

Kostas Palamas, *The Twelve Words of the Gipsy*, translated by Theodore Ph. Stephanides and George C. Katsimbalis, London, 1974, pp. 194. Printed in Athens by F. Constantinidis & C. Michalas, Panepistimiou 39.

Though more than thirty years have passed since Kostas Palamas's death in 1943, and though most of his verse today sounds dated by contemporary aesthetic standards and philosophical trends, there are few literary historians and critics in Greece proper who will readily admit that his achievement and reputation as a poet of the Greek nation have been surpassed, or even equalled, by others so far in Greece.

This claim may surprise friends of modern Greek poetry in the English-speaking world, where the names of Constantine Cavafy, Nikos Kazantzakis, and George Seferis are well-known, and their works widely accepted as the greatest exemplars of the modern Greek Muse. This phenomenon is due, primarily, to two reasons. First, the very nature and quantity—not quality—of Palamas's verse; second the poor quality of the earlier English translations of his works, that is before the publication of the present volume.

Kazantzakis was fortunate to have found a poet-translator of the calibre and dexterity of Kimon Friar, whose masterful rendition of *The Odyssey: A Modern Sequel* (1958) made Kazantzakis's fame as a Greek poet known to dozens of thousands of English-speaking readers. Similarly, the brilliant work of Edmund Keeley, Philip Sherrard, George Savidis, and Walter Kaiser—plus a few others—succeeded in literally popularizing in international poetry circles Cavafy's eccentric verse and Seferis's esoteric lyricism, as their fine translations easily superseded earlier and rather inadequate versions of their poetry by others—with the exception of Kimon Friar's.

Until 1974 Palamas, unfortunately, had not fared well in this respect, and although the Greeks had strongly supported his candidacy for the Nobel Prize twice, his fame failed to spread beyond the rather narrow confines of Greece. Harvard classicist Aristides Phourides published the first book-length translations of Palamas's works into English: *Life Immovable* (Ἀσύλευτη Ζωή), *A Hundred Voices* (Ἑκατὸ Φωνές), and *Royal Blossom* (Τρισεύγην), in verse, plus the short story *A Man's Death* (Θάνατος Παλληκαριοῦ) in 1919, 1921, 1923, and 1934 respectively¹. Phourides's honest translations, however, are too literal, thus colorless and stilted. The late publisher of Chicago's *Athene*, Demetrios A. Michalaros, published in 1930 his metrical version of *The Grave* (Ὁ Τάφος); but his good work went almost unnoticed, as did a few more scattered attempts by others.

During the last decade, two more classicists, Professor Frederic Will in the United States, and Professor Georges Thomson in England, attempted to generate interest in Palamas by translating, separately, his two great lyrical epics: *Ὁ Δωδεκάλογος τοῦ Γύφτου* and *ἡ Φλογέρα τοῦ Βασιλιᾶ*. The first was attempted by both scholars, the second by Dr.

1. Kostas Palamas, *Life Immovable, First Part*. Translated by Aristides E. Phourides. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1919. *A Hundred Voices, and Other Poems, From the Second Part of «Life Immovable»*. Translated with an Introduction and Notes by Aristides E. Phourides. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1921. Also, *Royal Blossom*, Translated by Aristides E. Phourides. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1923. And, *A Man's Death*. Translated by Aristides E. Phourides, Foreword by D. C. Hesseling. Athens, 1934.

Will only². Much has been written about Will's and Thomson's translations by reviewers, including myself, the scholarly consensus being that their ambitious efforts resulted in utterly unpoetic, prosaic, and, in the case of Dr. Will, grossly inaccurate mistranslations. In effect, these two major poems had remained untranslated³.

All these books, plus a few more lyrics translated by Rae Dalven and others, represent roughly one-fifth of Palamas's total output as poet, prose writer, and critic. Thus, quantitatively speaking, only a small fraction of this prolific author's astonishing contribution to modern Greek letters has been made available in English, and that in unsatisfactory translations mostly. By contrast, Cavafy's and Seferis's complete poetical works have appeared in fine English translations; and the bulk alone of Kazantzakis's colossal epic, plus the translations of most of his novels and several of his plays, constitute a rather impressive literary corpus for the English readership of modern Greek literature.

Up to now Palamas's poetry has steadfastly refused to yield to English translators. His highly lyrical language, enriched with elements from folk-song diction, contemporary sophisticated idiom, Byzantine, Hellenistic, and even classical Greek verbal expressions, plus his Homer-like fashioning of numerous compound adjectives and nouns (cf. *περδίκωστήθη, ἐρωτόπαθη, νυχτοφέροντας*), had created unsurmountable obstacles to all manner of well-meaning translators. His subject-matter, imagery, allusions, and references—largely deriving from the long and inexhaustible cultural tradition and history of contemporary Greece, Byzantium, and ancient Hellas—similarly had posed tremendous problems of transposition to translators who acted only as linguistic interpreters.

In his subjective epic *The Twelve Words of the Gipsy*, first published in 1907, Palamas presents his nomadic hero as the individuated representative of his race, and as a dynamic symbol of human restlessness and freedom from responsibility and tradition. As he explains in his «Preface», Palamas identifies with the *persona* of the Gipsy, and at times he, the narrator's own voice, and the poet's identity seem to merge into one consciousness—the Gipsy's. This Dionysian character owes much of his conceptualization to Palamas's knowledge of Nietzsche's theory of the Superman, as decades later Kazantzakis's own colorful Zorbas was to become an exponent—in part at least—of similarly Nietzschean influences. Both characters, however, despite their pronounced «internationalism», are in many respects typically Greek or Greek-like, both valuing their freedom and individuality above anything else. In the poem, this romantic attitude of the Gipsy has ominous implications for the declining cosmopolitan Greek Empire of Constantinople. The pleasure-seeking Emperor, complacent in his pursuit of self-gratification, remains indifferent to the steady rise of the Turks (c. 1350). The Gipsy experiences the two seemingly antithetical forms of Hellenism

2. Kostas Palamas, *The Twelve Words of the Gipsy*, Translated with an Introduction by Frederic Will. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1964; also, *The King's Flute*. Translated with an Introduction by Frederic Will. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1967. And, Kostas Palamas, *The Twelve Lays of the Gipsy*. Translated, with an Introduction, by George Thomson. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1969.

3. See reviews of these translations by Dr. Costas Proussis in the *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* XII (1967), 208-212; and in *Balkan Studies*, VIII (1968), 214-5. Also by Dr. M. Byron Raizis in *Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature*, 18 (1969), 86-89; in *Philological Quarterly*, XLIX, 2 (April, 1970), 278-282; and in *Neo-Hellenika*, I (1970), 215-219.

—pagan and Christian— and senses their eventual fusion into one, into a new culture combining elements from both. Thus Palamas, through his exotic mouthpiece, does not hesitate to prophesy death as well as a future resurrection. In this particular respect the poet symbolically accounts for the historical rise and fall of Hellenism, for the contemporary adversities of his nation (the 1897 defeat), and the inevitable racial survival of Hellenism in a new phase and form.

All these and much more are synthesized by Palamas's compelling imagination into a kind of artistic expression —by means of lyrical philosophising— of his anxiety *vis-à-vis* the historical reality and destiny of modern Greece. There is no doubt that Palamas succeeded in becoming the poetic spokesman of his nation's complex cultural consciousness and awareness, perhaps much more effectively than Tennyson, Longfellow, and Whitman ever became in their times and cultures.

Palamas's proverbial virtuosity in versification is triumphantly manifested in the numerous purple passages, varied stanzaic forms, rhyme schemes, and even free verse that he utilized in the composition of *The Twelve Words of the Gipsy*. Often rhetorical, and at times even verbose, his lines flow spontaneously and smoothly, always creating and maintaining melodious effects, as moods and tones shift, and rhythmic patterns change in endless succession.

It is exactly this astonishing, though traditional and conventional, skill in Palamas's art that had proven to be the Lydian stone in the translations of professors Will, Thomson, Phoutrides, Dalven and others. It is exactly in that area —successful transposition of rhythms, measures, poetic form and feeling— that the latest translators, Dr. Stephanides and Mr. Katsimbalis, have proven their skill and worth. To translate Palamas's verse one has to be a poet in his own right, plus, of course, quite an expert in modern Greek language, literature, and culture.

Stephanides and Katsimbalis are not novices in the field of English translation of Palamas poetry. Prior to the publication of their present book, they had published together two pamphlets with Palamas lyrics in their metrical versions: *Poems* (London, 1925), and *Three Poems* (London, 1969). These good translations, however, received little attention by comparatists and other literary scholars, mostly because they were published privately, and thus their promotion was quite limited. Stephanides, who is a retired London physician with several books of good English lyrics to his credit, and Katsimbalis, the famous *Colossus of Maroussi* of Henry Miller, and prolific writer, critic, editor, and reviewer in Athens for almost half a century, have now completed their English version of the *Ascræus* too, which, we would like to hope, should be published sooner than other Palamas texts.

A comparison of random passages of the Stephanides-Katsimbalis translation of *The Twelve Words of the Gipsy* —as they have rendered the Greek word *logos*: canto, lay; plus the New Testament connotation— to those of others, reveals their strong poetic feeling and impressive ability to transpose Palamas's poem as a poem in English, not merely as a text, or literary document of sorts. Palamas opens his poem with the stanza:

Τ' ἀξεδιάλυτα σκοτάδια
τὰ χαράζει μιὰ λιγνὴ λευκότη
νυχτοφέρνοντας καὶ αὐτή·
καὶ εἶτανε τοῦ νοῦ μου ἡ πρώτη
χαρυνγή.

(Ἀθήναι: Μπίρης, σελ. 303)

G. Thomson's prosaic version reduces the quintet to . . . three rhymeless lines, thus violating its poetic substance and form:

A faint glimness marks the impenetrable darkness
Still full of night,
It was my mind's first dawn. (p. 43)

F. Will's slightly more artistic rendition mistranslates the word ἀξεδιάλυτα, among other weaknesses:

Indissoluble shadows
one thin light invades them
swaddled itself in night;
it was my mind's first
dawn. (p. 1)

Now, this is how Stephanides and Katsimbalis skillfully and creatively restore the poetic element of the original, without having to resort to free adaptation, «imitation» à la Robert Lowell, or *anaplasis*:

Through the interwoven shadows
Crept an evanescent gleam
Mingled still with night;
And it was my mind's own dawning
Of the light. (p. 25)

Also, here is their version of the famous Palamas quatrain in the beginning of Word III. Notice how well Katsimbalis and Stephanides have captured the rhythm and harmony of the Greek:

Περδικόστηθη Τσιγγάνα
ὦ μαγεύτρα, ποὺ μιλεῖς
τὰ μεσάνυχτα πρὸς τ' ἄστρα
γλῶσσα προσταγῆς, (σελ. 329)

Partridge-breasted Gipsy woman
O enchantress! You who stand
Speaking with the stars of midnight
In a language of command, (p. 55)

The above rendition virtually eclipses the following unpoetic and awkward ones by the two classisists:

Partridge-breasted gypsy,
magician, you who speak
at midnight to the stars
the commandments of the tongue, (F. Will, p. 36)

and

O Gipsy woman, full-breasted as a partridge,
You witch, who speak a language of command (G. Thomson, p. 61)

Equal skill is exhibited by Katsimbalis and Stephanides in their rendering of rhyming couplets, ottava rimas, sestets, free verse etc. For instance, the epigrammatic couplet in the beginning of the Final Word, «To A Woman»:

Τὰ δυνατά σου χέρια τ' ἄξια, τὰ κοσμικά,
χάρισμα πιὸ μεγάλο κι ἀπ' τὰ φτερά. (σελ. 445)

Your hands so strong and deft at homely things
Are gifts more precious than a pair of wings. (p. 185)

Thomson arbitrarily twisted and compressed this couplet into . . . one long and pedestrian line of many syllables: «Your strong, capable, skilled hands are a gift greater than wings;» (p. 141). And F. Will in vain arranged his prose to look like a couplet:

Your worldly, worthy, doing hands,
a gracing greater than from wings. (p. 196)

Dr. Theodore Stephanides and Mr. George Katsimbali wrote no introduction of their own, and let Kostas Palamas himself address his readers by means of his eloquent «Preface». They provided, however, a four-page «Glossary and Notes», plus a brief but precise «Analysis of the Poem» (pp. 21-24).

Let us hope that this excellent English translation of *The Twelve Words of the Gipsy* (1974) will help restore Palamas's reputation as a great visionary poet of modern Greece, and will persuade a serious academic press to present his beautiful and sonorous poetry to the English-speaking world.

Southern Illinois University at Carbondale

M. BYRON RAIZIS

Dimitrie Cantemir, *Extracts from «The History of the Ottoman Empire»*, eds., Alexandru Dușu and Paul Cernovodeanu, Bucharest, Association Internationale d'Études du Sud-Est Européen, 1973, pp. 359 + 30 plates.

This handsomely bound and printed volume is a generous gift to the world of scholarship on the occasion of the three hundredth anniversary of Dimitrie Cantemir's birth. Not only have two noted Romanian scholars reprinted the lengthy notes and «The Life of Demetrius Cantemir, Prince of Moldavia» from N. Tindal's London-translated English edition of *Incrementa atque decrementa aulae Ottomanicae* (1734-1735), but they have arranged the notations by theme, provided a wealth of useful explanatory material, added bibliography and essays of their own, and presented a fitting tribute in the form of a «Foreword» by Professor Halil Inalcik, President of the A.I.E.S.S.E.S. But even further, what makes this book so pleasant to browse through are the thirty plates, some from Cantemir's original sketches of Ottoman sultans, some from other European and Asian sources, illustrating in both black and white and in colour the rich exoticism of this eighteenth century Romanian Humanist's masterpiece.

If there were still need to justify Cantemir's place in the gallery of European Humanism—and Dr. Cernovodeanu's essay and bibliography of works on the Moldavian prince show that at such a late date the argument would be superfluous—the register of «XVIIIth Century Echoes» and Prof. Dușu's «Introduction» would be sufficient. Clearly the task of scholarship now is not to justify but to integrate, to examine more closely the interpenetrations of Humanist ideas and ideals, as well as their dynamic growth, in South East Europe, tracing the three main avenues of approach which seem to cross over the three