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Nikos Kazantzakis’s Work under the Romanian Censorship’s Siege

ABSTRACT

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This article presents several observations regarding the way the Romanian Communist Censorship affected the editorial field, in general, and the literary translation, in particular. Therefore, I will provide a comparative analysis of the translations into Romanian of two works belonging to Nikos Kazantzakis, *Ο Χριστός ξανασταυρώνεται* (*Christ Recrucified*) and *Αναφορά στον Γκρέκο* (*Report to Greco*), performed firstly in 1968 and in 1986, and retranslated after 1989.

Keywords: Censorship, literary translation, comparative analysis.

He who controls the past controls the future.
He who controls the present controls the past.
(Orwell 1949: 42)

During the communist Regime in Romania (1945–1989) the Modern Greek literature enjoyed a special attention of the Romanian editors and of the public as well. Writers like Emmanouil Roidis, Alexandros Rizos Rangavis, Alexandros Papadiamantis, Konstantinos Kavafis, Gregorios Xenopoulos or Andreas Karkavitsas were widely translated, but it seems that Nikos Kazantzakis is the public’s favourite Greek writer judging by the number of editions his works had¹. Despite

1| For example, the translation of *Zorba the Greek* (*Βίος και η πολιτεία του Αλέξη Ζορμπά-1946*) was published in Romania in 1969, 1987, 1994, 1999.

its profoundly religious (mystic) content, his Work somehow managed to get through the Censorship's vigilance, but with several "sacrifices" (see unit 3).

1. Censorship in Romania

It is of common knowledge that the communist Regime in Romania (1945–1989) was a totalitarian one. Together with its Ideology they were implemented through *Censorship* and *Propaganda*, with the purpose of the instauration of a new political and social climate for a *homo novus*, detached from his traditional ethical and religious values, obedient and depersonalized.

Censorship was not a phenomenon invented by communism, though. The first to establish an official Censorship was King Carol II (1893–1953) for two years (1938–1940) during his monarchical Dictatorship. His enforced abdication in 1940 was followed by the instauration of general Antonescu's Dictatorship (1940–1944)², when it was accounted for by the World War II and Romania's adhesion to fascist Germany. However, when we refer to censorship, the automatic association is with a form of abusive control exerted by the Romanian Communist Party, instituted at the end of the War with the approval of Soviet power.

This type of Censorship, known as the *General Division for Media and Printing* (GDMP)³, as a reflection of the communist Regime's policy, has undergone two stages delimited by the year 1977 when, under the pressure of the West, Ceaușescu formally dissolved it, based on the Decree 471. The first stage follows the end of the World War II and it ends as already mentioned in 1977, while the second stage, the stage of the hidden control, was ended by the Revolution of 1989. The first stage of the Censorship is related to the period of imposing a Soviet like regime in Romania, in parallel with the Romanian society's "cleansing" through both physical and spiritual extermination in communist prisons of the first rank intellectuals, prosperous farmers opposing the *Collectivization*, priests, businessmen, students and even high-school pupils. In the second stage, the hostile attitude towards the traditional Romanian values, the Church and the Religion, in general, became harsher; history was mystified and the cult of personality was instituted.

Regardless of its stages, Censorship adversely affected all fields of activity which involved the creation of cultural products meant for the masses: written media, television, radio, arts (theatre, film), education, philosophy, literature (original productions or translations) etc.

2| In this case, we talk about a military Censorship, "turned afterwards into an appendix of the Soviet Committee of Truce Control until 1947" (Rusan 2012: 111).

3| Direcția Presei și a Tipăriturilor.

2. Censorship and the editorial field

Instituted at the end of the Second World War with the approval of the Soviet Russia, the GDMP was officially in charge with monitoring media and literary products in Romania. It was a visible institution until 1977, “with headquarters, employees and a name” (Blandiana 2012: 21). After that year the communist Party’s control over the written cultural products was getting worse, as the GDMP’s former employees were hired by the state’s publishing houses and newspapers. They became invisible, “Censorship became a definition impossible to avoid, but also impossible to pinpoint [...]” (ibid.). Moreover, censure could be imposed by the feared *Securitate*⁴, a kind of political police. There were many cases when manuscripts and typewriters were confiscated or “the entire edition was withdrawn and burned, while all the printing costs were incurred by the author and those who had approved the publication” (Râpeanu 2012: 107).

Editors, writers, translators and journalists had developed a set of “tricks” meant to pass the cultural product through Censorship’s forks. Any reference to *God, Saints, Church* or *Religion* was either omitted or masked “by spelling them with small letters” (Petreu 2012: 42). Another “trick” was the intentional introduction of “subversive” paragraphs, hostile to the Party, “meant to distract the censor’s attention from what the author really wanted to transmit” (Cubleşan 2012: 68). The adding of a word or a name related to the communist Ideology (the *Party, Marx, Lenin, the people, the Republic, cranes, labour, factory*) especially in titles was another “trick” widely used those years⁵.

3. Censorship’s strategies in Nikos Kazantzakis’s works

The translation process in the years before 1989 had a little in common with the one developed nowadays, for the direct communication with contemporary foreign writers was difficult or even impossible⁶. Foreign titles were translated at the proposal of a publishing house or of a translator, and after three reports of *opportunity* were drafted by the field’s specialists.

The opening of the communist regime towards the works of a profound religious (mystic) writer like Nikos Kazantzakis, contrary to what one expects, was

4| Departamentul Securității Statului (Department of State Security).

5| Ana Blandiana’s case (which was not unique) when the title of the poem opening her debut volume, *First person singular* (1964), was changed from *Immocence* to *Ode to the Party* (Blandiana 2012: 29).

6| Exceptionally, Pericle Martinescu, the translator of *Christ Recrucified* in 1968, had the extraordinary chance to travel to the island of Egina (Greece), where he met Nikos Kazantzakis.

a matter of *opportunity* for the Regime. It was precisely the Greek writer's inquisitive nature with all its questions, doubts, apparent denial of Divinity, but also his conflict with the Greek Orthodox Church as institution that served the Propaganda. Uninformed readers might see Kazantzakis as an atheist. The Censorship, after cutting out from his works exactly those paragraphs (sometimes even entire pages as it is the case of *Report to Greco*, published in translation in 1986) in which the writer burns out for his love of God, through its literary critics, presents Kazantzakis as a religious thinker and imposes him to the collective consciousness as a rebel, freed from religion-generated torments, as an apostate [see the *Preface to Christ Recrucified (Hristos răstignit a doua oară* – 1968) signed by literary critic Romul Munteanu: “But this (N.T. presence of Biblical references) should not lead to the obviously erroneous conclusion that Nikos Kazantzakis imbues his novels with a certain theological meaning. His polemics with Christian ethics reveals the position of a rebel Christian and, finally, an atheist (Munteanu 1968: IX) or “[...] Nikos Kazantzakis is a rebel who fights the *religion of nonviolence* and destroys the myth of the Biblical quotation by having it face the spirit of our epoch. That is why we are of the opinion that the meaning of the parable from *Hristos răstignit a doua oară* is somewhat outside the narration of events, and to interpret the novel from a religious perspective would be to deny its fundamental intention” (Munteanu 1968: XVII)].

In order to illustrate how Censorship exerted its influence in the case of Kazantzakis during its two stages of existence (1945–1977, 1977–1989), I will present a comparative analysis of the translations performed for *Ο Χριστός ξανασταυρώνεται* (en. *Christ Recrucified*) and *Αναφορά στον Γκρέκο* (en. *Report to Greco*). The first book was translated for the first time in 1968 (when Censorship existed officially) under the title *Hristos răstignit a doua oară* by Pericle Martinescu and Ioan Halianis, and retranslated in 2008 as *Hristos răstignit din nou* by Ion Diaconescu. The case of the second book is more interesting as it was translated by the same translator, Alexandra Medrea Danciu, under the title *Raport către El Greco*, firstly in 1986, during the “invisible” but harsher Censorship, and then again in 2012.

Both translations performed before 1989 indicate the methods used by the Censorship to make Kazantzakis's work comply with the communist Ideology. Those methods concerned religious and cultural aspects, mainly. For the religious aspects, in order to desacralise the specific terminology, the main methods were the spelling of the Church terminology with small letters (see the subunit 3.1.1), the avoidance of words such as *God*, *Christ* or their replacement with common paraphrasing (see subunit 3.1.2). Other method was the use of irony and trivialisation towards the Church representatives, as well as the trivialisation of the characters' discourse on religious matters (see subunit 3.1.3). The cultural aspects, such as the anti-Semitic remarks or the revisionist (the promise to recover the

Constantinople from the Turks) remarks, and the conflict between the Christian subjects and the Ottoman conquerors, were treated with caution either by lexical replacements or by total elimination from the text (see subunit 3.2) even though such an action required the elimination of entire paragraphs or even pages (see subunit 3.2.3).

3.1. Dealing with the religious issues

3.1.1 Spelling Church terminology in small letters

Despite the abundance of examples that confirm the use of spelling of the Christian religious terminology with small letters in order to desacralise it, I will further mention only three relevant cases.

In *Christ Recrucified* (1968): *του Χριστού την Ανάσταση* (p. 17) – *învierea lui Hristos*. [Christ's resurrection...] (p. 15), *το Άγιο Δισκοπότηρο* (p. 152) – *potirul* [chalice] (p. 196) instead of *Sfântul Potir* [Holy Chalice], *τον Τιμιο Σταυρό* (p. 25) – *cinstita cruce* [Holy Cross] (p. 27).

In *Report to Greco* (1986): *Άγιος Τάφος* (p. 80) – *mormântul sfînt* [holy tomb] (p. 91), *το Άγιο Πνεύμα* (p. 103) – *spiritul sfînt* [holy spirit] (114) or *duhul sfînt* [holy ghost] (p. 288, p. 505x3), *Δευτέρα Παρουσία* (341) – *judicata de apoi* [doom's day] (p. 347, p. 435, p. 505).

3.1.2. Replacement or elimination of the words God or Christ

In both translations published before 1989, the word God is replaced with:

a) *the skies*

Για το όνομα του Θεού , εσυ 'σαι, Μανολιό; του κάνει. (<i>Christ Recrucified</i> , p. 117)	
În numele cerului , tu ești, Manolios? zise în cele din urmă. (1968, p. 150)	Pentru numele lui Dumnezeu , tu ești, Manolios? făcu. (2008, p. 122)
[In the skies ' name, is that you, Manolios? he said eventually.]	[In God's name, is that you, Manolios? he said.]

[...] <i>μα αυτοί είχαν καρφωμένα τα μάτια τους στο Θεό, κι ο Πειρασμός αφανίζονταν.</i> (<i>Report to Greco</i> , p. 73)	
[...] <i>dar ei aveau ochii îndreptați spre cer și erau feriți de ispită</i> (1986, p. 84)	[...] <i>dar ei aveau ochii ațintiți spre Dumnezeu și nu se lăsau ispitiți</i> (2012, p. 72)
[... but their eyes looked towards the skies and were protected from any temptation]	[but their eyes looked towards God and could be difficult to tempt]

b) *life*

[...] ζητούσε ο Καζαντζάκης από το Θεό του διορία [...] (<i>Report to Greco</i> , p. 9)	
[...] a cerut răgaz vieții [...] (1986, p. 15)	[...] i-a cerut lui Dumnezeu un răgaz [...] (2012, p. 7)
[he asked life for more time]	[he asked God for more time]

c) *Divinity* (p. 25) or *divinity* (p. 28, p. 30, p. 33)

[...] τον κακοτράχαλο ανήφορο του Θεού [...] (<i>Report to Greco</i> , p. 19)	
[...] necruțătorul drum spre Divinitate [...] (1986, p. 25)	[...] necruțătorul drum spre Dumnezeu [...] (2012, p. 17)
[the harsh road toward Divinity]	[the harsh road toward God]

Παιδιά, είπε, σήμερα κατέβηκε στη γης ο Χριστός βρέφος . ας τον πάρουμε μαζί μας, έχουμε μανάδες για να τον βυζιάζουν... Καλά Χριστούγεννα, αδέρφια! (<i>Christ Recrucified</i> , p. 451)	
<i>Fraților, astăzi a coborât pe pământ pruncul divin. Să-l luăm cu noi, că și avem destule mame să-l hrănească. Vă doresc un Crăciun vesel, fraților!</i> (1968, p. 300)	<i>Fiilor, spuse el, a coborât pe pământ Hristos prunc: să-l luăm cu noi, avem mame ca să-l alăpteze... Nașterea lui Hristos cu bucurie, fraților!</i> (2008, p. 479)
[Brethren, today the divine baby came from the skies. Let us take him with us, since we have enough mothers to feed him. I wish you a merry Christmas, brethren!]	[My sons, he said, Christ the baby has come on earth: let us take him with us, we have mothers to feed him... Christ's birth with joy, brethren!]

Most examples one can see in *Report to Greco* published in the second stage of Censorship.

3.1.3. Desacralisation through irony and trivialisation

Desacralisation through irony and trivialisation is oriented against Religion and the Church representatives. Such an example is the following one:

– Τώρα θα 'ρθει, καπετάνιο μου, ο παπάς με τ' Άγια Μυστήρια να σε μεταβάλει· μην πιεις ρακή. (<i>Christ Recrucified</i> , p. 148)	
– Căpitane, o să vină popa cu sfinta împărtășanie ; să nu bei rachiu. (1968, p. 190).	– Acuma o să vină, căpitane, preotul cu Sfintele Taine să te împărtășească. Nu bea rachiu. (2008, p. 155).
[‘Captain, the parson will come with the holy eucharist ; don’t drink any spirits.’]	[‘Captain, the priest will come soon with the Holy Eucharist for you. Don’t drink any spirits.’]

In this case there is double desacralisation: the use of small letters for the *Holy Eucharist* and the use of the term *popă* [*parson*] instead of *preot* [*priest*]. The pejorative meaning of this word is even more obvious when *parson Grigoris* (pages 8, 10, 12, 13, 14 etc.), a negative character in the before mentioned novel, is opposed to *father Fotis* (pages 114, 115 etc.), the representation of the positive side of the Church. The same happens in *Report to Greco* (1986): *Μισούσε τους παπάδες* (p. 33) – *Nu suporta popii* (p. 41) [He could not stand **parsons**].

Other examples of desacralisation concerning the Church terminology: *μετόχι* = *domeniu* [estate] (270 x2) instead of *metoc*, *αρχοντάρης* = *amfitrion* [host] (283x2) instead of *arhondar* [head monk].

3.1.4 Common Orthodox values as the stamp of foreign culture

Although in Romanian language and in the Romanian liturgical practice there are valid equivalents for those commonly used in Greek liturgical practice, the translator prefers to leave them untranslated, in order to create the impression of unfamiliarity of our society with Church-related activities.

In *Christ Recrucified* (1968):

<i>Κανένας δεν αποκρίθηκε· οι γυναίκες σταυροκοποούνται, έφτυναν στον κόρφο τους, μουρμούριζαν: «Κύριε ελέησον! Κύριε ελέησον!»</i> (334)	
<i>Nimeni nu scoase o șoaptă. Femeile se închinau îngrozite, își scuipau în sân și murmurau: “Κυrie eleison! Kyrie eleison!”</i> (145)	<i>Nimeni nu răspunse; femeile se grăbiră să-și facă cruce, își scuipară în sân, murmurau: “Doamne miluiește! Doamne miluiește!”</i> (2008: 355)
[Nobody said a word. Women crossed themselves terrified, spit and whispered: “ Kyrie eleison! Kyrie eleison! ”]	[Nobody replied; women hurriedly crossed themselves, spit and whispered: “ Lord, have mercy! Lord, have mercy! ”]

In *Report to Greco* (1986) the names belonging to the Saints of the Orthodox Church, although common to both Greek and Romanian Christians are transliterated giving the impression that the author speaks about something like local mythology, unfamiliar for the readers. Thus, *Άι-Γιάννη του Καλυβίτη* (75) is *Sfîntul Ion Kalivitul* [Saint John Kalivit] (75) and not *Sfântul Ioan Colibașul*, *Άι-Μηνάς* is *Sfîntul Minas* [Saint Minas] (101) and not *Sfântul Mina*, *Πορφήτης Ηλίας* is *Elias* (287) and not *Profetul Ilie* [Prophet Elijah].

3.1.5 Paraphrasing the Source Text

This method was widely used in the publishing process either to diminish the original message for the public or to make it comply with demands of the Censorship.

[...] κι όσο πιο πολλή σάρκα μετουσιώνει σε αγάπη, σε παλικαριά κι ελευτερία, τόσο περισσότερο, γίνεται Γιος του Θεού. (25)	
<i>Cu cât trupul se preface în iubire, în curaj și în libertate, cu atât mai mult omul se poate numi stăpînul său. (1986, p. 32)</i>	<i>Cu cât trupul se preface în iubire, în curaj și în libertate, cu atât mai mult omul devine Fiul lui Dumnezeu. (2012, p. 25)</i>
[The more the body turns into love, courage and freedom, the more man can call himself his own master.]	[The more the body turns into love, courage and freedom, the more man becomes the Son of God .]

3.2. Dealing with cultural issues

3.2.1 Anti-semitic content

Any words, phrases, paragraphs which might be deemed anti-Semitic are also removed from the target text:

[...] γιατί ήξερα από τη γιαγιά μου πως οι Οβραίοι παίρνουν τη Μεγάλη Παρασκευή τα χριστιανόπουλα, τα ρίχνουν σε μια σκάφη με καρφιά και πίνουν το αίμα τους. (Report to Greco, p. 57)	
[Ø] (1986, p. 68)	<i>Pentru că eu știam din poveștile bunicii că în Vinerea Mare, evreii prind copiii creștini, îi aruncă într-o albie căptușită cu piroane și le beau sângele... (2012, p. 56)</i>
	[Because I knew from my grandma's stories that on Good Friday, Jews catch Christian kids, throw them in a trough coated with nails and drink their blood.]

3.2.2 Nationalist content

Mentions about the Turks are also removed (although, for a long period of time, both Greece and Romanian principalities shared the same ideals of liberation from the rule of the Ottomans):

...κι ο Χασάνμπης, ο αιμοβόρος ψιρσιανομάχος, ήταν γείτονάς του. (Report to Greco, P. 82)	
<i>Era vecin cu Hassan-Bei [Ø]; iatacul aces-tuia era lipit de biserică... (1986, p. 93)</i>	<i>Era vecin cu Hassan-bei, dușmanul sânge-ros al creștinilor; (2012, p. 81)</i>
[He was a neighbour of Hassan-Bei's [Ø]; his bedroom was next to the church]	[He was a neighbour of Hassan-Bei's, the bloody enemy of Christians]

Last, but not least, the Target Text does not feature any pejorative references to Russian communists: 6 lines are missing from page 371 to be found on page 369

of the 2012 edition; they contain the ironic dialogue targeted at Karl Marx (one of “God’s favourites”) between Kazantzakis and the Jewish communist activist with whom he was engaged in Berlin. On pages 421 and 424 the word *bolșevici* [Bolsheviks] is avoided, while on page 361 the word *ură* [hatred] is replaced with *luptă* [fight].

3.2.2 Removal of entire paragraphs or pages

Omissions of one-line sentence: pages 56, 213, 225, 260, 419; two-line paragraphs (sentences): 285, 293, 479, 493, 494; 3 lines: 248, 268, 269, 286, 421, 424, 425 etc. The largest paragraphs to be found again in the 2012 translation comprise 20 lines (428–429), 29 lines (422–423), 31 lines (272–273, 287–288), 42 lines (287–288), and the record omission being a removal of 6 *entire pages* (279–285). All of them contain references to Biblical passages, psalms or Buddha.

To conclude, taking into account the data resulting from the comparative analysis of the translations published both before and after 1989, we could state that communist Censorship was strongly felt even in the case of the translation of writers deemed socialist by the Romanian communist Party, as was Nikos Kazantzakis’s case. Considered after 27 years (almost a generation), this instrument meant to annihilate any authentic cultural manifestations and to favour communist propaganda as similar to the Procrustean bed. Literary works (but not only them) were altered through omissions, additions or interpretations (mystification), “all with the supreme goal of massacring the truth” (Melinescu 2012: 87). In respect of the two novels selected for my study, the situation of the former, *Report to Greco*, translated in 1986, is significantly more dramatic than that of the other novel, *Christ Recrucified* (1968), particularly because of the omission of entire pages containing references incompliant with the Party ideology. After 1989, they deserved new translations, which would fully present the *Truth*.

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