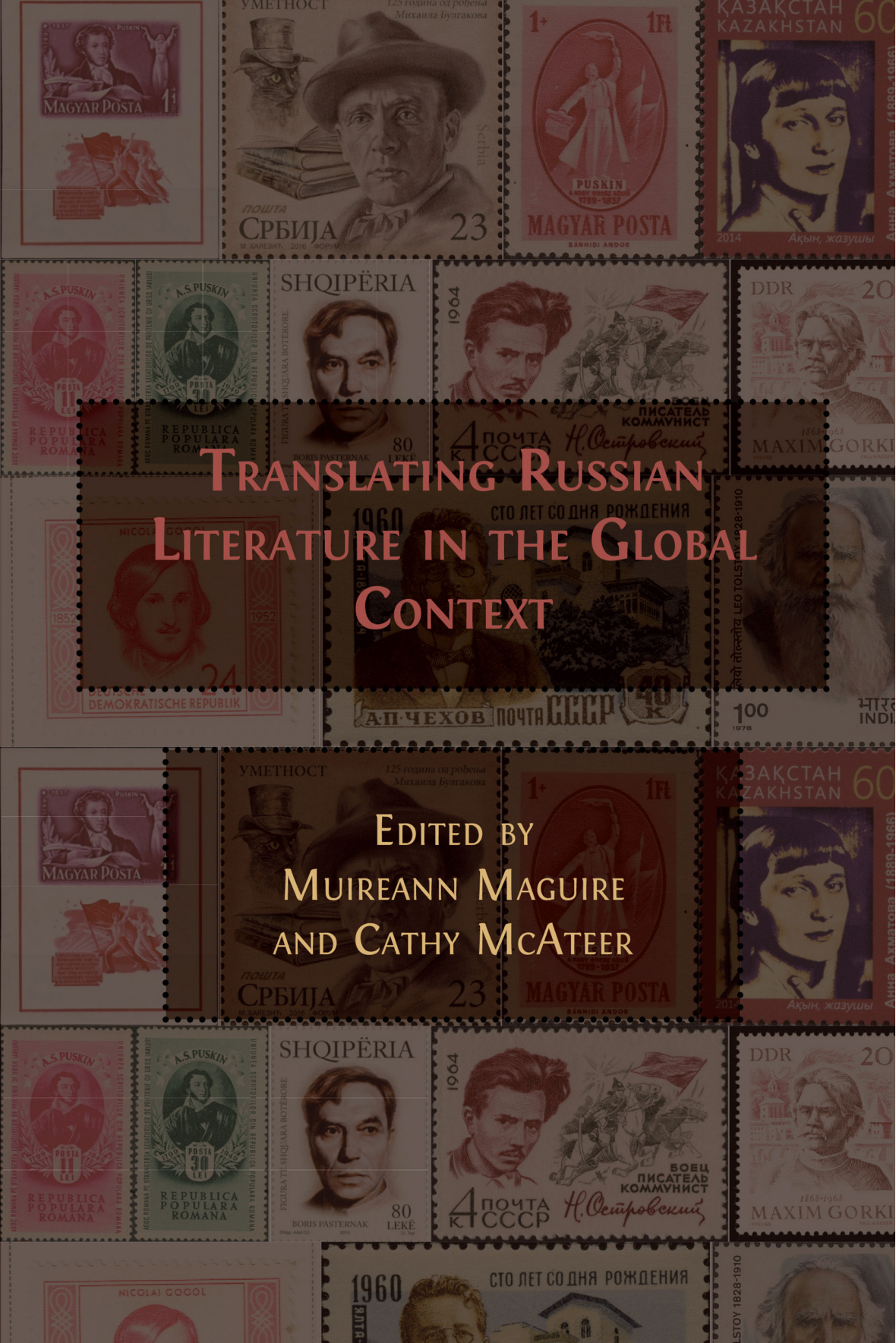

Translating Russian Literature in the Global Context

Edited by
Muireann Maguire
and Cathy McAteer

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Greece

The Reception of Russian and Soviet Literature in Interwar and Postwar Greece

Niovi Zampouka

The Greek reception of Russophone literature during the twentieth century has been mainly restricted to two categories of literature: the most prominent nineteenth-century classics and the classics of Socialist Realism. In this chapter, I will attempt a historical overview of the main stages, aspects and tendencies of the Greek translation and publication of Russian and Soviet literature, focusing on the socio-political context that shaped it within the broader comparative perspective of Greek-Soviet literary entanglements. Further, I will briefly discuss the Greek appropriation of Socialist Realism, drawing on three representative case studies. Finally, I will elaborate on why Modernist voices are missing from the Greek canon of Russian literature.

The Greek 'Northern Obsession'

The most important figures of nineteenth-century Russian literature were introduced in Greece, albeit fragmentarily and unsystematically, mainly during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, through periodicals.[1] This occurred

1 On the reception of Russian literature in nineteenth-century Greece see Sonia Ilinskagia, *Ē rōsikē logotechnia stēn Ellada* (*19os aiōnas*) (Athens: Ellēnika grammata, 2006), as well as Christina Karakepeli's essay in the present volume. For a bibliographical overview of translations in the nineteenth century, see Kōnstantinos Kasinēs, *Vivliographia tōn ellēnikōn metaphraseōn tēs xenēs logotechnias ITH'-K' ai.*, 2 vols (Athens: Syllogos pros diadosin ōphelimōn vivliōn, 2006–13), I (2006).

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partly through translations from Russian undertaken by Russian-speaking Greeks living in Russia or having close ties to it, and partly through Western languages (French, English, or German). From the mid-1890s onwards, the field of Greek literary translations documents a gradual decline in translations of French literature, which had dominated during the nineteenth century,[2] and a sharp increase in the number of translations from Russian, English, German, and the Scandinavian languages, peaking during the interwar period (1919–38). The noticeable preference for these literatures, which contemporary literary critics called the "northern obsession" (in Greek, *voreiomania*),[3] reflected a broader shift from Romanticism to Realism within the Greek literary field during the first quarter of the twentieth century. It was characterised by a strong preoccupation with social questions and a growing interest in Socialist ideas. As a well-known critic from that period, Aimilios Chourmouzios, notes:

> [...] a time came, which I can place between 1915 and 1930, during which Greece aspired to become a Russian or at least a northern province. That was the time during which we discovered the Russians and the Scandinavians (from 1915 up to 1920). The periodicals made them accessible to the literary audience and from 1920 onwards, a real publishing frenzy begins, characterized by an astonishing plurality of translations of Russian and Scandinavian works, novels and short stories).[4]

According to statistics in Kōnstantinos Kasinēs's *Bibliography of Foreign Literature in Greek Translation 1901–1950*,[5] Russian literature vastly increased its share in the total production of translated literature during the first half of the twentieth century (by comparison with the nineteenth). With sixty-two and fifty-one translated titles respectively, Fedor Dostoevsky and Lev Tolstoy occupy the third and fourth places (in that order) among the twenty most translated foreign authors in Greece, after William Shakespeare and Jules Verne. Maksim Gorky

2 Cf. Kōnstantinos Kasinēs, *Vivliographia tōn ellēnikōn metaphraseōn tēs xenēs logotechnias ITH'-K' ai.*, 2 vols (Athens: Syllogos pros diadosin ōphelimōn vivliōn, 2006–13), I (2006), p. 29.

3 For additional information about the origin and emergence of the term, see Kōnstantinos Kasinēs, 'Ē neoellēnikē „voreiomania". Ē rēxē me to romantiko parelthon', in *Continuities, Discontinuities, Ruptures in the Greek World (1204–2014): Economy, Society, History, Literature*: *5th European Congress of Modern Greek Studies of the European Society of Modern Greek Studies: Proceedings*, ed. by Kōnstantinos Dēmadēs, 5 vols (Athens: Eurōpaikē Etaireia Neoellēnikōn Spoudōn, 2015), III, pp. 119–38 (p. 127).

4 Aimilios Chourmouzios, 'Logotechnikē alētographia', *Nea Estia*, 313 (1940), 40–43 (p. 41).

5 Kōnstantinos Kasinēs, *Vivliographia tōn ellēnikōn metaphraseōn tēs xenēs logotechnias ITH'-K' ai.*, 2 vols (Athens: Syllogos pros diadosin ōphelimōn vivliōn, 2006–13), II (2013). The statistics provided here refer to book translations only.

holds (with forty-five books) sixth place, with Leonid Andreev in thirteenth (with twenty-eight books). In addition to these four most-translated Russian authors, another forty-six—the vast majority of them belonging to the nineteenth or early twentieth centuries—were translated during this period. These include Ivan Turgenev, Aleksandr Pushkin, Anton Chekhov, Mikhail Lermontov, Nikolai Gogol, Mikhail Artsybashev, Vsevolod Garshin, Aleksandr Kuprin, Vladimir Korolenko, and others. After French and English, Russian was the third most common translated foreign literature (accounting for approximately 13% of all translated literature),[6] the novel being the predominant genre. Most works were translated from the original, while French and German served occasionally as bridge languages.[7] The publishing house Govostēs Editions founded by Kōstas Govostēs (a former literary translator from Russian) in 1926, was the main distributor of translated Russian literature; however, many other major as well as short-lived publishers from across the political spectrum were also active in this field.[8] The fact that, seeing the economic benefit, several publishing houses were retranslating and/or republishing the same titles within very short periods of time, indicates the popularity which Russian classics enjoyed during this period.

The Cult of Gorky

The October Revolution gave even greater impetus to the translation of pre-revolutionary Russian literature. It led to the foundation of Greece's Socialist Labour Party in 1918.[9] At the same time, the dynamic artistic landscape of post-revolutionary Russia encouraged the leftist intelligentsia to discuss proletarian literature, Marxist aesthetics and the purpose of art. Describing the spirit of the highly productive interwar period with regard to the publication and reception of Russian literature, the well-known Greek author Angelos Terzakēs wrote:

6 Kōnstantinos Kasinēs, *Vivliographia*, p. 29.

7 Little or no background information is available regarding three of the most productive translators of the interwar period working directly from Russian. Koralia Makrē translated over twenty works of Russian authors, Athēna Sarantidē translated twelve works of Russian literature in the period 1919–46 and the Egypt-based polyglot Kōstas Trikoglidēs translated works by Dostoevsky, Gorky and Andreev. Prevalent translators of the interwar and postwar period were the novelist and poet Arēs Alexandrou (1922–78), well-known to this day for his translations of Dostoevsky, Maiakovskii, Ehrenburg and of Akhmatova's *Requiem* (*Rekviem*, 1963) as well as the left-wing author Petros Pikros (1894–1956), who also translated Gorky, Dostoevsky and other Russian classics directly from Russian. See Christina Karakepeli's essay in this volume for more on Alexandrou.

8 For statistics on publishing houses of this period, see Kōnstantinos Kasinēs, *Vivliographia*, pp. 36–38.

9 In 1924 the Party adopted its current name: the 'Communist Party of Greece'.

> Imperative messages of the biggest social revolution in the world were coming from the North. […] While a small, socially privileged, group continued the tradition of turning to the West, […] another group, more numerous and invisible, was rising up from the popular underground […]. It was then, that Russian authors triumphantly invaded Greece. In the literary undergrounds, a wind of wild admiration for the heroes of misery and rebellion was blowing. Short-lived literary magazines were competing to promote any short story by a revolutionary writer translated from Russian and literary novices without a future were copying these exaggeratedly for their mental emancipation. They were wearing flat caps on uncombed hair, growing beards like those of persecuted writers of the tsarist era and falling platonically in love with prostitutes like Dostoevsky's, Gorky's and Andreev's protagonists.[10]

Within this context, Gorky constituted one of the leading figures among translated Russian authors in interwar Greece, not only in terms of circulation—approximately thirty-five of his works were translated by more than twenty-five translators during the first half of the twentieth century[11]—but mostly in terms of popularity and productive appropriation on various levels of intertextuality. Since he was perceived not only as a writer but also as a literary theoretician and critic, Gorky enjoyed a multifaceted reception, acquiring—also by means of his own 'eventful' biography—virtually mythological status. As the leftist writer and literary critic Petros Pikros (his pen name 'pikros' meaning 'bitter' in Greek, just like 'gor'kii' in Russian)[12] noted in 1928: "We all know that Gorky […] has always been the most popular writer of all the Russians here […] even when the French were very popular, even when the Scandinavians were totally in fashion […] Gorky found himself to be the most well-known, the most read".[13] Gorky was praised regularly as the "spiritual father" of revolutionary literature by father figures of the Greek Left such as the poet Kōstas Varnalēs and the Marxist theoretician Dēmētrēs Glēnos,[14] and was appreciated as a realist writer by established liberal literati such as Kōstēs Palamas, Stratēs Myrivēlēs, and others. Left-wing writers related to him directly through the dedication of

10 Angelos Terzakēs, 'Dēmosthenēs Vouturas', *Nea Estia*, 190 (1934), 1015–22 (p. 1015).

11 Works such as *Mother* (*Mat'*, 1907), *The Lower Depths* (*Na dne*, 1902) and *The Philistines* (*Meshchane*, 1902) were retranslated and republished several times. See Kōnstantinos Kasinēs, *Vivliographia*, p. 27.

12 His real name was Giannēs Gennaropoulos (1894–1956).

13 Petros Pikros, 'Gyrō apo to iōvilaio tou. O Gkorky s' emas edō', *Nea Epitheōrēsē*, 5 (1928), 129–36 (p. 131).

14 See for instance Varnalēs' text 'Pōs gnōrisa ton Gorki' ['How I Met Gorki'], *Rizospastis*, 28 June 1936, pp. 3–4.

poems[15] or inscriptions, as well as intertextually by adopting specific Gorkian motifs such as the eponymous 'Mother', Pelageia Nilovna, from his 1906 novel,[16] or the figure of the Vagabond (the latter inspiring the titles of short stories and poems or even pen names).[17] While the appropriation of Gorky's critical realism and/or revolutionary romanticism by Realist writers can be argued in regard to social protest novels and proletarian novels of Greek leftist literature (at least two canonical Greek authors—Dēmosthenēs Vouturas and Menelaos Lountemēs—have been called the 'Gorky of Greece' in different periods of time), Gorky's 'vagabond' characters triggered, especially among young writers of the interwar period, a great wave of imitation, forming a distinct literary trend, much discussed by interwar critics.[18]

The Introduction of Socialist Realism

These domestic literary needs of Russophone literature were motivated by historical and cultural ties between Greece and Russia and by the development of Greek Socialist thought, which examined how Russians had reflected on the socio-political and moral-spiritual situation in their country on the eve of the revolutions, as well as by corresponding West European literary trends. The book market's major focus lay thus on Russian writers of the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century, whereas post-revolutionary Russian literature, though gradually presented to the public by leftist periodicals, held an insignificant market share until the end of the Second World War. The diversity of viewpoints regarding the forms of revolutionary art, depicted in the Greek leftist literary journals in the first decade of the interwar period and reflecting to a large extent the literary controversies of the Soviet 1920s as well as Western European Marxist positions, indicate an openness to avant-gardist approaches. Notwithstanding, periodicals of translated literature clearly focused on those writers and poets who embraced the revolution, some of the most widely published being Gorky,

15 See for instance Giannēs Ritsos's poem 'Ston s. Gkorki' ['To c. Gorki'] in *Neoi Prōtoporoi*, 7 (1935), pp. 254–55, or Teukros Anthias's poem 'Gorky—teacher, brother, father!' as cited in Iannis Mochos, 'Traditsii Maksima Gor'kogo v grecheskoi literature', in *Gor'kii i sovremennost'*, ed. by Vladimir Shcherbina (Moscow: Nauka, 1970), pp. 388–93 (pp. 389–90).

16 For instance by Giannēs Ritsos in his poem *Epitaphios* (1936) or by Melpō Axiōtē in her novel *The Twentieth Century* (*Eikostos aiōnas*, 1946).

17 See for instance Dēmosthenēs Vouturas's short story *The Vagabonds* (*Oi alaniarēdes*, 1921) or Teukros Anthias's poem cycle *The Whistles of the Vagabond* (*Ta sfyrigmata tou alētē*, 1929), which allude to Greek publications of Gorky's short story collections that adopted the French edition's title *Les vagabonds* (first published in 1901 by Mercure de France in Ivan Strannik's translation).

18 For a more detailed analysis of Gorky's reception in Greece, see Giōrgos Michaēlidēs, 'Translating Russian Literature in Interwar Greece: The Example of Maxim Gorky', *Syn-Thèses*, 6 (2013), 1–19, https://doi.org/10.26262/st.v0i6.5306.

followed by Vladimir Maiakovskii, the poet of the Revolution *par excellence*, and Dem'ian Bednyi, very popular in the 1920s and 1930s.[19] Modernist writers and poets like Anna Akhmatova, Boris Pil'niak, Boris Pasternak, and others were not unknown to interwar literary criticism, but remained largely untranslated and thus obscure to the public; or else known exclusively for the romantic-revolutionary aspects of their work. For instance, Aleksandr Blok's poem 'The Twelve' ('Dvenadtsat'', 1918) was reprinted multiple times due to its thematic affinity to the revolution, while the rest of his work received almost no attention.[20] From the early 1930s onwards, this relative openness was gradually replaced by a canonical, party-regulated conception of literature. The programme of Socialist Realism, launched in Moscow at the First Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934, also drew a line under domestic left-wing critical reflection on aesthetics. The principles of Socialist Realism were imported to Greece directly after their official consolidation through the important Greek leftist literary magazine *New Avant-gardists* (*Neoi Prōtoporoi*), which devoted a September 1934 special issue to the Congress, with translations of the major keynote speeches by Gorky, Andrei Zhdanov, Karl Radek, and Nikolai Bukharin. Later issues listed the charter of the Soviet Writers' Union. From this point onwards, Socialist Realist postulates were adopted by left-wing literary critics, becoming common currency among them.[21] Polemics against 'bourgeois literature', naturalism, and formalism intensified while the representation of reality in its 'revolutionary development', the positive hero, and linguistic simplicity were strongly promoted. Gorky's glorification of folklore encouraged the Marxist Greek intelligentsia's interest in folk culture and oral storytelling traditions while the number of translations of Soviet literary theoretical articles elaborating on the concept of Socialist Realism increased.[22]

Public disputes, especially about Socialism, were interrupted by anti-Communist repressions under the dictatorial Metaxas regime (1936–41), followed by the outbreak of World War II and the Axis occupation of Greece (1941–45). Significantly fewer translations were published in this period; most were reprints, with some new translations of Russian nineteenth-century classics (Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Pushkin, Gogol, Chekhov, Andreev, and Gorky),

19 See, for example, the contents of the magazine *Neoi Prōtoporoi* in *Neoi Prōtoporoi (1931–1936)*, ed. by Maria Sakellariou (Thessalonika: University Studio Press, 1999).

20 After the war, at least three editions of Blok's 'The Twelve' were published: by Petros Kolaklidēs (Athens: n.pub., 1945); by Giannēs Ritsos (Athens: Kedros, 1957); and in 1964, by Kōstas Tambakēs (Athens: n.pub.). This poem also appeared in several literary journals, including *Epitheōrēsē technēs*, 34 (1957).

21 See Christina Dounia, *Logotechnia kai politikē: Ta periodika tēs aristeras sto mesopolemo* (Athens: Kastaniōtēs, 1996).

22 The amount of aesthetic theory and literary criticism translated from Russian and published in leftist literary magazines exceeds that translated from other languages over the entire interwar period. See Dounia, *Logotechnia kai politikē*, pp. 504–5.

and a few works of contemporary Soviet war literature (e.g. Aleksandr Bek and Vasilii Grossman). Russian and Soviet literature published in 1945—the year of liberation—exhibited a sharp turn to twentieth-century Russian literature, showcasing the diversity of literary trends (together with the plurality of interests) that might have eventually prevailed in the publishing field if the Greek Civil War had not broken out. In parallel with Socialist Realist Bildungsromans such as Nikolai Ostrovskii's *How The Steel Was Tempered* (*Kak zakalialas' stal'*, 1932/1934) and Il'ia Ehrenburg's *Without Pausing For Breath* (*Ne perevodia dykhaniia*, 1935), other prominent genres of Soviet literature of the 1920s such as Aleksei Tolstoy's utopian science-fiction novel *Blue Cities* (*Golubye goroda*, 1925) and Il'ia Il'f's and Evgenii Petrov's satirical novel *The Twelve Chairs* (*Dvenadtsat' stul'ev*, 1928), two narratives clearly incompatible with the officially promoted literature of the Zhdanov era—Isaak Babel's banned *Red Cavalry* (*Konarmiia*, 1926) and *The Man from the Restaurant* (*Chelovek iz restorana*, 1911) by the Russian émigré writer Ivan Shmelev—demonstrated an alternative aesthetic and political approach that, without being polemically anti-Soviet, took a critical stand against the dogmatism of the Soviet literary canon. Despite the explicitly antidogmatic rhetoric of the editions' prefaces—which Gérard Genette famously considers "a zone not only of transition but also of transaction: a privileged place of pragmatics and a strategy, of an influence on the public"[23] —both the last-named works were framed by their Greek publishers as highly popular in the Soviet Union without mentioning their authors' fates, such as Babel's arrest or the execution of Shmelev's son by the Bolsheviks, causing Shmelev to exile himself in Paris.

Soviet Literature as Role Model

After the Communists lost the Greek Civil War (1946–49), which erupted (following the end of the Axis occupation) between the Communist-dominated leftist forces and the government forces from the political right, Greek Communists shifted their activities to the so-called 'ideological front'. Printed propaganda produced during the partisan warfare by means of portable hand-printing presses in the mountains was transferred to new settlements in the Eastern Bloc countries,[24] where the outlawed Communist Party (KKE) and

23 Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 2. For the ideological use of paratexts and their relevance for translated literature, see also Caroline Summers, 'What Remains: The Institutional Reframing of Authorship in Translated Peritexts', in *Text, Extratext, Metatext and Paratext in Translation*, ed. by Valerie Pellatt (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), pp. 9–32.

24 Mainly in Bulkes (now Maglić) and Belgrade in the former People's Republic of Serbia, in Bucharest and Dej in the Romanian People's Republic and in Borovets in the People's Republic of Bulgaria.

Greek political exiles sought refuge. The main goal of their 'ideological struggle', steered by the Communist Party's quest for political influence, was political indoctrination and popularisation of the Party line among the masses. As far as publishing was concerned, this translated into the circulation of works that:

> contribute to the increase of the Marxist-Leninist and ideological-theoretical level of Party members and people's fighters in general; to the creation of politically and theoretically trained combat cadres in Greece, and active and cultivated fighters of socialist construction abroad.[25]

Anna Matthaiou and Popē Polemē have shown how the Party used literature to make a targeted contribution to Communist enlightenment and education. Authors living in political exile, as well as domestic left-wing writers, were prompted to compose patriotic works inspired by the people's heroic struggles for resistance and liberation, which vividly depicted the 'New Man' of Socialist culture and cultivated optimism and belief in victory along with hatred for Fascism, war, and pessimism. Soviet literature's function as a role model for this process was accentuated by explicit references in the left-wing press and in Party speeches of the time; it was reflected in the book production of the exile publishing houses in their first years of operation (1947–54). The publication of translated Soviet literature during this time exceeded that of native Greek literature many times over.[26] The General Secretary of the Communist Party of Greece, Nikos Zachariadis, announced in 1949:

> We have published a few dozens of the best works of Soviet literature, mostly dealing with the heroism, the achievements and exploits of the Soviet people during World War II. For us, these works contain, among other things, a rich and very valuable war experience. So we need to make sure that all of our male and female fighters familiarize themselves with these in order to learn from them.[27]

In parallel with Soviet theoretical texts on Socialist Realism, the Greek Communist Party's printing houses outside of Greece published during these years Greek translations of Aleksandr Bek's *Volokolamsk Highway* (*Volokolamskoe shosse*, 1947); Petr Vershigora's *People with a Clear Conscience* (*Liudi s chistoi sovest'iu*, 1947); Vasilii Grossman's *For a Just Cause* (*Za pravoe delo*/*Stalingrad*, 1952); Boris Polevoi's *Story of a Real Man* (*Povest' o nastoiashchem cheloveke*,

25 According to a report by the KKE politburo from 1951 as cited in Anna Matthaiou and Popē Polemē, *Apo to vouno stēn yperoria: Ē ekdotikē peripeteia tōn Ellēnōn kommounistōn, 1947–1968* (Athens: Vivliorama, 2003), p. 62.

26 This picture emerges from the evaluation of the publications catalogue provided in Anna Matthaiou and Popē Polemē, *Apo to vouno stēn yperoria*.

27 Nikos Zachariadēs' speech in the Central Committee's fifth plenary session (1949), cited in Anna Matthaiou and Popē Polemē, *Apo to vouno stēn yperoria*, p. 24.

1947); Petr Ignatov's *Partisans of the Kuban* (*Zapiski partizana*, 1944); Nikolai Ostrovskii's *Born of the Storm* (*Rozhdennye burei*, 1936); Dmitrii Furmanov's *Chapayev* (*Chapaev*, 1923); Mikhail Sholokhov's *They Fought For Their Country* (*Oni srazhalis' za rodinu*, 1943); Aleksandr Fadeev's *The Young Guard* (*Molodaia gvardiia*, 1946) and *The Rout* (*Razgrom*, 1927), besides numerous other classics of Soviet war literature, most of which were illegally exported to and circulated in Greece. These works were considered important for boosting fighters' morale. In their backpacks—as one can read in the Party's newspaper *Neos Kosmos*—"while bread was unlikely to be found, books like *Volokolamsk Highway*, *How the Steel Was Tempered* and *Story of a Real Man* one would definitely find".[28] Literary figures such as Furmanov's Klychkov or Polevoi's Vorob'ev were used as role models for the political commissars of the Democratic Army of Greece (KKE's military branch), while literary representations of battles served as guidelines for war reports: "In the description of the battle the man should be shown with his emotions, his feelings (as this is done in *Volokolamsk Highway*)".[29] At the same time, Socialist Realist classics were meant to function as a preparatory 'proto-canon'—a textual reservoir providing, in Pascale Casanova's sense of the phrase, the "literary resources" for Greek "progressive" literary production.[30]

From the mid-1950s onwards, the publication of translated Soviet literature by the Party's printing houses in exile decreased considerably in favour of contemporary left-wing Greek literature. According to an article in *Neos Kosmos* after the Second Congress of Soviet Writers (1954), "Soviet literature, its humanistic ideals, its patriotism and internationalism had a great and beneficial impact, not only on the readers, but also on the writers of Greece".[31] The vast majority of Greek literary works that can be identified as appropriations of Socialist Realism, as defined by the widely accepted typologies of Katerina Clark, Hans Günther, Evgeny Dobrenko, and others, belong to postwar and resistance literature.[32] They primarily address the Greek resistance movement and Greek social reality in the aftermath of the Civil War (and also, in later years, resistance to the Greek military junta of 1967–74). The Civil War itself is

28 Kōstas Bosēs and Apostolos Spēlios, 'To 2o synedrio tōn sovietikōn syngrapheōn. (Didagmata gia tēn ellēnikē patriotikē logotechnia)', *Neos Kosmos*, 3 (1955), 63–74 (p. 64).

29 From the instructions directed to radio correspondents in 1948 as cited in Anna Matthaiou and Popē Polemē, *Apo to vouno stēn yperoria*, p. 25.

30 Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 235.

31 Bosēs and Spēlios, 'To 2o synedrio tōn sovietikōn syngrapheōn'.

32 See Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981); *Sotsrealisticheskii kanon*, ed. by Chans Giunter and Evgeny Dobrenko (St Petersburg: Akademicheskii proekt, 2000); Hans Günther, *Die Verstaatlichung der Literatur. Entstehung und Funktionsweise des sozialistisch-realistischen Kanons in der sowjetischen Literatur der 30er Jahre* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1984).

implicitly present, represented by the disappointed, and therefore less positive, hero of leftist post-civil-war literature. It is largely absent as a central theme or setting, both because of the Communist defeat, which makes it a delicate issue of literary negotiation, and because of this period's party line on literature.[33] In general, Greek appropriations of Socialist Realism correspond to the concept of the "prototypical plot" defined by Katerina Clark in *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual* (1981), which outlines the typical young Soviet hero's "rite of passage" from relative spontaneity to political consciousness. Assisted in his quest by an older, more 'conscious' mentor figure, the hero overcomes obstacles and achieves his goal through social integration and gradual development of collective identity.[34] Beyond the structural elements of the master plot, these works share most of the Socialist Realist novel's tropes and literary paradigms: Gorky's Mother-figure; Ostrovskii's portrait of physical suffering and paralysis as constitutive characteristics of a true hero; the prioritisation of the collective over the personal; expressive focus on machines and agricultural labour; criticism and parody of bourgeois culture; female emancipation and collective action; and explicit philo-Soviet references. However, Greek Socialist Realism primarily differs from the Soviet version by the intensity of its expression of Party spirit (*partiinost'*), a difference explicable by the respective transformations of the canon within the Greek literary field.

Greek Appropriation of Socialist Realism

A brief comparison of three exemplary cases demonstrates the main tendencies of the Socialist Realist canon's appropriation by Greek leftist literature. The

33 Despite its reorientation and alleged openness to scepticism and criticism in light of Khrushchev's secret speech (1956), the Party recommended restricting the Civil War as a literary theme in favour of anti-Nazi resistance topics. This served the interests of both the Party, which sought to establish a broad patriotic front in Greece and therefore benefit from emphasis on the resistance movement instead of the one-sided portrayal of Communist guerilla fighters (which risked providing additional pretexts for anti-Communist state propaganda); and of politically exiled authors themselves, whose concerns for amnesty and repatriation were bound up with Civil War memory. See Venetia Apostolidou, 'The Politics of Memory in the Fiction of Greek Political Exiles in Eastern Europe', in *Greek Diaspora and Migration Since 1700: Society, Politics and Culture*, ed. by Dimitris Tziovas (Burlington: Ashgate, 2009), pp. 215–28 (pp. 222–23); and Venetia Apostolidou, *Trauma kai mnēmē: ē pezographia tōn politikōn prosphygōn* (Athens: Polis, 2010), p. 65.

34 Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual*, pp. 159–76. For the key features and periodisation of Socialist Realism see also Hans Günther, 'Die Lebensphasen eines Kanons–am Beispiel des sozialistischen Realismus', in *Kanon und Zensur. Beiträge zur Archäologie der literarischen Kommunikation*, ed. by A. Assmann and J. Assmann, 3 vols (Munich: Fink, 1983–1999), II (1987), pp. 138–48.

first is *The Twentieth Century* (*Eikostos aiōnas*, 1946) by Melpō Axiōtē (1905–73), which appeared in Athens shortly before its author's long-term exile in Paris and East Berlin. Axiōtē, whose innovative earlier works employed surrealistic techniques, converted to Marxist ideology and joined the Greek Communist Party in the mid-1930s. Her novel describes the sacrifice of a modern Polyxena. This is the name of the protagonist, a young woman from a middle-class family, who after joining the Greek resistance on the Communist side, finds herself spending her last night in a prison cell awaiting execution. Here she reflects on her life, which has been closely intertwined with major socio-political events of the early twentieth century.[35] Despite fulfilling every aspect of the Socialist Realist master plot, including Gorky-esque motifs, and showing an explicitly philo-Soviet spirit, Axiōtē's novel is far from conventional in the strict, dogmatic sense of the canon. The novel features several modernist literary devices as well as a highly controversial depiction of the October Revolution, described in an eyewitness report by Russian refugees as a bloody event orchestrated by violent and ruthless Bolsheviks.

Published in the same year and prior to its author's exile variously in Hungary, Romania, and East Berlin, the novel *Fire* (*Fōtia*, 1946) by Dēmētrēs Chatzēs (1913–81) addresses, through the experiences of a peasant family, Greek national resistance against occupying German troops. *Fire* offers a vision of a Greek People's Republic. Following a young woman's character development from naivety to emancipation and ideological consciousness, the novel is characterised by heroic self-sacrifice, the cult of labour, collective optimism, and Party-driven sentiment. Due to its modernist poetics and subversively negative depiction of the October Revolution, Axiōtēs' novel is situated on the periphery of Socialist Realist style, while Chatzēs' novel represents an ideal realisation of Stalin's well-known formula "national in form, socialist in content".[36] Having been composed during the phase of full implementation of the canon[37] and also on the eve of the Civil War without knowledge of its outcome, both novels communicate—despite their differences in style—explicit optimism, an enthusiastic bond with the Communist Party, and clear political conviction.

Different again is the dilogy by Mētsos Alexandropoulos (1924–2008), *Nights and Dawns* (*Nychtes kai auges*), published by the Greek Communist Party's printing house in Romania in 1961–63, during the author's exile in the Soviet

35 In Greek mythology Polyxena was the youngest daughter of King Priam of Troy and his queen, Hecuba, who—according to one variation of the myth—was sacrificed by the Greeks on the tomb of Achilles after the fall of Troy in order to appease his ghost and thus raise winds to take the Greek ships home.

36 Iosif Stalin, 'O politicheskikh zadachakh universiteta narodov Vostoka: Rech' na sobranii studentov KUTV. 18 maia 1925 g.', in *Sochineniia*, 18 vols (Moscow and Tver': Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1946–2006), VII (1952), pp. 133–52 (p. 138).

37 For the key features and periodisation of Socialist Realism see for instance Hans Günther, 'Die Lebensphasen eines Kanons'.

Union. The novel, which was originally written as a graduation thesis at the Maksim Gorky Literature Institute, discusses partisan fighting during the Axis occupation of Greece. This work preserves the master plot and positive hero, however—like many other politically engaged novels to emerge in the aftermath of the Civil War and during the period of decanonisation—its political position is significantly more reserved, albeit clear, with elements of leftist self-criticism. Within the context of the Soviet Union's "largest more or less coherent project of translation the world has seen to date",[38] these three novels—along with many other works of Greek left-wing writers—were translated and introduced as "progressive literature" into the Soviet literary field of the 1950s and 1960s, where they underwent further canonisation and Sovietisation through paratextual framing, ideological translation, and censorship.[39] Gorky's (and occasionally Dostoevsky's) 'influence', or any kind of thematic affiliation with his work, is regularly accentuated in the translations' paratexts (often written by Greek authors and philologists in Soviet exile), serving as a legitimisation of the publication and indicating the father role of the Russian literary tradition. Most of these authors, including those discussed above, would eventually distance themselves from Socialist Realist aesthetics.

Revisionist Tendencies and Repression

Within the domestic Greek literary field of the 1950s and 1960s, literary production and publishing operated in a climate of extreme political polarisation under conditions of repression and fear. The 'Emergency Law 509' of 1947, ostensibly created to discourage violent coups but essentially a bulwark against Communist propaganda, had provided for harsh penalties such as imprisonment, internal exile, or execution. It was not repealed until after the end of the Greek junta in 1974.[40] In the mid-1950s, Gorky's *Mother* (*Mat'*, 1907),

38 Susanna Witt, 'Between the Lines: Totalitarianism and Translation in the USSR', in *Contexts, Subtexts and Pretexts: Literary Translation in Eastern Europe and Russia*, ed. by Brian James Baer (Amsterdam and Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins, 2011), pp. 149–70 (p. 167).

39 On Greek appropriation of Socialist Realism and Greek literature reception in the Soviet Union see my published dissertation, *Sozialistischer Realismus erzählen und übersetzen: Von der Sowjetunion nach Griechenland und retour* [*Narrating and Translating Socialist Realism. From the Soviet Union to Greece and Back*] (Berlin and Boston, MA: De Gruyter, 2023), pp. 158–75, https://www.degruyter.com/document/doi/10.1515/9783111026534/html?lang=en.

40 For in-depth accounts of the Greek Civil War and Greek political and social reality after the liberation from Nazi occupation, see for instance *After The War Was Over: Reconstructing the Family, Nation, and State in Greece, 1943–1960*, ed. by Mark Mazower (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000); Roderick Beaton, *Greece: Biography Of A Modern Nation* (London: Allen Lane, 2019); and Mark Mazower, 'Policing the Anti-Communist State in Greece, 1922–1974', in *The Policing*

Dostoevsky's *Poor Folk* (*Bednye liudi*, 1846), Gogol's *Dead Souls* (*Mertvye dushi*, 1842) and Il'ia Ehrenburg's *The Fall of Paris* (*Padenie Parizha*, 1941), among other world literature classics, were banned; many Greek left-wing writers, poets, publishers and artists were put on trial and sent to internal exile on prison islands. In this hostile context for the publication of Soviet literature, translation work and relatively diverse publishing activity continued. Besides new editions of old translations and new translations of Russian nineteenth-century classics and of Gorky's works, contemporary Soviet writers who enjoyed multiple translated publications included Aleksei Tolstoy, Il'ia Ehrenburg, Valentin Kataev, and Aleksandr Blok. From the mid-1950s onwards, revisionist trends, as well as close monitoring of the publishing activity abroad, become more and more apparent. Although not published by the Communist Party, Ehrenburg's *The Thaw* (*Ottepel'*, 1954) appeared in 1955 with an anonymous preface summarising both Soviet criticism of the novel during the Second Congress of Soviet Writers (1954) and Ehrenburg's response. It was subsequently republished in four editions and re-translated three times by 1960.[41] The 1958 Greek translation of Boris Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago* (*Doktor Zhivago*, 1957), imported debates surrounding the 'Pasternak affair' into the Greek field of literary criticism. In 1959, Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* (1955) appeared; in 1963–64, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* (*Odin den' Ivana Denisovicha*, 1962) was published.[42] Revisionist tendencies seeking to liberate Socialist Realism from the absolute dominance of tropes like the positive hero and the absence of conflict (*bezkonfliktnost*), short of abolishing the canon, were still subject to Party control. Thus, the publication of Daniil Granin's novella *A Personal Opinion* (*Sobstvennoe mnenie*, 1956) by the important revisionist literary journal *Epitheōrēsē technēs* in 1959, a work which had already drawn criticism from Soviet Party bureaucrats and even from Nikita Khrushchev, led to an

of Politics in the Twentieth Century: Historical Perspectives, ed. by Mark Mazower (Providence, MA: Berghahn Books, 1997), pp. 129–50.

41 Two translations of the book—one from Russian by the journalist and left-wing resistance fighter Lampros Sekleiziōtēs (Athens: Kerkēs) and one by Moursella Pierakopoulou (Athens: Arkadia)—appeared in 1955. Sekleiziōtēs' translation was republished in 1956 (Athens: Pyxida), while a third version by K. Ch. Angelidis also appeared around this time (Athens: Parisianos, n.d.). Very little is known today about these translators and publishers. Due to inadequate bibliographical information, common with older editions, and the frequent use of pseudonyms because of political repression, their identities often prove elusive. More generally, the field of the Greek reception of Russian literature from the perspective of sociology of translation and actor–network theory remains largely unexplored.

42 Based on its paratexts, the year 1964 is the *terminus ante quem of* this publication. Soviet dissident literature such as Solzhenitsyn's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* or other officially banned literary works such as Mikhail Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita* (*Master i Margarita*, 1967) would be (re-)published under the Greek military junta, often with an explicitly anti-Communist framework.

informal Greek Communist Party trial. As a result, the journal editors resigned, and the journal was forced to change course.[43]

Conclusion

The editorial decision to publish a story depicting the dark side of the Soviet state and Party apparatus by a journal, which only two years before had been prosecuted for publishing an issue dedicated to the fortieth anniversary of the October Revolution,[44] not only manifests a conscious attempt to expand, modernise, and rationalise the Zhdanovian conception of the canon, but also highlights a broader problematic of the reception of Russian literature in Greece. Elaborating on the conditions that determine the transnational circulation of literature in translation, Johan Heilbron and Gisèle Sapiro cite politics as a determining and also—depending on the "degree of politicisation"—constraining factor.[45] Due to prevailing political conditions in Greece from the interwar period until the mid-1970s—also substantially responsible for the delayed institutionalisation of Slavic studies in Greece[46]—the primary reception and subsequent introduction of twentieth-century Russian literary production in Greece took place largely through leftist ideological channels—organised mainly around the Communist Party—through which only officially-approved Soviet literature was imported.[47] As a consequence of this extreme political polarisation, as well as the continuous conflict, repression, and exile endured by the Greek Left for most of the twentieth century, the very limited attempts observed to import nonconformist, controversial, or stigmatised works were necessarily also politically inflected. In other words, the dissemination of Russian literature in Greece during the period I have discussed was not primarily

43 See Alexandra Iōannidou, *Ypothesē Gkranin: Ē logotechnikē kritikē sto edōlio* (Athens: Kastaniōtēs, 2008).

44 See *Epitheōrēsē technēs*, 34 (1957). The publication by the same journal of an issue devoted to Soviet literature in 1962 (96) provoked this time a Soviet reaction because of its promotion of 'modernist' texts. See Popē Polemē and Dēmētrēs Dēmētropoulos, 'Dēmētrēs Spathēs (1925–2014): o theatrologos', *The Books' Journal* (29 December 2014), https://booksjournal.gr/synenteykseis/774.

45 Johan Heilbron and Gisèle Sapiro, 'Outline for a Sociology of Translation: Current Issues and Future Prospects', in *Constructing a Sociology of Translation*, ed. by Michaela Wolf and Alexandra Fukari (Amsterdam: Benjamins Translation Library, 2007), pp. 93–107 (p. 97), https://doi.org/10.1075/btl.74.07hei.

46 The first purely philological department of Slavic studies was founded only in 2007.

47 Another factor to be considered is the absence in Greece of big Russian diasporic communities, as in Paris, Berlin or the United States, which could possibly form an additional channel for the dissemination of dissident literature. See also Alexandra Iōannidou, 'Political Aspects of Russian Literature Reception in Greece: Aris Alexandrou and Mitsos Aleksandropoulos', *Slavica Gandensia,* 32 (2005), 67–79.

motivated by aesthetic value nor by the philological consciousness of a specific foreign literature; rather, it fulfilled broader ideological purposes. For reasons linked to the political history of Greece, many of the most important Russian novelists and poets such as Aleksandr Blok, Anna Akhmatova, Marina Tsvetaeva, Sergei Esenin, Osip Mandel'shtam, Nikolai Gumilev, Boris Pil'niak, Iurii Olesha, Andrei Siniavskii, Iosif Brodskii, and many others, remained largely inaccessible to Greek readers until the mid- to late-1970s, emphatically confirming, in the case of Greek reception of twentieth-century Russian literature, Gideon Toury's definition of translations as "facts of target cultures".[48] Interestingly, some of those Greek authors in Soviet exile, who had embraced Socialist Realism and/or used their status as translators or literary critics to introduce official Soviet aesthetics to Greece, repositioned themselves during the late Soviet period as mediators of Russian culture and formerly banned Russian literature.[49]

48 Gideon Toury, *Descriptive Translation Studies—and Beyond* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1995), p. 29.

49 Two of the most widely published Greek writers in the Soviet Union—Mētsos Alexandropoulos and Alexēs Parnēs—are characteristic examples of such authorial repositioning. For a more detailed analysis of these strategies see Niovi Zampouka, *Sozialistischer Realismus erzählen und übersetzen*.