Dionisio Salamon / Διονύσιος Σολωμός: Poetry as a Dialogue between Languages

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Solomos (1798-1857) is usually referred to as the 'national poet' of modern Greece. The first two stanzas of his 'Hymn to Liberty' (1823), which he wrote during the Greek War of Independence and in which he hailed the return of Liberty to Greece and celebrated the military feats of the Greeks against the Turks, became in 1864 the National Anthem of Greece, while the mid-point of his Greek poetic career coincided both with his beginning work on his most mature poems and with the arrival of Otto in Greece as its first king (1833) and the establishment of Athens as the capital of the Greek state (1834). Yet throughout his career Solomos, who spent all his life outside the confines of the Greek state, felt more comfortable writing Italian than writing Greek. It is perhaps precisely because of his status as 'national poet' and as the inaugurator of modern Greek literature that comparatively little attention has been paid to the consequences of his bilingualism, both for himself and for the readers of his poetry.[1]

The standard edition of Solomos, based by Linos Politis (1948) on that of the first edition by Polylas (1859), divides Solomos' Greek poems from the rest of his writings by including the Greek poems in a separate volume. I propose to place the Greek poems in the context of Solomos' writings as a whole in order to focus on the extent and the consequences of his bilingualism. While doing so I shall give an account of the linguistic situation in which he lived and wrote, and of his own ideas on language.

Solomos' bilingualism was a consequence of the biculturalism prevailing in the Ionian Islands, itself a product of imperial rule. Although the Ionian Islands, including Zakynthos, where Solomos was born, and Corfu, where he moved in 1828, had ceased to be under Venetian rule in 1797, the presence of Italian (rather than specifically Venetian) culture continued to be dominant there at least until the end of the period of the British protectorate (1815-1863). During this time Italian

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continued to be used as the *de facto* administrative language of the 'United States of the Ionian Islands' (in particular, the language in which the British authorities addressed the people under their 'protection', and *vice versa*), even though the official Gazette was published in both Italian and Greek from 1831 onwards; Greek was not instituted as the sole official language until 1851. There is no doubt that had the Ionian Islands been incorporated into the Greek state at the close of the War of Independence, the sole official language would have been Greek.

Italian, then, was the dominant language of culture in the Ionian Islands, especially since it continued to be customary for the sons of well-to-do families to be sent to Italy for their higher education – and sometimes, as in the case of Solomos, for their secondary education too. Italian was certainly the normal channel of written communication in Solomos' circle: not only did he write 143 out of his 147 extant letters in Italian, but all thirty-four of the extant letters addressed to him are in Italian too. He and his correspondents quote Dante without the need for attribution and with the same facility with which Plato quoted Homer and the English have traditionally quoted Shakespeare. For the majority of the population, however, Greek constituted the sole mode of communication, as it was for Solomos' illiterate mother, who had formerly been a servant-girl in his father's household. The British protectorate re-established the Venetian class stratification that had been temporarily abolished by the Revolutionary French occupiers of the Ionian Islands in 1797, yet the linguistic divide did not coincide with class distinctions: Solomos' father, who like his son after him held the Venetian title of Conte, wrote his will in a misspelled but fluent and idiomatic demotic Greek which probably represents a fairly faithful reflection of the Greek spoken by his circle at the time.

Thus Solomos was born and bred in a society with at least two languages, two alphabets, two churches, and two calendars (the Julian for the Orthodox and the Gregorian for the Catholics; in his correspondence he normally used the 'New Style', without specifying it, while as an Orthodox he celebrated Christian festivals according to the 'Old Style') – all this had been established for centuries before the arrival of the innovations in language and religion brought by the British.[2] There were two names both for his native island (Zakynthos and Zante) and for the island to which he moved in 1828 (Kerkyra and Corfú). But he too had a double name: when he moved house in 1828 – a crucial move away from his native island and the maternal embrace into exile within another Greek environment – he ceased to use the Italian form of his name, Dionisio Salamon, in his signature at the foot of

his letters, replacing it with the semi-Hellenized version Dionisio Solomòs (he had already been using the form Διονύσιος Σολωμός in his published Greek works). This renaming was related to his attempt to present himself as a Greek poet and to distance himself from the Italian side of his culture. This dual identity, this participation in two cultures, is an essential part of Solomos's literary personality.

As for his literary work, it can be divided into six categories according to linguistic criteria. His earliest poems, including those that make up one of the only two volumes of his poems published during his lifetime, *Rime improvvisate* (1822),[3] are entirely in Italian, as are the poems and drafts of poems he wrote after abandoning Greek around 1854 (just three years after Greek – though not demotic - was declared the official language of the Ionian Islands). There are a few early poems - the 'Hymn to Liberty' is one - entirely in Greek which have no 'Italian substratum'[4]. Three satirical poems written mostly in Greek in 1824 contain a large admixture of Italian, together with some Venetian, French, and Latin; conversely, there are two satirical poems basically in Italian but containing a certain amount of Greek and dating from the same time; in all these Solomos is satirizing the speech of a member of his circle, Dr Dionysios Roidis. One of his late poems, known as 'Carmen Seculare', was written in two different versions, each in a different language without being a translation of the other. Lastly, the bulk of Solomos' mature Greek poetry written between about 1824 and about 1854 consists of fragments embedded within Italian prose drafts. According to this last method of composition, he would normally begin by writing a draft of the poem (or part of the poem) in Italian prose, together with comments, statements of intent, and instructions and reminders to himself. Then he would re-draft the text several times, each draft consisting of progressively less Italian prose and more Greek verse, some of the latter being almost literally translated from the Italian version. None of the poems that we know to have been composed in this way was finally completed, although some – for instance 'The Cretan' (1833-4) – were very near to a final version before being abandoned.

Thus most of Solomos' Greek poems – whether they contain words and phrases from other languages or whether they emerged from Italian drafts – are in some way connected to non-Greek material. But a number of his other Greek poems were published – or were intended to be published – with an *en face* translation. As far as I can ascertain, Solomos' very first published Greek verses were the last eight stanzas of the 'Hymn to Liberty', which appeared with an English translation in the *Literary Gazette* in London on 11 September 1824. The entire text of the 'Hymn'

first appeared in two editions in 1825, with a facing translation into Italian and French respectively, while the poem 'On the Death of Lord Byron', which was never published during Solomos' lifetime, appears in the manuscripts in three fair copies dating from between about 1826 and 1829, each accompanied by a facing Italian translation; we know from the poet's correspondence that he hoped and planned that this latter poem would also be published in French and English.[5] But even poems published only in Greek appeared in a bilingual or multilingual context. In 1824 Solomos had plans to publish the whole of the 'Hymn', together with 'Byron' and 'Lambros', in England. Although he also hoped to make money on these publications,[6] his chief aim was undoubtedly to convey his patriotic message to the European public and to stir up Philhellenic sentiments. Almost ten years later, well after the end of the War of Independence, section 25 of 'Lambros' was published in the first issue of the *Ionian Anthology*, albeit only in Greek; yet the journal itself contained bilingual contributions, while the introduction to this first issue (which immediately precedes Solomos' poem) makes it clear that the magazine is 'open [...] to writers in any of the three languages with which the people of these Islands are most acquainted', as its anonymous author – possibly Lord Nugent – expressed it.[7] Solomos' publication of section 25 of 'Lambros' in 1834 perhaps indicates his desire to be shot of this poem; by publishing this section he was more or less preventing himself from doing any further work on it, so that he could concentrate on the new poems that he had already begun to work on.

Thus, in his early career as a Greek poet during Greece's struggle for independence, Solomos was trying to become a national poet in an international context and with an international audience in mind. Later, however, once Greece was established as an independent nation state, he came to see himself as writing for a purely Greek audience, and in his mature poems his debt to non-Greek poetry becomes less overt and more internalized.

In short, Solomos was accustomed to seeing Greek not as an *absolute* language, existing in isolation from others, but as a *relative* language to be viewed constantly in the context and from the perspective of other languages. But the relativity of Modern Greek did not consist solely in its relation to foreign languages; demotic Greek had also to be seen in relation to and in contrast with other forms of Greek, chiefly the classical language, the *koine* of the New Testament, and the 'purified' forms of the modern language.

Solomos does not seem to have been particularly interested in the relation between ancient and Modern Greek. Modern demotic Greek was and always

remained his mother tongue (that which bore him) and his native tongue (that into which he was born). On his return to Zakynthos in 1818 at the age of twenty after a ten-year sojourn in Italy, his knowledge of Modern Greek must have been acquired from purely oral sources, while Italian was his language of culture; it is poignant to record that the letters written to his mother from Italy were all in Italian, a language of which she was ignorant. We know that, having settled in his native island again, he began to study texts in Modern Greek, and the outbreak of the War of Independence in 1821 clearly added to his desire to overcome his alienation from his own mother tongue. In his mature poetry Solomos increasingly aspired to the structure and diction of the Greek folk song, which was presented by its learned proponents as being composed in a universal (transdialectal) Greek language which embodied the national soul.[8] That Modern Greek remained for him primarily an oral language is attested by his refusal to conform to the conventions of Greek orthography, to which he preferred a purely phonetic transcription (though he tidied up his spelling – with help from his friends– on the rare occasions when he prepared texts for publication).[9] Perhaps the large proportion of his work which he placed in the mouths of his characters is another indication of his treatment of Modern Greek as an oral language. All this also indicates his view of poetry as something to be sung or recited rather than read off the page.

Solomos had no truck with the 'purified' forms of Greek that were becoming increasingly widespread in his day, and which later came to be commonly known as *katharevousa*. His 'Dialogue' on the language question (written in 1824 but not published during his lifetime), in which he attacks the linguistic reforms proposed by Korais and other σοφολογιώτατοι (pedants), is a powerful argument in favour of the view that poetry, at least, should be written in the natural spoken language of the people. It is characteristic that Solomos chose to employ the dialogue form for his treatise on the language question, since it displays the opposing views of two characters in *spoken* form, even though the pedant uses the same form of Greek as the poet; Solomos probably had in mind Italian dialogues on the language question such as Machiavelli's *Dialogo intorno alla lingua* (1514).

Later, in 1833, he chided his friend George Tertsetis for having published a series of articles in 'quella lingua babelica' ['that language of Babel'];[10] in the same letter he fulminated against 'il mare della rea usanza' ['the sea of reprehensible usage'], characterizing the users of *katharevousa* as 'coloro che uccidono la civiltà della Grecia' ['those who are murdering the culture of Greece']. This was the time when the Greek government was becoming established in Athens, and Solomos,

seeking like Dante to create a perfect modern vernacular that would be as natural and motivated as the language of Adam had been, seems to have believed that Tertsetis possessed enough influence in official circles to influence the authorities in favour of accepting demotic as the unified language of a soon-to-be-unified Greece; Solomos would then have been re-embodying Greece's dismembered limbs, which had been severed by the various imperial powers. But the *de facto* adoption of a 'corrected' form of Greek had already become so deeply ingrained in Greek officialdom that demotic was to be more or less exiled from Athenian intellectual life for another fifty years. With the intellectual and literary establishment of the Greek kingdom in thrall to linguistic archaism and to the sense of inferiority *vis-à-vis* the ancient Greeks that this implied, there is little wonder that Solomos felt no desire to visit the mainland.

Yet, as the years went by, he must have felt increasingly isolated from the poets and readers of Greece, who tended in their turn to be alienated from Solomos' poetry because he was using what was considered to be the wrong language.[11] Solomos was clearly attempting to produce an alternative national literary language to the one used by the Athenian establishment, and it is significant that he was doing so within a multilingual context. He no doubt saw Corfu as an alternative centre of cultural power in the Greek world (as too was Constantinople) and refused to accept the exclusive hegemony of Athens. The fact that the Ionian Islands were nominally free and independent (albeit under British 'protection') meant that they were beyond the reach of cultural domination by Athens, itself in the grip of a strange kind of autochthonous colonialism, in which the indigenous popular Greek culture was being colonized by a new-fangled and alien Greek culture in semi-classical dress concocted and imposed by the intellectual elite. Solomos was deeply disconcerted by the state language through which the Athenian establishment exerted its power over the citizens of Greece and which threatened to disrupt and erode the spoken language instead of enriching it.

The reality of language use in Greece at the time was aptly satirized by D.K. Vyzandios in his comedy *Vavylonia* (1836). The title, literally 'Babylon', refers symbolically to the Tower of Babel, and the play depicts a gathering of characters from various parts of the Greek-speaking world in a café in Nafplion (then the capital) in 1827. The humour is based largely on the different dialects spoken by the characters, and particularly on the misunderstandings that arise from dialectal differences. Solomos was aware of the fact that his own spoken Greek had a strong dialectal tinge, and in his mature poems he clearly made efforts to exclude features

that could be identified as regional. In his arguments in the 'Dialogue' Solomos was careful to play down regional differences in Modern Greek; yet for him the proponents of *katharevousa* were adding yet another - unspoken and unspeakable - form of language to the fallen Babel that is human speech, with its multitude of different tongues, each of them divided into dialects. Influenced by the myth of Babel, Solomos perhaps yearned to be able to compose his poetry in the 'Adamic language' of which Dante too had dreamed:[12] the necessarily true and directly efficacious language in which God Himself had spoken during the first days of Creation, and in which He and Adam and Eve had conversed in the Garden of Eden, at that 'privileged moment in time when God, man, and natural forces still lived in mutual transparency',[13] and in which every word was divinely appropriate to its meaning – Socrates' 'αὐτὸ ἐκεῖνο ὃ ἔστιν ὄνομα' in the *Cratylus* (389d).

In his mature years Solomos' own bilingualism was compounded by his interest in contemporary German writing and by the fact that - because of his own ignorance of the German language – he had to read it in Italian translations made specially for him by his friend Nikolaos Lountzis. The consciousness of the multiplicity of languages and of the arbitrariness of each one; the awareness of the translatability and therefore the inevitable non-definitiveness of any text; yet the realization of the loss of certain indefinable nuances of meaning as they slip between languages and fail to be captured adequately in any of them - all this perhaps led him to wish to be able to 'speak in concepts', as he puts it in the 'Dialogue'; even though in the same passage he admits the futility of trying to speak 'the language of Adam'.[14] In other words, whereas the Romantic and post-Romantic view of language was that it was the 'incarnation of the thought'[15] and that the relationship between the two was therefore organic, Solomos still adhered largely to the Classical dogma that 'language is the dress of thought', and that linguistic expression, like clothes, can be changed at will.[16] Nevertheless, the fuller version of the phrase from the 'Dialogue' addressed by the poet to the pedant and quoted above, ' 'Ομίλειε μὲ τὰ νοήματα, γιὰ νὰ μὴ βαρβαρίζῃς!' ['Speak in concepts so as not to barbarize!', or perhaps 'If you don't want to speak barbarically, then let your concepts speak for themselves!'], implies that if one's ideas are noble, they will ennoble the language that one has borrowed from the mouths of the people.[17]

It is clear that the chief reason why Solomos drafted his mature Greek poems in Italian prose before laboriously converting them into Greek verse was that he wished first to fix his meaning in an alien and prosaic garb before re-dressing it in

Greek poetic language; he wished to place the Italian as a mediator of his expression and as a rein on his impulsive inspiration, which was capable of producing poems with somewhat excessive facility. This too is a decidedly non-Romantic procedure: monolingualism – the exclusive use of and allegiance to the national mother tongue – was a Romantic imperative, whereas in the youthful satires of his pre-Romantic phase Solomos was happy to mix his languages and allow them to interpenetrate. It seems that in his mature work he did not wish to commit himself to a specific formulation of his idea in Greek until he was sure precisely what he wanted to say, and Italian possessed the ready-made vocabulary which enabled him to clothe his idea in words. Yet in his constant recasting of textual material in the successive drafts of a single poem Solomos was often translating intralingually as well as interlingually, altering the formulation of his ideas in Italian even before putting them into Greek, then obsessively redrafting the Greek too. The most obvious examples are the different versions of the same motif in the three drafts of 'The Free Besieged' as it is published in the editions. This very dependence of poetic composition on translation and the infinite substitutability of signifiers made him constantly aware of the arbitrary and labile character of language and of the lack of a one-to-one correspondence between words and things. Moreover, as Paul de Man remarks with reference to Walter Benjamin, translation reveals that, so far from our being cosily at home in our own language while being alienated in any other, 'this alienation is at its strongest in our own relation to our own original language'.[18]

For Solomos Italian was the language of Dante, but it was also a language that since Dante's time had been through such a lengthy process of sophisticated elaboration (Renaissance, Marinismo, Baroque, Rococo, Neoclassical refinement, etc.) that it had become conventional and etiolated. Modern Greek, on the other hand, was still chiefly an oral language, whose use had been largely confined to speech and song. In his adulation of Modern Greek as a spoken language Solomos shows himself to have been a Romantic. For him the seemingly naive language of the Greek peasants, which showed itself at its finest in the folk songs, was closer to the language of Adam than any sophisticated literary language could be. An oral language was one that directly expressed the motions of the heart and soul without the mediation of writing and reading. We can contrast the verbosity, the neutral abstraction, and the academic coldness of Solomos' Italian poetry, which is rather old-fashioned and lacks 'intimate native resonances',[19] with the conciseness, the emotive evocativeness, and the musical sensuality of his Greek. This contrast is

due to the opposition between the constraints of the old Italian literary convention and the freedom offered by living Greek popular speech and song. It is also due to the fact that Italian was a 'borrowed voice',[20] his 'second, or second-hand language', while Greek was his native voice; Italian was the 'patriarchal' language, while Greek was his 'maternal' language.[21] Solomos' Italian is, to use Deleuze and Guattari's term, deterritorialized,[22] lacking any organic relationship with his native place. After completing his poetic apprenticeship with his Italian masters, Solomos was able to apply their lessons to his own language, in which he was able to achieve completely new effects.[23]

Early in his career Solomos tried his hand at poems in Italian which turned out to be devoid of any individual style; he simply used the available conventions. Solomos eventually did the converse of the more successful colonial or post-colonial writers who re-fashion and extend the hegemonic colonialist language by inoculating it with the spirit, rhythms and flavour of the native language in order to express their indigenous experience;[24] instead he injected into Greek the sophistication of Italian poetry and German thought, thereby extending and deepening the expressive capabilities of the Greek language on the basis of Italian and other languages.[25] This means that the seemingly oral language of his mature Greek poetry, fragmentary as it is, is impregnated with his readings in Italian, German, and other literatures. Solomos wished to cure what was widely perceived to be the moral degeneration of the contemporary Greeks by transmitting to them the moral courage and purity that he could sense in the actions of the people of Missolonghi, but which he believed could be expressed only through concepts developed by recent western European philosophers such as Kant, Hegel, and Schiller (including of course their aesthetic values). Thus Solomos resembles those post-colonial writers who learn from their colonizers how to use language and literature in different ways and for new uses and who apply this knowledge to their hitherto low-prestige native languages, which they reclaim and develop for literary use. After a period of exile in Italy, in which he attempted to assimilate himself to Italian culture and in which his Greek identity became displaced, Solomos at first continued to write in Italian from the eastern periphery of the Italian-speaking world. But he soon sought to return home by writing from the western periphery of the Greek-speaking world, creating an ideal Greek language and locating his poems in a Greek setting.

But it took Solomos a long time to get this far. It is instructive to compare and contrast the playful satires that he wrote in 1824 ('New Year's Day', 'The

Consultation', and 'The Visit') with his mature Greek poems dating from 1833 onwards, for it is here that we can observe his transition from an overt multilingualism to an apparent monolingualism in which his many voices are singing in unison. Reading these playful satires we become aware of the extent of multilingualism that prevailed in the aristocratic and bourgeois circles in which Solomos lived in Zakynthos; this mixture of languages in the same text (Greek, Italian, Venetian, Latin, and French)[26] perhaps represents (albeit in exaggerated form) the kind of language which Solomos and his circle used in their everyday conversation. In 'The Consultation', in particular, Dr. Tagiapieras speaks exclusively in French, while Dr. Roidis formulates his prescription in Latin; otherwise the latter speaks in a mixture of Greek and Venetian-tinged Italian, as the following extract illustrates:

> Ma zà κάνω ogni sproposito
> Μέρα νύχτα ... Μπά! a proposito,
> Vostra madre τί μοῦ κάνει;
> [But now I make every kind of gaffe
> all day and all night... Ah! by the way,
> how's your mother doing?][27]

In these poems we observe not merely the co-existence, side-by-side, of different languages, but a promiscuous interpenetration which results in hybrids such as the forms 'Demostene' and 'ντισερτατσιόνες' found in 'New Year's Day'. Here Solomos seems to be putting the various languages on display, standing outside them rather than inside.

It is indicative that these satires display *differences* of opinion among the characters. The monologue that Roidis addresses to the poet in 'New Year's Day' explicitly contrasts the speaker's method of poetic composition with that of the addressee: Roidis claims that his own verse is improvised without any conscious effort on his own part, while Solomos is clearly labouring hard over his manuscript.[28] 'The Visit' presents a meeting and exchange of views between various characters, while 'The Consultation' presents discussions and disagreements among a group of doctors. 'New Year's Day' consists entirely of Roidis' monologue, while 'The Consultation' and 'The Visit' contain narrative passages which, significantly enough, are in Greek only. Solomos seems to have realized that the poet's own language – unmixed without being 'purified' according to the

rules of ancient grammar – must be distinguished from the jargon of the doctors.

These satires display the colonized sociolect of Solomos' community, in which at least two languages and alphabets are merged. In his mature poems he attempted to decolonize Greek, a task that entailed the excision both of foreign and of *katharevousa* elements, the latter representing for him marks of Turkish domination, since Solomos saw linguistic archaism as a desperate but misguided attempt by the subjugated Greeks to preserve their links with their ancient heritage – an attempt that should have been abandoned as soon as the Greeks had showed themselves worthy of freedom during the War of Independence. Thus the struggle for political independence by the freedom-fighters of 1821 goes hand in hand with linguistic independence – from ancient Greek as well as from Italian.

In parallel, in Solomos' serious poems we can observe a transition through three stages: first, the rather journalistic diction of the 'Hymn to Liberty', which consists partly of fictional eye-witness reports of certain military episodes of the War of Independence embodied in an international stanzaic structure; secondly, the Greek in Italian dress of 'Lambros', in whose *ottava rima* we hear the rhythms of the Italian chivalric and epic verse tradition (and of Byron's *Don Juan*) running in rather incongruous counterpoint to the agonies of the Manfred-like hero and the patriotic Greek setting; and thirdly, the indigenous plots and settings and the native fifteen-syllable verses of the later poems. Solomos' adoption of the Greek fifteen-syllable verse was an important step in his assertion of his difference from the dominant foreign culture.

This move from multilingualism to monolingualism might be seen, in Bakhtinian terms, as a transition from dialogism to monologism:[29] the youthful satires put on display the impure multilingualism and the multiplicity of contradictory discourses prevailing in the real, socially stratified community from which Solomos emerged and in which he lived, while 'The Free Besieged' aspires to a single, pure Greek voice which is spoken by no real community at all, but belongs to the imagined ideal organic community of the besieged inhabitants of Missolonghi, a community which possesses a single consciousness and in which all internal conflicts are finally resolved. It is significant that the characters and events of Solomos' serious poems tend to originate from and be placed outside the Ionian Islands, in locations he had never visited: the language of truth (the absolute, divine language rather than the relative language of reality) is always to be sought elsewhere. Their single-minded devotion to their spiritual goal brings the people of Missolonghi as close as it is possible for human beings to come to the Adamic

state. Moreover, the demotic language of the folk songs, which Solomos struggled to make his own and to adapt for his own purposes in his mature poems, came near to fulfilling the ideal of a 'universal language spoken by a universal voice',[30] since its forms were the common property of all Greeks without belonging to any single individual or group. Not only did demotic satisfy the search for an Adamic language, but its use conforms with the Herderian idea that a language embodies the history and collective identity of a people. Yet this view would ignore the Italian and German intertexts that are inherent in the mature poems: the monologism is only apparent; the Greek of these poems conceals a dialogue between languages, and it is the assimilation of the discourses of his foreign influences to the language and versification of Greek popular tradition that gives Solomos' Greek its special vibrancy.

As I have already said, however, it is only the posthumously published versions of these late Greek poems that are exclusively in Greek. 'The Cretan', 'The Free Besieged', 'The Shark', and other mature poems were never completed and never prepared for publication. In the manuscripts, the fragments of these poems are like the tips of icebergs, the bulk of whose volume consists of Italian prose material. The first editor, Polylas, has been followed by his successors in isolating the Greek verses from the Italian context (or peritext) that surrounds them in the manuscripts (the exception to this rule is of course the facsimile *Autograph Works* published by Linos Politis in 1964); yet even a cursory comparison of Polylas' version of 'The Shark', for instance, with the more recent reconstructions of the poem by Kechagioglou and Alexiou[31] shows up significant differences in the number and content of the lines which are due to the different solutions adopted by each scholar to the problems presented by the text. Furthermore, the standard edition of Solomos' works, by Linos Politis, has dismembered the poet's corpus, not only separating the Italian works from the Greek, but separating the Greek prose from the Greek verse and the satirical from the non-satirical Greek poetry, thus making Solomos' chronological development difficult to discern. What appear in the editions to be isolated fragments are but those peaks of a vast subaqueous continent that protrude above the surface of the Greek language. Nevertheless, since the Italian drafts and notes are often indispensable keys to the meaning of the Greek fragments, Polylas felt in some cases constrained to include, in his own Greek translation, certain extracts from these Italian texts as introductory or supplementary material to the Greek fragments, although he characteristically omitted to specify that these extracts were originally in Italian. Politis too felt it necessary to

quote, in Greek translation, extracts from Solomos' Italian drafts in order to help the reader understand ambiguous or incomprehensible passages in the Greek poems. Thus the Greek poems of Solomos are the tips of intertextual icebergs: they are embedded in Solomos' own Italian material, which in turn contains a multitude of quotations from and allusions to texts in various languages – ancient Greek, Modern Greek (both demotic and *katharevousa*), Latin, Italian, German, French, English, and Spanish - so that beneath the Greek poems lies the whole of the Italian literary tradition (especially Dante and the Florentine Renaissance synthesis of Christianity and Neoplatonism) as well as the large body of Solomos' readings in other European literatures, and especially contemporary German thought. Here Solomos' Italian is a channel through which he transfuses European culture into Greek. Once the reader is aware of the Italian material, it becomes an obligatory intertext, constantly diverting him from the linear reading of a self-sufficient poem-fragment and referring him to the manuscript context from which the Greek fragment has been extracted.

To change metaphors, the first task of the traditional editor has been the double one of prospector and purifier, first searching for nuggets of Greek gold, then cleaning away the Italian dross. After this stage, the editor's task has been that of the old-fashioned archaeologist who sets out to reconstruct the edifice whose ruins he has painstakingly discovered. The task of the sensitive and involved reader has then to be to reverse this process and view the Greek verses in the context of the Italian drafts and notes, since Solomos' late work is not a poetry of completion but a poetry of process, whose importance lies not in what the poem would have said had it been finished, but precisely in the laborious process by which the poet attempted to hew a Greek poetic form out of his formless Italian material.[32] We can compare those unfinished sculptures of Michelangelo in which a human form seems to be struggling to escape from a shapeless block of marble: their fascination lies not in the speculation as to what the form would have been like had it fully emerged, but in the depiction of the process of emergence.

This emergence of Greek verses from their Italian prose context can be illustrated by the following two extracts from Solomos' manuscripts of the third draft of 'The Free Besieged' (Greek verses are printed in italics in my English translation):

(1) Le mille volte benedetto quel sogno deh! fosse vero. Teh le mie ali o vaso di sventura [?che misse][33] l'angelo, incorruttibili sono e volano da per tutto.

οχι φιλὶ χερετισμὸ μιτε ματια νὰ δοσο
κ' αμεσος τα σφιροκοπο στον ανικτον αερα,
χορις φιλι χερετιςμὸ μιτε ματιὰ να δοσο.

Non fossi tu sogno o visione notturna! teh!

[A thousand times blessed is this dream. Ah! if only it were true. Ah! my wings, oh vessel of misfortune, [?which the angel put on me] are incorruptible and fly everywhere.

without giving either kiss or farewell or glance
I beat them at once in the open air.

Would that you were not a dream, oh nocturnal vision! Alas!][34]

(2) Nel fronzato albero η αβγαλτη κορι mirava le danze della vittoria, τὸ στραβὸ φεσι στο χορὸ τ'ανθι σ'αυτι στολιζι. Entro lo stesso l'intimorita ascoltava il tumulto della pugna lontana dalla quale uno sfrenato cavallo giunse [...]

[In the leafy tree *the young maiden* had been watching the victory dances, *the crooked fez in the dance is adorned by a flower behind the ear.* From inside the same tree the frightened girl was listening to the tumult of the distant battle, from which an unbridled horse approached.][35]

Although the Greek verses in both examples reappear in a more elaborated form and within a larger Greek context in later drafts, the sections of the poem in which they were planned to appear were never completed.

The bilingual poet's approach to his linguistic material is self-consciously sophisticated, since he is aware of the relativity and specificity of the particular language he is using, while at the same time he feels the other language constantly pressing against him and attempting to invade the language in which he is writing.[36] Solomos' Greek poetry is constantly haunted by Italian and other languages. For Italian was not merely a channel for transfusing European culture into Greek, but a substance in itself that placed constant pressure on his Greek.

In the end, Solomos was able to make a virtue of necessity: his cultural cross-breeding made possible the linguistic, intellectual and cultural cross-fertilization that fed his Greek poetry, while he managed to convert his hybridity into syncretism. Far from viewing the Babelic multiplicity of languages as a handicap to his intention to speak to 'the Greek world', he may have understood the positive advantages and the 'psychic indispensability of the prodigality of diverse languages', since each language embodies a 'possible world'.[37] The very existence of different languages and the transferability of meanings between them emphasized for him the detachability of meaning from linguistic form, of the signified from the signifier: this may have led him to a belief in the existence of an *Ursprache* lying behind all languages,[38] and even to a belief that ideas can perhaps exist as autonomous entities outside language itself.[39] No doubt he also came to see that a knowledge (or at least an awareness) of as many languages as possible could go some way towards recuperating the single universal meaning that had been smashed to smithereens at Babel as a divine punishment for human rebellion and arrogance. This was the meaning that he attempted (with incomplete success, of course) to incorporate into his mature Greek poems. At the same time it is obvious that Solomos wished to enrich the limited range of the primarily oral Greek language of his day by injecting into it the rich and varied concepts to be found in the literary languages of Europe. As Derrida puts it, 'grâce à la traduction, autrement dit à cette supplémentarité linguistique par laquelle une langue donne à l'autre celui qui lui manque, et le lui donne harmonieusement, ce croisement des langues assure la croissance des langues'.[40]

The reading of Solomos' poetry too involves a dialogue between languages. For the reader, Solomos' work is an endlessly fascinating network of poetry and concepts which constantly refer to various languages and the literatures that have been written in them. The lack of closure of his mature works, with their successive and obsessive versions in Italian and Greek, results in their meaning being constantly deferred as the poet constantly searches, amid the luxuriant jungle of alternatives, for the perfect expression that forever eludes him.

NOTES

I am grateful to the editors and to Professor Roderick Beaton for their careful reading of a draft of this article, which has been greatly improved as a result of their advice.

1 Solomos appears to be unknown to students of Italian poetry. Generally negative assessments of his Italian works are made by F.M. Pontani, 'Le poesie italiane di Dionisio Solomòs', Ἐπιθεώρησις (Rome), 3 (1940) 324-37, and V. Rotolo, 'Dionisios Solomòs fra la cultura italiana e la cultura greca', Ἰταλοελληνικά 1 (1988) 87-110 (see p. 87 for a select bibliography on the subject). For the consequences of Solomos' bilingualism see Z. Lorentzatos, Γιὰ τὸ Σολωμό: τὴ λύρα τὴ δίκαιη (Athens 1974), esp. pp. 22 and 26-7, O. Merlier, 'Italien et grec chez Solomos', in his book *Solomos et Origène, suivi de deux autres essais* (Athens 1990) 43-58, and especially the illuminating analysis of the composition of 'Carmen Seculare' by Louis Coutelle in his book *Πλαισιώνοντα τὸν Σολωμό* (Athens 1990) 153-61. The widespread multilingualism of Greek poets is stressed by G.P. Savidis, 'Γιὰ τὴν πολυγλωσσία κάποιων νεότερων Ἑλλήνων ποιητῶν', Τὸ Δέντρο, no. 33-34 (Sept.-Oct. 1987) 3-12.

2 According to the quadripartite scheme proposed by Henri Gobard for multilingual communities, the 'langue vernaculaire, maternelle ou territoriale, de communité rurale ou d'origine rurale' (the one used 'here') was Modern Greek; the 'langue véhiculaire, urbaine, étatique ou même mondiale, langue de société, d'échange commerciale, de transmission bureaucratique, etc., langue de première déterritorialisation' (the one used 'everywhere') was both Italian and English; the 'langue référentiaire, langue du sens et de la culture, opérant une reterritorialisation culturelle' (the one used 'over there') was Italian; and the 'langue mythique, à l'horizon des cultures, et de reterritorialisation spirituelle ou religieuse' (the one used 'beyond') was both Latin and Greek (both Classical and Biblical in each case). See G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *Kafka: pour une littérature mineure* (Paris 1975) 43.

3 The other volume he published was the 'Hymn to Liberty'.

4 Merlier, 'Italien et grec chez Solomos' 54.

5 Dionysios Solomos, Ἅπαντα, III: Ἀλληλογραφία (Athens 1991) 91; the letter dates from 22 March 1825. Whereas Politis earlier believed the fair copies to have been made by Lodovico Strani (Dionysios Solomos, Αὐτόγραφα ἔργα (Thessaloniki 1964) 591 and 593), he later came back to his earlier view that they were done by Giorgio de Rossi: Ἀλληλογραφία 124).

6 Ἀλληλογραφία 103 (8 June 1825).

7 *Ionian Anthology* no. 1 (January 1834).

8 Nevertheless, even the Greek folk songs probably came to Solomos via Paris, in the form of Claude Fauriel's *Chants populaires de la Grèce moderne* (Paris 1824-5), where the Greek song is framed within a French peritext and accompanied by a French translation. Fauriel's second volume (1825) also included the 'Hymn to Liberty', together with a French translation.

9 For a sample of Solomos' Greek spelling see the quotation on p. 72.

10 Ἀλληλογραφία 253 (1 June 1833).

11 See especially Alexandros Soutsos' verse 'Epistle to King Otto' (1833), which criticizes Solomos and Kalvos for their 'sublime thoughts poorly dressed'. Kalvos, six years Solomos' senior, had made serious efforts to become established as an Italian poet and tragedian before his brief but intense foray into Greek poetry in 1824-6, after which his poetic voice fell silent; although his version of Greek poetic diction was more archaistic than that of Solomos, his poetry was equally thrust aside by the Athenian establishment.

12 Although at one point Dante expressed the standard view that this pre-Babelic language was Hebrew (*De vulgari eloquentia*, Book I, chapter VII), he later depicted Adam himself correcting this view and claiming that 'the tongue I spoke was all extinct' even before the Tower of Babel was built (*Paradiso*, canto XXVI). Solomos quotes this line from Dante in his 'Dialogue': Ἅπαντα, II: Πεζὰ καὶ ἰταλικά (Athens 1955) 18.

13 J.-P. Vernant, 'Foreword' to M. Olender, *The Languages of Paradise: Race, Religion and Philosophy in the Nineteenth Century*, tr. A. Goldhammer (Cambridge, Mass., and London 1992, x.
14 As Alex Argyros writes, 'The story of the Tower of Babel is an allegorical version of the making arbitrary of the signifier' (*Crimes of Narration: Camus' 'La Chute'* (Toronto 1985) 14).
15 William Wordsworth, 'Essay on Epitaphs III', in W.J.B. Owen, ed., *Wordsworth's Literary Criticism* (London 1974) 154.
16 Lorentzatos, *Γιά τό Σολωμό* 135, interprets the following note in Solomos's manuscripts as the poet's view of the four stages of poetic composition: 'pensare, immaginare, sentire, parola' ['think, imagine, feel, word']. It is significant that the linguistic form is the last element to enter into the process. Dante too had written that 'the theme of those who write verse always persists as an ingredient separate from the words' (*De vulgari eloquentia*, Book II, chapter I). Compare the famous phrase from Solomos' letter to Tertsetis (see footnote 10): 'la nazione vuole da noi il tesoro della nostra Intelligenza individuale vestito nazionalmente' ['the nation wants from us the treasure of our individual intelligence clad in national dress']; the 'treasure of the individual intelligence' is more important than the national dress in which it is expressed.
17 My colleague Stathis Gauntlett has suggested to me an alternative interpretation of the phrase "Ομίλειε μὲ τὰ νοήματα...', namely 'speak in gestures if you don't want to talk barbarically'. I am grateful to him for pointing out this possibility which, if adopted, would of course nullify the point I am making here.
18 P. de Man, 'Conclusions: Walter Benjamin's "The Task of the Translator"', in *The Resistance to Theory* (Minneapolis 1976) 84.
19 Rotolo, 'Dionisios Solomòs' 106.
20 R. Parthasarathy, 'The exile as writer: on being an Indian writer in English', *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, vol. 24, no. 1 (1989) 2.
21 See Nicole Ward Jouve's book, *White Woman Speaks with Forked Tongue: Criticism as Autobiography* (London and New York 1991) esp. 22-3, which book contains many stimulating and moving insights into the condition of bilingualism that are relevant to Solomos.
22 Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka* 29-30.
23 For rich documentation and insights concerning poets who work their way through other languages until they produce their best work in their native language see L. Forster, *The Poet's Tongues: Multilingualism in Literature* (Dunedin 1970).
24 Braj B. Kachru talks of the 'nativization of discourse patterns' in the colonial language by the post-colonial writer ('The bilingual's creativity: discoursal and stylistic strategies in contact literatures', in L.E. Smith, ed., *Discourse across Cultures: Strategies in World Englishes* (New York, London, Sydney, and Tokyo 1987) 125. See also B. Ashcroft et al., *The Empire Strikes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (London and New York 1989).
25 I am not referring here to the numerous linguistic Italianisms that occur in his Greek poetry, nor to Italian tics such as the interjected 'yes' in mid-sentence, encountered in Italian poetry throughout the centuries and frequently found in Solomos' Greek poetry: compare 'Σήμερ', ἄπιστοι, ἐγεννήθη, / Ναί, τοῦ κόσμου ὁ Λυτρωτης' ('Hymn to Liberty', stanza 97), with 'Il giorno,/ Sì, di letizia e di vittoria, è questo' (Alfieri, *Saul*, II 332-3).
26 This mixing of different languages or dialects within the same text, which is frequently found in Italian literature, has been termed 'plurilinguismo' to distinguish it from the multilingualism of a particular community or the use by the same writer of different languages in different texts (Ivano Paccagnella, 'Plurilinguismo litterario: lingue, dialetti, linguaggio', in *Letteratura italiana, vol. 1: Produzione e consumo* (Turin 1983) 103-67. The use of different alphabets in the same text has been termed 'polygraphy' (J.-G. Lapacherie, 'Poly-, hétéro- et exo-graphies', *Poétique* 84 (November 1990) 397).
27 Dionysios Solomos, "Απαντα, I: Ποιήματα, 2nd ed. (Athens 1961) 278.

28 This satirical portrait of Roidis is most probably a critical self-portrait, ridiculing the facile method of composition which Solomos had employed in *Rime improvvisate* and which he had by now abandoned. It is not certain whether this self-criticim is related to the negative review of the *Rime* by Solomos' erstwhile friend, the pro-Romantic critic Giuseppe Montani, in the *Nuova antologia* in 1824, where Solomos is castigated for indulging in Italian improvisations instead of becoming a patriotic poet in Greek. For this review see M. Vitti, Ἱστορία τῆς νεοελληνικῆς λογοτεχνίας (Athens 1987), 185.

29 See M. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics*, ed. and tr. Caryl Emerson (Manchester 1984).

30 M. Holquist, 'Introduction' to M.M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, tr. Caryl Emerson and M. Holquist (Austin 1981) xxi.

31 G. Kechagioglou, 'Προτάσεις γιὰ τὸν "Πόρφυρα"', in Ἀφιέρωμα στὸν καθ. Λ. Πολίτη (Thessaloniki 1979) 179-83; S. Alexiou, 'Σολωμικά', Παλίμψηστον, no. 3 (December 1986) 30-1.

32 It is as well to point out that the 'formlessness' of the Italian prose drafts of Solomos' Greek poems has nothing in common with the 'academic coldness' of his Italian poems. As is illustrated in the examples quoted, the Italian drafts contain passages of intensely passionate lyrical prose. Bearing in mind that Solomos knew Macpherson's poems, which purported to be prose translations of poems by the non-existent Celtic bard Ossian, we might see Solomos' Italian prose drafts as the converse of these: while Macpherson's texts were supposed to be prose translations that conveyed the meaning but not the form of the poetic original, so Solomos' Italian prose seems to have poetry hidden within it and struggling to escape.

33 Politis reads this phrase as 'di misse', which makes no apparent sense. Solomos' handwriting is fiendishly difficult, and my suggestion in square brackets (including 'misse' for the more standard 'mise') is only a conjecture. I am grateful to Professor John Woodhouse for confirming my hunch that there is something wrong either with Solomos' own formulation or with Politis' reading of it.

34 Solomos, Αὐτόγραφα ἔργα 508.

35 Ibid., 453.

36 See Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* 62.

37 G. Steiner, 'Preface' to *After Babel* (2nd ed., Oxford and New York 1992) xiv-xv.

38 Steiner, *After Babel* (London, Oxford and New York 1975) 64.

39 Cf. Brian Fitch, who writes that for the bilingual writer 'language will tend to peel away from its meaning so that what language normally designates or gives expression to will somehow be felt to lie elsewhere, outside of language, because it is between languages': *Beckett and Babel: an Investigation into the Status of the Bilingual Work* (Toronto, Buffalo and London 1988) 158.

40 J. Derrida, 'Des Tours de Babel', in J.F. Graham, ed., *Difference in Translation* (Ithaca and London 1985) 246.