

Kostas Palamas, *The Twelve Words of the Gypsy*. Translated with an introduction by Frederic Will. Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska Press, 1964. Pp. xxi and 205.

Kostas Palamas is one of the major poets of modern Greece and *The Twelve Words of the Gypsy* is among his major works. Consequently, the translation of this work into English — long ago a *magnum desideratum* — would have been a major event for the English-speaking lovers of modern Greek literature. Unfortunately, the translation of Professor Frederic Will is a philological and poetical crime, a real disaster for Palamas and modern Greek literature. The translator displays ignorance of common Greek words, of basic grammatical and syntactical phenomena of modern Greek language, and ignorance of Greek life and traditions. The result is a mistranslation from cover to cover, complete misunderstanding of the meaning of the poem in its parts and as a whole, annihilation of its artistic values, and the eventual stultification of Palamas' masterpiece. I have compiled a full list of Professor Will's mistranslations numbering in the hundreds, but it is too long to be published here.

The mistranslation begins with the title of the book: *The Twelve WORDS of the Gypsy* for 'Ο Δωδεκάλογος τοῦ Γύφτου. The Greek word λόγος with its many meanings is, of course, very difficult to be translated always properly in any language, but to render it as "word" here is the least proper choice. Palamas himself in his Prologue to the poem states clearly that he uses the word λόγος as "subdivision," "part" — or, as he tells us in his *Kings' Flute* where he again uses the same term under similar circumstances, "rhapsody," "hymn" (like the Homeric hymns), "ode." But this is a minor error compared with the mistanslation of hundreds of words in the poem.

Hundreds of mistranslated words, recurring again and again, result in as many misunderstood passages. Hundreds of other passages are misunderstood because of omissions of verses, additions of unnecessary words (especially possessive pronouns, and adjectives — often, the wrong ones), innumerable grammatical and syntactical mistakes, and distortions of names and meanings. The translator often changes the subject of a verb wrongly to an object, or vice-versa. Also he often changes wrongly persons, tenses, moods. Commas are added where they are not needed, or omitted where they are necessary for clear and precise meaning. In fact, all the above changes are unnecessary and detrimental, because

they are not the kind of "liberties" that one naturally takes when one translates from one language to another in order to make the translated text smooth, clear, and intelligible in that new language. Quite the opposite: they becloud, twist, distort, and stultify the passages in which they are introduced.

As for the so-called "legitimate liberties" that one is allowed to take when translating from one language into another, — well, they are so many here, so unnecessary, improper, and absurd, that most of them are really illegitimate licenses that distort the meaning even more. I am not referring to such liberties as using "state" instead of "city," "joy" instead of "grace," "true" instead of "good," "camps" instead of "castles," "splendid" instead of "beautiful," "nails" instead of "chains," "parks" instead of "paradises," "theologies" instead of "religions," "fidelity" instead of "faith," "truth" instead of "knowledge," "knowledge" instead of "science," and hundreds of others. These are bad enough in themselves and most of them are unnecessary and unwarranted in the passages they occur. Rather I am referring to such "liberties" as the following: The common adjective *μεγάλος* "large, big, great," is almost always rendered as "giant," and so we have not only "giant cities," "giant lands," "giant roads," "giant staffs of the shepherds," but even "giant eyes of the chilfren!" The simple "my white brothers" is rendered "brilliant brother stars," "Beatiful Ones" becomes "Graces," "spirit" becomes "breath," "everlasting" becomes "total," "demon" becomes "spirit-force," "valley" becomes "pass" — and hundreds of similar others. And what, pray thee, mean "tireless palace," "my *private* king," "ambidextrous trees," your hands are "a gracing greater *than from* wings," "margaret - stones?"

There are hundreds of other mistranlations which, together with the hundreds of ludicrous mistranslations of simple words, have made the great poem of Palamas not only unintelligible but also foolish. The crime perpetrated on Palamas is monstrous. The *corpus delicti* must be immediately withdrawn from circulation. It is the least that should be done.

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