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Translation of Dionysia Mousoura-Tsoukala’s “New Year’s Day Expectations”

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The Greek diaspora of Australia is a vibrant, expansive community, whose expression of their experiences in literature provides a unique perspective on life in a place far away from their ancestral lands. One prominent contributor to the Greek-Australian literary canon is Dionysia Mousoura-Tsoukala, one of several strong female voices reflecting on issues including identity, family and the representation of women (Garivaldis 288). Born on the island of Zakynthos, Mousoura-Tsoukala immigrated to Australia in 1967 and has contributed to the Greek community of Melbourne through her teaching, translating and writing ever since (Tsokalidou). In her story “New Year’s Day Expectations”, published in 2014, she describes a memory of her youth, narrating the lead-up to family celebrations that she recalls with humour and warmth.

One of the elements that I believed needed to be accurately replicated in the English translation of this text was its tone. Mousoura-Tsoukala writes here in the first person, obviously narrating a memory, and in a style which gives the impression that the story is being told orally to the reader. In order to replicate this personal connection between writer and reader, I had to ensure that my word and style choices conveyed a similar intimacy to the source text (ST). This was achieved in the translation of the moments where the author almost addresses the reader directly. In her description of what most parents worried about providing for their children, she mentions “παπούτσια χωρίς τρύπιες σόλες και πέταλα, ναι, καλά ακούσατε”, rendered into the target text (TT) as “shoes whose soles had no holes and horseshoes- yes, that’s right”. I translated the final part of the sentence, which directly translates from Greek as “yes, you heard right”, as an interjection to the description, emphasizing Mousoura-Tsoukala’s interaction with her readers in the story.

While it is true that Mousoura-Tsoukala manages to create quite a vivid image for readers, she does not frequently make use of powerful adjectives to do so. I therefore had to focus on keeping the same level of descriptive language in the TT. My interpretation was that the narration was not structured to persuade the audience of any particular argument; the ST aims to present a positive childhood memory, rather than the struggles of life following years of war. She does point out that many of what we consider essential items today were, at the time, “απρόσιτα κι αδιανόητα συν ανύπαρκτα”, which I translated as “inaccessible and unimaginable and even non-existent” to match the weight of the adjectives in Greek. Mousoura-Tsoukala also noted that she and her cousins would not dream of gifts or other “μεγαλεία” (literally meaning “grandeurs” or “splendours”) for New Year’s Day. Here, I opted to use the word “luxuries”, which carried a slightly less emotive connotation in English, therefore not changing what I felt her intent to be. This story does not try to evoke pity for whatever circumstances families like hers were in, but to provide readers with contextual information about the great anticipation of New Year’s Day from a child’s perspective.

Another significant element of the text that required specific attention was the use of dialect words. On a few occasions in the ST, Mousoura-Tsoukala includes words from her local island dialect, the meaning of which may or may not be obvious to Greek readers, depending on where they originate from. Each inclusion required individual evaluation of whether to incorporate the original dialect word in the TT: is its inclusion in the otherwise English text important in showcasing the story’s unique setting (Baker

15), or would its inclusion and therefore an explanation of its meaning make the flow of the narrative cumbersome? In one case, the dialect word plays quite a role in the subsequent action of the plot. Mousoura-Tsoukala explains that she and her cousins were excitedly waiting for the New Year's Day treat of “μπικίρι” or “κατσάμπα”, which I did select to include and write phonetically in English as “bikiri” or “katsamba”, as this item acts as a symbol of ensuing celebration throughout the rest of the text, and is referred to with this same dialect word each time. The structure of the ST also meant that an explanation of its meaning in standard Greek, “τα χειμωνιάτικα πεπόνια” (winter melons), followed in the subsequent paragraph, so I was able to maintain this same momentum in the TT of the introduction of an unusual word, followed by its contextualization. However, in another case, the ST includes the dialect word for kitchen, “μαγερείο”, immediately followed by the standard Greek word “κουζίνα” in brackets. Here, I selected to omit the dialect word; since it did not appear again as a significant, recurring image and the text did not provide additional contextual information, there was no reason to interrupt the flow of the TT with superfluous vocabulary.

As with most translations, this ST did present questions of how much information to add to explain Greek cultural phenomena to unfamiliar readers. For this text, I decided to only add minor contextual information to make cultural details explicit to the reader if the reader would otherwise potentially miss out on a significant aspect of the narrative, which would be clear to source language readers (Munday 92, 133). For example, Mousoura-Tsoukala makes reference to the “λειτουργία στη Χρυσοπηγή της Μποχάλης, όπου εφημέρευε ο παπάκης μου” (literally “the service at Chrysopigi in Bochali, where my dad was on duty”). In the TT, this was translated as “the service... at the Chrysopigi church in Bochali, where my dad was *the priest* on duty” (emphasis added). The implication in the ST that she is talking about a church is very clear to Greek readers, but I felt it needed to be slightly clarified in English. Overall, I believed that any other addition would be unjustified, and would take away from decisions Mousoura-Tsoukala made about how much detail about cultural practices she wanted to provide.

I am thankful for the opportunity to interact with such a heartfelt example of storytelling from a Greek-Australian author. I hope that my translation has managed to convey the engaging nature of the tone and narrative of the source text to a new set of readers.

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Πρωτοχρονιάτικες Προσδοκίες
By Dionysia Mousoura-Tsoukala

Κείνα τα όμορφα και ξέγνοιαστα παιδικά και νεανικά χρόνια, δεν είχαμε μεγάλες απαιτήσεις όχι μόνο από τους γονείς μας αλλά κι από τη ζωή την ίδια! Ζούσαμε απλά, χωρίς να περιμένουμε τίποτα από κανέναν.

Ήταν γιατί, πλούσιος θεωρείτο κάποιος αν στην αποθήκη του είχε το σιτάρι και το λάδι της χρονιάς του κι αν μπορούσε να εξασφαλίσει τα βασικά στη φαμελιά του, όπως, καινούργια παπούτσια για τα Χριστούγεννα, που πολλές φορές βιάφονταν άσπρα, ώστε να φοριούνται και το καλοκαίρι και με ρούχα που περνούσαν από το μεγαλύτερο παιδί στο μικρότερο.

Πώς να έχεις απαιτήσεις, όταν μέριμνα των περισσότερων γονιών ήταν ένα πιάτο φαΐ στο τραπέζι, ρούχα με όχι πολλά μπαλώματα και παπούτσια χωρίς τρύπιες σόλες και πέταλα, ναι, καλά ακούσατε, πέταλα στην πόντα μπροστά και στα τακούνια για να μην φθείρονται εύκολα;

Πολλά από τα σημερινά «βασικά κι απολύτως αναγκαία» ήταν απρόσιτα κι αδιανόητα συν ανύπαρκτα, για την πλειοψηφία των παιδιών και νέων λίγο μετά τον Β' Παγκόσμιο Πόλεμο και τον Αδελφοσπαραγμό που ακολούθησε με τον Εμφύλιο.

Φυσικά ούτε να ονειρευτούμε τολμούσαμε Πρωτοχρονιάτικα δώρα και άλλα... μεγαλεία! Ο μπιναμάς μας ήταν καμιά δραχμή ή καμιά λιχουδιά αφού, είπαμε, όλα δύσκολα!

Κείνη την Πρωτοχρονιά, όμως, πρέπει να ήταν λίγο πριν το 1950, εμείς τα ξαδελφάκια περιμέναμε πώς και πώς την Πρωτοχρονιά, γιατί η νόνα η Αντριάνα, αλλά και ο νόνος ο Κωνσταντής, μας είχαν υποσχεθεί το μπικίρι ή κατσάμπα που... λιμπιζόμαστε

New Year's Day Expectations
By Dionysia Mousoura-Tsoukala
Translated by Denise Anagnostou

During those beautiful and carefree years of our childhood and our youth, we didn't have great demands, not just of our parents, but of life itself! We simply lived, without expecting anything from anyone.

That was because a person was considered rich if they had their year's supply of wheat and oil in their stores, and if they could ensure the basics for their family, such as new shoes for Christmas, which would often get dyed white, so they could also be worn in summer, and worn with clothes that would get passed down from the older child to the younger one.

How could you have demands, when most parents' concern was a plate of food on the table, clothes with not too many patches, and shoes whose soles had no holes and horseshoes- yes, that's right, horseshoes at the toe in front and at the heels so they wouldn't get easily ruined?

Many of today's "basic and absolutely necessary" items were inaccessible and unimaginable and even non-existent for the majority of children and young people, just after World War Two and the brutal fratricide that followed with the Civil War.

Of course, we didn't dare to even dream of New Year's presents and other... luxuries! Our little New Year's gift was a drachma or so, or some kind of edible treat, since, as we said, everything was difficult!

That New Year's, however, it must have been just before 1950, we cousins were excitedly waiting for New Year's Day, because my grandmother Andriana, and grandfather Konstandis too, had promised us the "bikiri" or "katsamba"... which we craved for months in anticipation of them cutting it

για μήνες, να το κόψουν ανήμερα όπου μας περίμενε όλους να φάμε εκεί το αυγολέμονο!

Μπικίρι ή κατσάμπα λέγαμε τα χειμωνιάτικα πεπόνια, όπου συνήθως κρέμονταν από τα καδρόνια της οροφής στο μαγερείο, (κουζίνα), από το καλοκαίρι και τα τρώγαμε στις... επίσημες μέρες!

Αφού τελείωσε η λειτουργία στη Χρυσοπηγή της Μπόχαλης, όπου εφημέρευε ο παπάκης μου, πήραμε όλοι το δρόμο για το Μπανάτο, εμείς οι κοπέλες μπροστά κι ο παπάς με την παπαδιά να ακολουθούν, γιατί είχαν εναλλάξ αγκαλιά τον αδελφό μου, που ήταν πολύ μικρός, για να αντέξει τόσο δρόμο.

Όλο το δρόμο μιλούσαμε για το ωραίο αυγολέμονο με τη γαλοπούλα που θα είχε φτιάξει η νόνα, αλλά προ παντός για το μπικίρι που επί τέλους θα απολαμβάναμε!!!

Ολόκληρη ιεροτελεστία να κατέβει από κει που κρεμόταν... κι εμάς να τρέχουν τα σάλια από την προσδοκία της όμορφης γεύσης!

Δεν θυμάμαι ποιος ανέβηκε τη σκάλα. Θυμάμαι μόνο τα όχι χαρούμενα επιφωνήματα διαπιστώνοντας πως... άνθρακας ο θησαυρός, αφού τα τρωκτικά με μεγάλη τέχνη είχαν αδειάσει το περιεχόμενο κι είχε μείνει το εξωτερικό ανέπαφο να κρέμεται κι έτσι όπως ήταν δεμένο σταυρωτά να μην υποψιάζεσαι πως είναι άδειο... Όμως, ουδέν κακόν αμιγές καλού. Το γέλιο και το καλαμπούρι που επακολούθησε δεν περιγράφεται. Μαζεύτηκαν οι γειτόνοι από τα ξεφωνητά μας και το γλέντι κράτησε μέχρι αργά, με το άδειο μπικίρι να είναι η ατραξιόν της ημέρας...

on that day, when they would be expecting us all there to eat our egg and lemon soup!

“Bikiri” or “katsamba” was what we called honey-dew melons, which would usually get hung from the beams in the kitchen ceiling since the summer and which we would eat on... special days!

When the service finished at the Chrysopigi church in Bochali, where my dad was the priest on duty, we all headed for Banato, we girls at the front and the priest and his wife behind, because they took turns holding my brother, who was very young, so he could handle such a long journey.

The whole way we would talk about the beautiful egg and lemon soup with the turkey that my grandmother would have made, but mostly we would talk about the melon that we would finally get to enjoy!

Taking it down from where it hung was a whole ritual... and our mouths would water in anticipation of its beautiful taste!

I don't remember who went up the ladder. I only remember the not-so-happy exclamations at the discovery that... it was fool's gold, since rodents had artfully emptied out its contents, while the untouched outside remained hanging, and as it was cross-tied up there, you would not suspect that it was empty... However, every cloud has a silver lining. The laughter and the joking that followed is indescribable. The neighbours gathered because of our screams and the party went on until late, the empty melon being the highlight of the day...