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A Century of Greek Poetry 1900-2000 (review)

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Peter Bien, Peter Constantine, Edmund Keeley, Karen Van Dyck, eds., *A Century of Greek Poetry 1900–2000,* Bilingual Edition. River Vale NJ: Cosmos Publishing 2004. Pp xxviii + 1993. $59.95.

In the last few years three anthologies of Greek literature in English translation have been published of which this is the latest. The first, published in England and edited by David Ricks (*Modern Greek Writing: An Anthology in English Translation*, London: Peter Owen 2003), includes both poetry and fiction, and covers Greek writing since Independence. The other two, published in the U.S.A., concentrate on poetry in the twentieth century. The first of them (*An Anthology of Modern Greek Poetry,* edited by Nanos Valaoritis and Thanasis Maskaleris, New Jersey: Talisman House 2003), includes translations of poets arranged in thematic categories (Symbolist Forerunners, Traditional Neo-Symbolists, Mainstream Modernists, The Surrealists, Modernist Existentialists, Left-Wing Poets, The Avant-Garde, Neo-Modernists, Neo-Surrealists) and provides brief introductions by Nanos Valaoritis to each of the poets included.

A Century of Greek Poetry 1900–2000 includes a total of 109 poets and 445 of their poems. This is the longest of all three anthologies and the most wide-ranging collection of twentieth-century Greek poetry. The poets are arranged in chronological order, starting with C. P. Cavafy (born 1863) and ending with Ioulita Iliopoulou (born 1965). Paradoxically, Kostis Palamas who, though born four years earlier than Cavafy, oulived him by ten, is not included in the volume. The fact that the editors could "not find enough contemporary translations of quality to do his work justice" is surely not an acceptable reason to omit such an important poet from a project of this magnitude. Some other omissions from the anthology include poets such as Tellos Agras, Aris Alexandrou, Melpo Axioti, Nikos Alexis Aslanoglou, Yannis Dallas, Ioannis Gryparis, Kleitos Kyrou, Hektor Kaknavatos, Dionysis Kapsalis, Yorgos Koropoulis, Vyron Leontaris, Kostas Montis, D. P. Papaditsas, Kostas Stergiopoulos, Yannis Varveris. Instead poets such as Vassilis Dimitrakos, Ignatis Houvardas, Liana Sakelliou-Schultz, Constance Tagopoulos, Christos Tsiamis, Billie Vemi, Ioanna Zervou are included while Takis Papatsonis is represented by two poems and Kostas Karyotakis is represented by the same number of poems (all from his satires, plus Preveza) as Christos Laskaris. Poets of the 1970s and 1980s get more than their fair share in this anthology while women poets are generously represented in the volume. Though each anthology reflects the tastes of its editors or translators and disagreements over inclusions or exclusions will never cease, it has to be said that this is the most comprehensive anthology of twentieth-century Greek poetry in English and the best mirror of the translating talent available in English for Greek poetry.

Poets are represented by between one (e.g. Alexander Baras, Pandelis Prevelakis) and twenty poems (Cavafy), but poets are given no introduction nor are the dates of publication given for each translated poem. Had this been done, it would have been easier to follow the development of poets such as Kostas Varnalis, who is represented in the anthology mostly by his early poems like his sonnet "Orestes," published in 1914 when the poet was under the influence of Parnassianism and before his adoption of Marxist ideas. Without such guidance

the reader might find comparing his early rather idealistic, antiquarian and lyrical poems ("Orestes," "Aphrodite," "The Chosen One," "Alcibiades") all published before 1920 with his later satirical, political and even angry poems such as "Jungle" (1951) and "Catechism" (c.1965) a confusing experience. This confusion is likely to be compounded by the fact that his poems are not always printed in chronological order with "Magdalene" from *The Burning Light* (1922) appearing before earlier poems. Some sort of explanatory gloss in an introductory note would have helped elucidate the transformation of his poetry after the second decade of the twentieth century.

The aims of the anthology are not always spelled out clearly. Karen Van Dyck's claim in her introductory note that the aim of the anthology is to make "available to an English-speaking audience that which is most Greek and most different from English" seems to be contradicted by her subsequent statement in the same paragraph that the anthology is "more the expression of a particular relationship between Greek and American letters than a representative selection of twentieth-century Greek poetry." Though apparently intended for "an American audience unschooled in Greek orthography," this bilingual edition undermines the aim of the editors to "make the foreign accountable to the familiar" and might prove unappealing to a general audience due to its bulk.

The four editors are all themselves dedicated and leading translators from Greek and other languages (Peter Constantine), but the unsung hero of their anthology is Kimon Friar. Several of his translations (edited by Matthew Jennett) are included in the volume demonstrating his long commitment to translating Modern Greek poetry. The fact that some of his translations date back several decades (e.g. Kazantzakis's *The Odyssey: A Modern Sequel* [1958]), seems at odds with the claim of one of the editors that certain poets were left out because enough contemporary translations could not be found. If the aim of this anthology was to present fresh English translations of Greek poets, then new translations should have been commissioned. While reprints of Friar's volumes of translations: *Modern Greek Poetry* (1973) and *Contemporary Greek Poetry* (1985) would be welcome, the anthology cannot claim to be at the cutting edge while remaining in thrall to the past.

On the other hand, the anthology offers a good opportunity to compare translation practices in view of the number of translators involved and the fact that some poets included in the volume have been translated by more than one translator. That Nikos Fokas's poem "Ode to a Coat Hanger" required the joint services of four translators and one poet (Stathis Gourgouris) translated his own poetry, including the poem "In the Manner of S.G.," might be noted among the curiosities of the volume. Considering the number of translators who have contributed to this anthology, a list of their names would have been helpful.

This is indeed an elegant volume, apparently first planned as two to judge from Peter Bien's reference to two volumes in his Introduction (a slip not corrected in proof reading). However, notwithstanding a few lines by Karen van Dyck in her introductory note, a more detailed note on or more consistency in the transliteration of names would have been helpful. Sometimes χ is transliterated as ch (Christianopoulos, Chouliaras, Christos Laskaris) and sometimes as h (Hatzilazarou, Sahtouris, Hatzopoulos, Haralambidis) and φ as ph (Korphis)

and f (Nikiforos, Frantzi and Fokas). This inconsistency results in some poets being listed under Ch and others under H with no cross-references in the alphabetical index of poets. First names too can be transliterated differently e.g. Yannis Kondos but Yiannis Patilis, George Themelis but Yorgos Sarandaris (Sarantaris on p. 988), Alexander (Baras and Matsas) and not Alexandros. The reasons for the different transliterations could have been fully explained in each case and details of any English translation(s) available in volume form for each poet should have been given. The name of the poet referred to here as Pascalis (which should be either Paschalis or Pashalis) definitely needs correcting in the next edition.

The publication of such volumes raises the question as to whether anthologies are still the best way to introduce the literature of a country to a foreign audience. And from this overarching question others flow: whether to include fewer poets with a larger number of poems or more poets with fewer poems; is a thematic arrangement preferable to a chronological one? Can themed anthologies such as the recent one on Greek fantasy writing (*The Daedalus Book of Greek Fantasy*, edited & translated by David Connolly, 2004) appeal more to an international audience? Indeed are anthologies popular with the general public or simply intended for an academic audience? Whatever the answers to these questions are, the anthology *A Century of Greek Poetry 1900–2000* will be a valuable introduction to Modern Greek poetry for years to come.

A Century of Greek Poetry 1900–2000 is intended as a celebration of poetic creativity, making the contrast, as Peter Bien does in his Introduction, between the predominantly technological American genius and the irrepressibly artistic Greek genius. It succeeds in presenting a panorama of Modern Greek poetry of the twentieth century, introducing a number of virtually unknown poets to a wider Anglophone readership and offering readers some very fine translations by a wide range of translators on both sides of the Atlantic. Despite its bulk, this is an anthology which would certainly stimulate interest in modern Greek poetry and whet readers' appetite for more in a "society more excited by engineering than by literature."

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Vangelis Calotychos, *Modern Greece: A Cultural Poetics*. New York: Berg. 2004. Pp. xii + 334. $84.95 hardback, $28.95 paper.

As the author himself points out, this is a book informed by a passionate neohellenism. The "statues," it suggests, or at least such is my reading, should be rounded up and placed where they belong: in the museum. Not to be forgotten or ignored—museums are, after all, often visited—but not to be allowed to circulate freely among the living and dominate the present either. The "statues" stand for the idealised image of classical Greece invented in Europe in the