; it has always been this way. And as soon as that is realized, the nature of transition becomes clear. It becomes clear that everything I do or create, in the larger scope, disintegrates, changes, becomes something completely different for the future. But it is never destroyed. Therefore, in a metaphysical way, every action that is experienced by someone is experienced as a transitory action from the past. And all things are translated through perception and tinted by time, living, and dying.

In regard to how I take part in transition, I know that my body will fail me, that I will hurt someone I love, that I will experience something beautiful and ephemeral; and everyone in his or her own way takes on life and lets go. Of course, the process of passing is not easy. It is not easy to know that my health is diminishing, that my work will never be appreciated, that I don’t have the relationship that I want with my parents.

As the great timeline of the world becomes infinitely long, our individual lives become infinitely small to the point of disappearing. Perhaps there is not one

thing that can distinguish me from something that has disappeared.

ΕΝΝΕΑ

It has become important for me to understand that my actions in some way or another have consequences; and, from that, to begin to think about the relationship between action and thought. Simply, I can say that my actions do not always correspond to my thoughts, even though the majority of my reflective thinking hinges on how I react to certain situations. For me, for most of my life, it has been easy to rely on my intuition or natural wisdom about things. Adults or teachers would remark that I was wise beyond my years or mature in regard to my intellect. My years caught up with me, though. I stopped trying to work things out on an individual level. Instead I relied solely on gut responses, what felt right to do. I began to disregard consequences and rely on how I could apply myself quickly to any situation and appear calm and knowledgeable. I stopped thinking about my actions because I didn't think I needed to. Becoming older than my wisdom promoted the taking over of a careless way of life in which there was no regard for what was really happening. It didn't matter, because I was pleasing myself and my friends and lovers. I was receiving praise from nearly everyone. It was difficult to change because nothing in my own life encouraged change. Nothing until I began to reconcile my relationship with death.

I can barely take any of my experiences for granted while concerning myself with thoughts of death. I seem to wander between thinking well and ill of life. But tonight, after being in Irakleon for three days, I feel glad to be alive and glad to see people moving around me, moving into the cafés and bars as the sun sets behind the buildings. Couples are sitting in the open-air restaurants, and they seem happy to be there, and I feel part of a greater happiness. Groups of teenagers begin to take over the plaka and the steps of the closed library. No one is doing anything out of the ordinary, and that in itself is comforting because it is simple and good. Nothing here seems as if it should be any other way — this town and time seem correct. This moment and place I am experiencing is the moment and place that I am supposed to experience.

I feel lost in the crowd although I am alone. I think of this morning, and how I was so inflected and inward that I now don't recall meeting anyone or even what I did. Up to this point, I have been lost in my thoughts, trying to sort out what it means to die, to leave forever all that is physical. Perhaps it was a sort of acceptance of my situation that allowed me to feel

awake; perhaps it was the prick of the needle today at the hospital that finally said very clearly that all things follow into death with a struggle that is only superficial. I needed to stop worrying so much. The experiences that have pushed me in some direction have finally found me to be where they wanted me, in a place where I am aware of the fact that I can only change myself. I am the only one who can spiritually destroy me. Perhaps it is somewhat twisted that it took being away from home, being scared; it took a girl from Athens, watching my life fall apart at the mere thought of my own death, and recognizing my life, along with most everyone else's life, as being completely fucked up and ridiculous, to finally allow me to hear that I am weak, fragile, not different from anyone. I can suffice on my own, as we all can, but without knowing that everyone lives in a strange place with strange people, and then dies; it is pointless to do so.

By simply being aware of death, I enter into a larger room in which I can see a thousand generations around me all churning at their own deeds. Then I am presented with the option either to remain dumbfounded by the comparative smallness of my life or to begin contemplation, begin a real sort of contemplation that promotes life and growth.

Sometimes I feel as if I am looking at my life from a bird's eye view. I see myself sitting drunk in the Termini in Rome, eating a tomato in the park, walking in a crowd of people in downtown Athens. Then I realize that whatever simple thing it is that I'm doing is something that any human does... Now I'm lying on my side watching Neysa's face. Her breathing has become smooth and slow because she is sleeping. I realize that I am not capable of really loving her. I think that I should slough off this fake living that doesn't really commit to anything, query my motivations. Perhaps this reflective work is what I've always wanted to do, but have been too scared or distracted to take an initiating step.

Although I know that it is necessary to revamp my life, to enter into a period of transition, I do not know what to do. So I question my actions and motivations. Do I sleep with and date girls because I am insecure with myself? Am I scared of being alone? Do I inflate my ego by writing poems for attention or praise? For several weeks, I have been too scared to do anything, paranoid perhaps of falling into old thinking or habits that would return me to a destructive place. But thinking about changing only goes so far.

ΕΝΤΕΚΑ

I had accumulated thousands of years of experience in a few short years, but the experience was wasted because I had no need of it. I had already been crucified and marked by the cross; I had been born free of the need to suffer — and yet I knew no other way to struggle forward than to repeat the drama. All my intelligence was against it. Suffering is futile, my intelligence told me over and over, but I went on suffering *voluntarily*. (Miller, 1997, p. 296)

Today, in almost every way, is exactly like yesterday. I opened my eyes to the room filled with sunlight filtered through a white curtain. From here I can see the curtain filling with air and then emptying, back and forth. The door to the balcony is open and I can hear the voices of

the family across the street. A woman is calling to a little boy. A car starts and I can hear it changing gears as it travels down the road. It's as if I gradually transferred from sleeping to being completely lucid and sensitive to this small world here in Irakleon. The foot of my bed is near the open balcony so I lie at the opposite end of the mattress so that the breeze will cool my face. This bed has been so worn down. I also sleep in this position because the permanent body indentation of hundreds of travelers caused me to wake up with a sore back.

The four other beds in this room are empty now because it is probably near ten o'clock. I remember last night, two men from New Zealand arrived after midnight while I was already lying down, watching the curtain move, illuminated by the streetlight. But those two are gone now; moved on to Xenia or another city, or perhaps they went early to Knossos or some other tourist sites. I've been here for a week and I haven't left this city. Perhaps this speaks of my current emotional or psychological state, but I am also quite tired of moving from location to location. Only two other people whom I have met in this hostel have stayed for more than one night. I imagine where other people are traveling to or coming from. Most everyone who passes through is on a similar route, which involves hitting the main archaeological sites, the best beaches, a bar, and then the next town.

I suppose I'm glad there are people touring that way, choosing to experience something proven. Although for me, I like to stay in a city for a week or two if I enjoy it, so that I may have the opportunity for a more tangible experience of the place, how the people who live there move around. I like to be more familiar with the streets and small shops. I like hearing the family across the street arguing or playing, or hearing the mother sing in the morning. It seems to me that the people who stay here in Irakleon for one night only usually miss those things because they are constantly thinking of where they will be going next or they are reminiscing over where they've been. When I move on too quickly without giving myself time to process my situation or location, I am never really present to what's around me. But, I suppose that different people want different things from life, looking to different epistemologies to promote change.

I am realizing more and more that I do not wish to be involved with those fleeting experiences that I never pay attention to or appreciate. It never seemed worth it to me to go to the fountain in the middle of the plaka, take a picture, and hurry on. Every day on my way to the library or to the farmer's market I walk by that fountain which has been shut off for years. It is important to me because it became part of my life. But, I should note that many things are part of my life and I don't recognize them. What is it about this particular fountain, or that particular tree growing alone near my street that causes pause? What is it about my thinking that calls my attention to evaluating my motivations in life? Very generally I can say that I want to be present in my life, aware of how I interact with my surroundings, aware of why I make these choices that can either create or destroy me.

The maid comes in the room and says, "oh, sygnomi." She says some more in Greek that I don't understand, but I know she wants me out of this room for the day so she can clean. This happens every day.

"Endaxi." I go upstairs to the manager who now calls me Philippos, and pay him for tonight's bed.

"How long do you stay here?"

I shrug, "not sure."

He looks up from his desk, "that's ok, come see me tomorrow morning, I'll keep a bed for you."

I go back down to the room and get my bag with my journal and translation material. I also take some water and a few dried figs I purchased at the market. The library is not far from here, and on the way there I get to pass several busy outdoor restaurants, at one of which the waiter let me leave and come back to pay later because I forgot my wallet. I pass that large circular marble fountain with the floral design carved in the sides. A small cart-like train fills with tourists for a ride around the city. A bus headed to Knossos passes by and I wonder if the driver has placed Orthodox icons on the dash or if he is listening to traditional Greek music on the radio.

I walk up three flights of marble stairs to get to the reading room of the library. I check out a copy of Herodotus' *Histories* in English to use as a crutch if I get stuck in my translating, because I've only been studying Greek for two years. I move over to a table by the window and lay out my work area. For most of my time in the reading room, I look over the Greek or make a vocabulary list, but overall, I don't get much done. I suppose that I can attribute my lack of motivation to not being able to really connect to Herodotus in the way that I have been able to connect with some Greek poets, such as Mimnermus or Philodemos. Their language seems near to me in a way so that I can easily hear how the tonal qualities would be reproduced in English.

I begin to tail off into thinking about *how* to translate a poem and if it is appropriate for me to do so. Oftentimes, I feel that I do not know enough about the process or about Ancient Greek itself for me to do justice to the original poem, or that I do not have the necessary connection. In the introduction to Stephen Mitchell's translation of *Genesis*, Mitchell comments that he had reservations about translating *Genesis* because he did not necessarily agree with everything that is written in that book of the Bible, "much of *Genesis* spoke to me without intimacy, in the tones of a stranger; much of it didn't speak to me at all... I soon realized that this was a matter of affinity. If I could find even one passage in *Genesis* where I had [a] kind of umbilical connection... that might be enough" (Mitchell, 1996, p. i). Perhaps by having a sort of umbilical connection with a work it is possible to accept the invitation to translate with a sense of integrity. And by referring to integrity I mean to say that I feel that I am imposing or I find it difficult to translate a poem into a working English poem if I am not invited by the poem. And, if I feel uninvited because of my current state of mind or because of my linguistic unpreparedness, whatever

work I do will be and sound forced.

If I am honest with myself, though, I will say that I am not getting any work done because my mind is not in this room. I can only think about being in Paros with Neysa, or being in Paris with Haans, or back home in Lexington. It seems odd that I miss Neysa, considering that I desire to change my life because of her; considering that my life is already in a state of flux because of her. But I would say that I miss being with someone calm like Neysa, someone who doesn't seem to be put at a loss by traveling. I don't always think that I am put at a loss by being here, though. I am often comforted by realizing that my life is in a state of transition now, and that I should enjoy this time of awareness and changing. It seems strange to me that whenever I sit down and start translating, I stray and begin to think about my past and how I would like to change my life so that I may preserve the things that I love about myself while learning how to cope and deal with my failures. Very simply, I want to love and appreciate myself and my current location in life, and I feel that I can do so by being conscious of how I engage in transition and grow.

The changes that involve me, the conscious choices that for the first time have conscious consequences, continually encourage me to meditate on translation. The act of translating continually encourages me to enter into a state of transition in my life. So perhaps there is a prime mover involved both in translation and in transition; a motivator that doesn't suggest or encourage but is like a constant stream involving everything whether or not it is conscious of its involvement. To me, death is that mover. Both creation and destruction, through transition, are inherently rooted in death because they are part of life, part of the psychic balance between all things in conflict. In a practical sense, death often pushes me to change, to make amends for carelessness, to exist and be present in my "one wild and precious life" (c.f., "A Summer's Day," Oliver, 1990).

I often find myself contemplating death. But, it is important for me to note that I often disguise laziness as contemplation. I may spend a whole day mulling over dying and thinking that because everything will pass, what's the point of trying and failing? Or, I often get so caught up in the contemplation itself that nothing further happens. If I do proceed from my false contemplation through laziness, I can only enter into a cycle of passivity in which I become careless with others and with myself. This floating along in the current of death allows for no sort of agency, and agency is not desired. The only way out of this passive cycle is through some opportunity that arises for transition, a longing for presence, or perhaps a longing

to live sincerely and to create. In that case, it is necessary for me to re-evaluate my thoughts on death and to enter a state of contemplation that is sincere; contemplation that is based on hard work, self actualization, and honesty.

From that point, I begin to question my motivations for my actions. If my motivations are centered on self-promotion disregarding anything else (or in the case of translation specifically, self-promotion without regard to what's going on in the original poem), I can only follow on a path that leads to irresponsibility, which then leads back to the cycle of passivity through carelessness. But if my motivations are based on the promotion of life and growth, I follow a path of agency in which I become more aware of the relationship between action and consequence. And through that relationship, creation and destruction, as a pair, come into being. And they both point to transition (or translation), which as before, is rooted in death. Perhaps it is both ironic and sad that the life of passivity and agency are both loops of sorts, but it can only be this way, otherwise, there would be no growth or opportunity. I am constantly in danger of choosing to be careless and destroying my life. Just as I am constantly capable of choosing a life that engages transition in a way that refuses to retrofit, in a way that can promote presence in thought and action by seeking to grow.

The choices that I make are inevitably forced to own up to the thought that created them, and to the action that will follow. As in translation, the linguistic choices that are made must own up to the original poem and be choices similar to what the original poet would have made if he were writing in the translator's tongue and during the translator's time. "Attempting to preserve the tone of the original in the translation is oftentimes not a quality that can be aimed at, it is a function of the writer's sincerity and it arises on its own in a translation if you have listened deeply enough to the original text and at the same time been faithful to the genius of the English language" (Mitchell, 1996, p. iii).

With each poem that is translated we learn more and more how to translate, and possibly more about the range and beauty of English. Oftentimes, translation is approached as a discipline for learning how to write and hear. For example, Merwin said, "I started translating partly as a discipline, hoping that the process might help me to learn to write. [Ezra] Pound was one of the first to recommend the practice to me... The work of translation did teach, in the sense of forming, and making available, ways of hearing" (Merwin, 1979, foreword). The linguistic knowledge gained by translating is secondary compared to the life knowledge gained by engaging in a practice that promotes the understanding of thought, action, and consequence. The translator's ability to listen and learn from his or her predecessors is also strengthened because he or she attempts to embrace the past and those who have died.

"All writers learn from the dead. As long as you continue to write, you continue to explore the work of writers who have preceded you; you also feel judged and held to account by them" (Atwood, 2002, p. 178). This is the point where the responsibility of the translator is the most clear, and that is to translate for the purpose of preserving the integrity of the poem, the original poet, the dead, and of course, the translator himself.

For the Bibliography, see the on-line version of this article at www.uky.edu/kaleidoscope/fall2003.