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**Queer identities in translation: a multilingual case study of Taktis' The third wedding wreath**

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### Βιβλιογραφική αναφορά:

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**Queer identities in translation:  
a multilingual case study of Taktsis' *The third wedding wreath***

**Introduction**

Few Greek writers have spurred such great controversy as Costas Taktsis (1927-1988). A poet and short-story writer, as well as a prolific translator, Taktsis is best known for his single novel *The Third Wedding Wreath*. He is equally well-remembered, though, for his cold-case murder in 1988 and his fierce opposition to the Gay Liberation Movement of Greece (AKOE) in the late '70s and '80s. His response to gay activism could be misinterpreted as a homophobic stance, had it not been for the details of his private life. Not only was Taktsis gay, but as he proactively obstructed the advance of gay rights in Greece, he all the while secretly prostituted himself as a transvestite woman.<sup>1</sup> It is, thus, no surprise that his novel is rife with portraits of homosexual and bisexual masculinities, queer practices, as well as stereotypical attitudes towards homosexuality. Such bold images are a quite rare instance of conspicuous queer representations in the then-contemporary Modern Greek literature. Taktsis himself confirmed the queerness of his text, stating that "one might say that it is a transvestite novel" (Dimou, 1987; our translation).<sup>2</sup>

Despite, or perhaps thanks to its unconventionality, the *Third Wedding Wreath* holds a special position in Greek letters, for critics and readers alike. Covering a time span from the Balkan wars to the 1960s, the novel sketches a graphic portrait of the Greek petite bourgeoisie, through the narrative voices of two women, Nina and Ekavi. The *Third Wedding Wreath*, has received attention for its intriguing use of the Modern Greek language, accurately representing the spoken vernacular without pretense or polish, or in the words of Linos Politis (1980) "in a language that is direct, free, without entanglement and concealment" (p. 359). By the same token, Vitti (2003) notes that "the first-person narration, thanks to its vivid orality, is the reproduction of a language that is free from the limitations of the standard Demotic Greek language, something that had not been done previously by Taktsis' contemporary fiction writers" (pp. 528-529). The ongoing popularity of the novel is affirmed by more than thirty re-publications by four different publishing houses to date. Its appeal to the public transcends the pages of the book; over the years several theatre performances based on Taktsis' text have been staged, its 78-episode radio dramatisation aired in 1979, while an adaptation for television, which was very-well-received by spectators, was also broadcast in 1995. The novel has also been translated

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<sup>1</sup> Taktsis (1989) refers to his experiences as a gay man in his unfinished autobiography, which was published posthumously. Scholars of his work have also pointed to his sexual preferences; see Vasilakakos (2020), Robinson (1997) and Kostis (1991), who discusses Taktsis' "sexual unorthodoxy" (pp. 103-104). Taktsis' views on homosexuality, which take into account historical changes but also seem to stem from Taktsis' own aesthetic concerns and personal experiences, had been published in various newspapers and magazines, later collected in the volume *Apo ti hamili skopia* [From a low viewpoint] (1992). Despite his uncloseted homosexuality, Taktsis's attitude towards the matter appears contradictory: while adopting liberal views (1992, 176-187), he nonetheless occasionally denies being gay (1992, p. 201) or is excessively judgmental towards other gay men on the grounds of immorality or poor aesthetics (1992, 106-109). Paradoxically enough, his thorny relationship with AKOE is directly related to his opposition to the inclusion of transvestite women in the movement.

<sup>2</sup> Citations were translated by the researchers unless otherwise stated.

into eighteen languages, namely, Albanian, Bulgarian, Catalan, Dutch, English, French, German, Hebrew, Hungarian, Italian, Norwegian, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Serbo-Croatian, Slovakian, Spanish, and Turkish (National Book Center of Greece [EKEBI], 2008).

A highly canonical text by now, the *Third Wedding Wreath* is a book that continues to excite and entice. Although it was first published in 1962, its immense popularity and its translation into various languages over the years have secured its uninterrupted circulation to the present moment. Thus, on the one hand, *The Third Wedding Wreath* adds to the body of work that considers non-normative sexualities in fiction and their reception by different generations of readers, but also generously offers itself to the investigation of queer sexuality in translation, on the other. This article focuses on the latter, discussing the multiple ways in which queerness is articulated when the same text is transferred across various languages. How are homosexual and queer desires, acts, and identities transferred from one cultural context to another? Is queerness highlighted or effaced in the translations? Taking into consideration the idiosyncratic construction of queerness in Taktsis' text, we first locate queerness along with stereotypical responses to homosexuality in the source text and then compare them to their translation in English, French, Italian, and German, seeking to explore whether there is a salient strategy each translator favours with respect to queerness.

## Methodology

### 1. Selecting original publication and translations

Regarding the source material, the 1977 edition of the novel was used (8th edition). It should be noted that although the novel was first published in 1962, with expenses covered by Taktsis himself, it was a publishing flop and not well received by critics. It was only after 1970, when it was published by Hermes, that the book became a success with multiple re-publications over the next decade.<sup>3</sup> Translations for the analysis were selected on the basis of temporal proximity to the source material, the 1977 edition.

Most of the translations selected for analysis were published during the eighties: the French in 1981 by Jacques Lacarrière,<sup>4</sup> the German in 1984 by Wolfgang Josing-Gundert, the English in 1985 by John Chioles, while the Italian was translated by Paola Maria Minucci in 1992. These translations are currently in circulation. Three translations were conducted by men (English, French, and German), while one was conducted by a woman (Italian). Two translations were published by publishing houses in Greece or houses outside Greece dedicated to publishing Greek literary works (English and German), one by a popular non-profit publisher (Italian), and one by a highly prestigious publishing house (French).

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<sup>3</sup> The text of the 1962 edition bears almost no difference with respect to the Hermes editions; there are only sparse changes regarding the spelling, layout, the chapter and paragraph breaks. Moreover, all the subsequent Hermes editions are exact reprints of the 1970 edition; Taktsis was the sole editor of his own work, while Hermes had the publication rights for the novel (G. Christoforidis [Hermes publishing house], personal communication, May 5, 2021).

<sup>4</sup> Jacques Lacarrière's translation was originally published in 1967 by the same publishing house.

## 2. Aspects of queer

The examination of how non-normativity is treated in the translations of Taktsis' novel may be embedded in the relatively recent framework that combines translation with queerness (Santaemilia, 2018, p. 12). Spurlin (2014) asserts that

analyses of gender and sexual difference(s) in translation work can provoke new sites of knowledge production, as well as stimulate significant shifts in social identities and categories, while focusing attention on the complex and nuanced ways in which gender and sexuality are inscribed in languages, a process that becomes elided when one works in and through only a single language. (pp. 299-300)

Indeed, examining the translation of the queer across languages can provide interesting insights for both fields. Comparing the modes of transferring queerness across languages may reveal the particular subtleties with which each culture vests its conceptualisation. In this context, Taktsis' novel and its translations are particularly interesting for yet one more reason: they both demonstrate what has been conceived as literary transvestism. Mackridge (1991) points out that

Taktsis displays his Protean self [...] by cross-writing - an author's equivalent of cross-dressing. Just as he was a transvestite in his sexual profession, so in his literary work he adopted the apparel, attitudes and mode of speech of a character who belonged to the opposite sex, or at least had a different sexual orientation. In this way he was able to undermine the enemy's citadel from within". (pp. 177-178)

Tziovas (2003) affirms that *The Third Wedding Wreath* "is indeed a transvestite text" (p. 189) and goes on to quote Robinson (1997) who remarks that the novel 'stages a debate about the literary representation of gender stereotypes in the mask and costume of a realist reflection of those stereotypes' (as cited in Tziovas, 2003, p. 189). This is a case of "[l]iterary transvestism which, according to C. Robinson, 'refuses to acknowledge binary oppositions between male and female identity and between reality and imagination'" and becomes, "in effect a hybridization of roles, genders, and identities" (Robinson, 1997, as cited in Tziovas, 2003, p. 189). What is interesting is that the cross-dressing metaphor has long been used also for translation, which is considered as "the redressing of a body of meaning in the clothes of another language" (Van Wyke, 2010, p. 18). The core question then about Taktsis' novel becomes: what is the result when a cross-dressing text puts on the clothes of another language?

To answer this question, one needs to consider the aspects that construct the queer in literary texts and more specifically in Taktsis' novel. Queerness in literature can be part of the narrative when it features as the description of non-heteronormative characters and their actions, part of the poetics and stylistics of the text, i.e. through the expressive means employed, part of the subtext, or represented as produced in discourse, as an instance of camp language, that is.<sup>5</sup> Queerness as camp talk

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<sup>5</sup> Keith Harvey (2000) provides an overview of camp talk and discusses its particularities with respect to its translation (1998).

is found in utterance; by the same token, queerness in text is often spotted in dialogue. Discussing the pragmatics of queerness, and most specifically intentionality in exchanging and perceiving queer meanings, Keith Harvey (2002) notes that “in conversation amongst themselves, gay men and lesbians, it is argued, often produce themselves as members of particular identity categories, circulate and consolidate their experiences and project the existence of a community that seeks to cross ethnic, geographical and historical space” (p. 1146). Nonetheless, an interesting aspect of Taktsis’ text is that men do not engage in dialogue, but are almost silent, instead. All the descriptions of queer identities and desires are provided through the narrative voices of two women, while the queer men in the novel remain largely voiceless. This means that homo- and bisexual identities are either constructed from the outside, in a form of ventriloquism, through the discourse of female fictional characters/narrators, or queerness is shifted and placed on a textual level or found in the subtext.

### 3. Selecting excerpts

On the basis of close readings of the novel and its translations, a decision was made early on to follow a bottom-up approach for the selection of excerpts, since it was not possible to predict meaningful categories in a novel characterised by “literary transvestism” (Robinson as cited in Tziovas, 2003, p. 189) without the risk of significant elements eluding the set framework. The initial intention was to select the specific parts exclusively showcasing or alluding to queerness in the novel, herein defined as terms, phrases or events involving masculinities portrayed in varying degrees of queerness. The range was expanded, however, to encompass excerpts related to heteronormative and stereotypical elements, with the objective to provide a broader perspective, elucidating the Greek social and cultural context. Moreover, except for direct references to queer, some more features and practices not-strictly related to queerness – mostly negative ones – were included, also for contextualisation purposes. Relevant excerpts were then analysed and the search for similarities that might provide useful groupings yielded three basic emerging categories or clusters. The first cluster focuses on *who* and includes elements which profile queer characters and other masculinities –mainly adjectives – essentially answering the questions “who is considered queer?”, “who is not?”, offering an illustration of what a queer person looks like in the novel. The second cluster answers the question of *what*, essentially, “what do these queer characters do?” and it includes words or phrases relevant to queer practices and other activities that are depicted as associated with queer identities. The third cluster revolves around *how*, i.e. how queer is perceived and treated by other characters, sketching, thus, a picture of the overall social setting of that time.

The representation of queer identities and practices, as well as queering language in *The Third Wedding Wreath* take different forms, oscillating between deprecation and pervasiveness. These elements of queerness are, nonetheless, clearly discernible and the question is whether they are transferred in a similar manner in the translations or whether they are rather attenuated. Considering “queerness’s evanescence” in literary texts, Marc Démond (2018) distinguishes three modes of translation: the misrecognizing translation, the minoritizing translation, and the queering

translation. According to Démond, the misrecognizing mode “simply ignores queerness”, while the minoritizing approach “congeals queerness’s drifting nature by flattening its connotative power to a unidimensional and superficial game of denotative equivalences” (p. 157). Contrary to these two modes, queering translation allows for the queerness in texts to become more salient, either by considering existing translations through a queer lens or “by developing techniques to preserve, using Kwame Anthony Appiah’s expression, the thickness of queer literary texts” (Démond, p. 157). Démond’s distinction can be a useful starting point to consider to what extent queerness becomes visible or is rather concealed in translation. The selected excerpts that pertain to the afore-mentioned clusters in Taktsis’ novel were examined in light of this distinction, with the addition of qualitative data, in order to provide a comparative analysis of the treatment of same-sex desire and practice in translation and identify the dominant pattern, if any, in each of the translations examined.

## Analysis

### 1. Presentation of Queer Characters

The queer characters of the novel are criticised from a narrative point of view, not only for their sexuality but also for their demeanour, their activities and their overall lifestyle. Men, overall, are presented in non-flattering terms. Tziovas (2003) observes that, although

men are acknowledged by women as being strong and bossy, they are occasionally presented as having no brains and behaving like little children. In this novel they tend to be losers: self-destructive (Dinos, Dimitris), ill (Fotis), impotent (Antonis), vulnerable and powerless (Babis). In general, they are presented as weak, belying their stereotypical image. (p. 183)

As far as the queer characters are concerned, they could be roughly split in two categories, the gay male and the occasionally non-heterosexual male. As it has been noted before, these characters remain largely silent or even voiceless, with either Nina or Ekavi relaying their dialogues or reactions.

The first category includes Argyris, the representation of the adolescent gay in the novel, who is Nina’s first and probably only love; a handsome, gentle and fragile figure. Nina’s parents forbid her from marrying him because, according to her uncle Markousis, Argyris was found to be having a relationship with a man. Then there is Dinos, Nina’s brother, the young adult gay who is adored by his mother, yet he is considered to be “a pervert” (Chioles’ translation, p.158), mainly because of his sexual preferences. Dinos seems to showcase the family attitude to queerness at that time, when his “other personal life” was tolerated, as long as they, i.e. the family, “don’t have to see it” (Chioles’ translation, p.158). He is ostracised from the family house after he is found having intercourse with Nina’s first husband, Fotis, on the third night after their wedding. Dinos eventually dies in exile as a political prisoner on the island of Anafi. Dinos reflects a once common picture of gay people as immoral, drug users, and even communists.

The second category includes Fotis, Nina's first husband and father to their daughter. He is described as handsome and, after the incident with Dinos, as unmanly for being a coward. He is asked to leave the family house after initiating sex with Dinos but there is no other reference in the novel of any other sexual activity with either men or women. Dimitris, son of Ekavi, on the contrary, is very sexually active in a non-discriminatory way. He is a small-scale swindler; he brags about deceiving an "effeminate type" (Chioles' translation, p.158) into having sex but then extorting him and boasts of going to bed with a monk for money. According to Tziouvas (2003), "Dimitris epitomizes deviancy in the novel, with forays into homosexuality and drugs, ending up in jail, becoming a communist, having an affair with a prostitute, and marrying a Jewish girl" (p. 184). Dimitris' storyline ends with him dying in prison, after being accused of murder. Dimitris, much like Dinos, is one of the male characters in the book who "tend to seek freedom and empowerment", but because they "defy society and its institutions [they] are doomed" (Tziouvas, 2003, p. 184).

## 2. Queer traits, desires and practices

### 2.1 Descriptions of the queer male

Taktsis' universe of queer masculinities is constructed in a manner that transcends the essentialist, heteronormative gender binary, in order to challenge the stereotypical biases of the then contemporary Greek society. In Robinson's words (2001):

Taktsis constructs a highly individual account of the fluidity of sexual identity, the ways in which society in general – and Greek society in particular – works to limit that fluidity for its own purposes, and the extent to which Greek literature has helped to 'fix' the gender values of its culture. (p. 393)

Male characters are largely peripheral in the novel, while the two female narrators are placed centre-stage. Even so, the male characters who are highlighted as most important with respect to the two women are configured as gay, bisexual or queer. There are few references to macho heterosexual males, which could serve to underscore the juxtaposition to the queer, and they seem to be vested in sarcasm, nonetheless. An eloquent example is the instance in which Nina, one of the two protagonists, scolds her daughter for her non-conformity to the norm that expects young females to seek after a respectable groom: "Αφού θέλεις άντρα",<sup>6</sup> της λέω κι εγώ σήμερα, "πήγαινε στο πάρκο και βρες κανένα μαγκλαρά"<sup>7</sup> (p. 12; emphasis added), which becomes in Chioles' translation, "'If it's a man you want,' I said to her today, 'go to the park and find yourself some *big hunk*.'" (p. 6; emphasis added).

What should be noted here is the lack of machismo which could accompany the heteronormative image of the male in such an instance. Taktsis seems to deliberately

<sup>6</sup> Monotonic orthography was used for the excerpts in Modern Greek.

<sup>7</sup> The word "μαγκλαράς" is a colloquial, slang word that describes a young, tall, bulky man (Katos, 2016). Although they bear no etymological affinity, it sounds similar to the culture-specific word "μάγκας", which designates a heavy attitude, non-conformist working-class man.

dismantle the homogeneous, stereotypical image of masculinity. This is further accentuated in the depiction of non-heteronormative men. The novel is rife with predominantly negatively-charged adjectives to describe gay men and/or men who engage in homosexual practices but do not necessarily identify themselves as gay, for example Fotis, Nina's first husband.

### 2.1.1 Effeminate

Gay men are labelled as “γυναικωτοί” (“πήγε στο σπίτι ενός γυναικωτού”; p. 152), an adjective close to “womanish” but used pejoratively to denote a male person who looks like and, possibly, behaves like a (stereotypical?) woman. Translation-wise, the more neutral “effeminate” (p. 158) is used in English and Italian with indefinite words and articles adding a note of pejoration. The English translation reads “he went home with one of those effeminate types” (p. 155), while the Italian follows in an almost identical manner (“fosse andato a casa di uno di quei tipi tutti effeminati”; p. 129). French uses a word with a different lexical root, “il avait été dans la maison d'un pédé” (p. 177). Despite its etymology, ‘pédé’ is no longer associated with pedophilia; it constitutes an offensive word, roughly equivalent to ‘homosexual’, a more pejorative choice in relation to the original. German, on the other hand, uses “Schwuchtel”, a stronger equivalent nearest to ‘faggot’ (“er zu ’ner Schwuchtel ins Haus gegangen war”; p. 121).

### 2.1.2 Beautiful

Another set of traits of queer characters in the novel is that they are beautiful, sometimes sensitive as well. Contrary to expectations, beauty and sensitivity in the present context bear negative connotations, a pattern already setting the tone from page 10 of the original. Nina, referring to her first husband, Fotis, admits: “Ήταν όμορφος - πιο όμορφος απ' ό,τι έπρεπε...” (p. 10). The translations in French, Italian and German tend to provide standard equivalents: “Il était beau, plus beau qu'il n'eût fallu...” (p. 14); “Era bello, più bello del necessario...” (p. 16); “Er war schön - schöner als nötig...” (p. 8), correspondingly. The translation in English, however, significantly deviates by employing techniques which arguably bring forth the presence and weight of queerness. More specifically, there is a tweak in the English translation, “[a]nd he was handsome, even beautiful – something a man shouldn't be anyway” (p. 4), where the adjective “handsome”, used mainly for male and the adjective “beautiful”, used mainly for female individuals, are both employed to denote the same adjective “όμορφος”. This tweak is accentuated by the addition of “even” and the explanatory comment immediately after; strictly speaking, the original only refers to Fotis “more beautiful than he should”, while the English translation expands the reference to metonymically include all males.

Nina is even disgusted when she hears Ekavi speak in admiration of her son's, “ομορφιά” (p. 98), rendered straightforwardly as “good looks” (p. 97), “beauté” (p. 115), “bellezza” (p. 86), “Schönheit” (p. 77), in English, French, Italian and German, respectively. Ekavi, later on in the novel, worries and cries over Dimitris, because she doesn't know his whereabouts, “σε τι στρώματα χαράμίζει τα νιάτα του και την ομορφιά του”. Chioles translates this in English as “in what beds he wastes his youth and handsome looks” (p. 106), opting for the adjective “handsome” which under-



scores conventional masculinity. The rest of the translations employ the same equivalent for ομορφιά/beauty (“beauté”; “Schönheit”), with the exception of Italian: “il suo fascino” (p. 93). Interestingly enough, in Italian, the word employed, denoting “charm”, alludes to attractiveness and seduction, moving beyond external features to describe a personality trait.

### 2.1.3 Sensitive

Sensitivity comes along with beauty, again perceived as a flaw and weakness, with links toward the feminine/effeminate, thereby diverging from the “macho-A-male” prescriptive expectations of the Greek society of the time. Dinos’ teacher warns his parents that Dinos is “τρομερά ευαίσθητος και διέρχεται την κρίσιμον ηλικίαν” (p. 99). The phrase is translated in standard equivalent terms, almost word-for-word, in all languages with translators playing with the intensity of the adverb “τρομερά” (‘terribly’). In the English one, he is “ever so sensitive, and he’s heading for that critical age just now....” (p. 97). The French translation sounds more intense (“il est extrêmement sensible et il approche de l’âge critique...”; p. 116), as well as the German one: “er ist furchtbar sensibel und geht durch ein schwieriges Alter...” (‘awfully sensitive’; p. 77). According to the Italian translation, Dinos is even ‘unbelievably’ sensitive (“È sensibile fino all’inverosimile e attraversa un’età critica”; p. 86), thereby bringing to the surface the underlying quality often linked to queer masculinities.

### 2.1.4 Manly looking

The concept of beauty as an allusion to queerness is repeated quite a few times in the novel. Nina herself starts being suspicious of “beautiful men” (Chioles’ translation, p. 43) after her experience with Argyris. She looks for men like Fotis who, on top of being handsome (or beautiful), is also “αρρενωπός” (p. 48), i.e. manly looking (commonly translated as “masculine”!) an antonym of ‘effeminate’. In this particular example, two tendencies emerge in the translations. On the one hand, in the translations in English and German, the focus lies on the general male aspect, the picture of the strong male, by using “manly” (p. 43) and “männlicher” (p. 38) respectively, while in the translations in French and Italian, the more specific concept of virility, stereotypically associated with the heterosexual male, is selected: “viril (p. 57)/ virile (p. 46).”. This specific selection from the array of potential connotations included in “αρρενωπός” might actually indicate a pattern of (hetero)sexualisation in the description of characters who are otherwise depicted as queer throughout the novel.

### 2.1.5 Pervert

A queer man is also “διεφθαρμένος” (p. 155), meaning ‘morally corrupted’. The word denotes a person whose character and soul have taken a twist toward the worse and/or a person who is seduced by violence or manipulation into a sexual relationship with someone (Kriaras, 1995, p. 368, definitions 1 and 2). The adjective was translated as “pervert” in English (“That was what we knew about Dino: that he was a drug addict and a pervert”; p. 158), a word rather more intense than the Greek one, which, again, implies that the character is warped or twisted. Similarly, the equivalent of “pervert” was used in both the French translation, “perversi” (p. 181),

and the Italian, “pervertito” (p. 131), explicitly stressing the deviance from the socially-accepted sexuality, the divergence from heteronormativity. On the other hand, the German uses “verdorben” (p. 123), a concept closer to the original ‘corrupted’, heavily loaded with moral implications.

### 2.1.6 Unmanly

Apart from the two near-synonyms for ‘homosexual’ mentioned above, namely “effeminate” and “pervert”, and the associations with beauty and sensitivity, there are other cases where not (necessarily) queer-specific adjectives and phrases are used to describe queer characters. A recurring trope throughout the novel is the characterisation of queer characters as lacking manly honour. Characters not conforming to strictly heterosexual behaviour are described as “άνανδρος” (p. 52) and “θρασύδειλος” (p. 53) through the use of two adjectives underlining cowardice and lack of (manly) courage, a feature to be ashamed of. “Άνανδρος”, the antonym of ‘brave’, ‘bold’, and ‘heroic’ and a near synonym of ‘coward’ (Kriaras, 1995, p. 87) denotes a person who does not display manly behaviour, for example bravery in a fight, and as such does not deserve to be called ‘a man’. Nina exclaims: “Τέτοιος άνανδρος ήταν ο άνθρωπος” (p. 52), referring to her first husband, Fotis, who, not only had slept with her gay brother Argyris, but had also tried to defend himself by accusing Nina of being frigid in bed. The translation in English, “That’s how much he lacked in manly honor, the man whose memory my daughter worships as if he were a god” (p. 47), seems to flatten out the connotations in an effort to achieve equivalence. The translations in French and Italian reach a similar result albeit by following different paths. The translation in French, for example, “Voilà le lâche” (p. 61), points to a coward or someone with loose morals, but not necessarily someone who would lose his status as a man. The text in Italian, “un vigliacco come pochi” (p. 49), roughly back-translated as ‘a coward like no other’, is even more emphatic than the Greek text, but again fails to convey a behavior not befitting a man. Contrary to the French and Italian translations, the German one picks up on another aspect of the meaning behind “άνανδρος”, the concept of virility: “Ein derartiger Schlappschwanz war der Mensch” (p. 41), by employing a slang term, literally translated as ‘cock-lazy’, commonly translated in other contexts as ‘wimp’ and sometimes alluding to impotence.

Similarly, “θρασύδειλος”, a compound adjective formed by the equivalents of ‘impudent’ and ‘coward’, appears in the sentence right after the one discussed above. Hence, it might be safe to assume that this provided translators with a direction, seeing that most of them opted for transferring the ‘coward’ aspect. The adjective, appearing in the phrase “Τέτοιος θρασύδειλος ήταν” (p. 53; back-translated as ‘he was such an audacious coward’), presents a paradox, in the sense that the first adjective, ‘θρασύς’, suggests movement toward the foreground, whereas the second adjective, ‘δειλός’, suggests movement to the background. This paradox brings forth the notion of pretension in the sense that the person who pretends to be manly and therefore, courageous, is, in fact a coward, demonstrating both audacity and cowardice at the same time. The translation in English attempts rendering this paradox with the sentence “It’s true, though, he was a brash coward” (p. 47), where “brash” does allude to the macho/dynamic representation of the heterosexual male. The rest of the translations, however, mostly ignore one of the two concepts; in the case of French, the whole sentence is even omitted (pp. 61-62). In the translation into Ital-

ian, the irony employed covers the aspect of ‘coward’ only (“Era questo il suo coraggio!”, p. 49; ‘That was his courage!’). In a similar manner, i.e. focusing on the notion of ‘coward’, the translation into German reads “Eine solchere Memme war er” (p. 41; ‘He was such a coward’).

### 2.1.7 Rascal

The noun “παλιάνθρωπος” (p. 10), a mildly offensive word denoting a male person who is dirty figuratively speaking, immoral, a rascal or scoundrel, is used twice in the novel. It is interesting that the noun is used for two different characters, Fotis and Dimitris, and that it acquires two different translations in most languages dealt with herein. The first reference of “παλιάνθρωπος” occurs with Nina referring to Fotis, her ex-husband. A stronger and more insulting word, “bastard”, is used in the English text rather than ‘scoundrel’: “He may have been a bastard, he was what he was, but he struck you as a man of the world.” (p. 4). A similar approach was followed in the French translation with “salopard” (p. 14). The Italian translation seems closer to the Greek original with “mascalzone” (p. 16), whereas the German “Schuft” (p. 8), denoting a mean and malevolent male person, seems to accentuate the concept of evil.

The second reference of “παλιάνθρωπος” occurs when Ekavi has just found out that her son, Dimitris, who displays a pansexual attitude in the novel, has sexual relations with his cousin Gogo (p. 156). As the concept of incest creeps in, translations of “παλιάνθρωπος” still bear a negative meaning but pointing to different directions, with the exception of Italian where the same word, “mascalzone” (p. 132), is used consistently. “Παλιάνθρωπος” becomes “shameless” (p.160) in English, an ethically-charged word; “espèce de vaurien” (p.182) in French, an offensive phrase alluding to a good-for-nothing, unscrupulous person; and “Lump” (p. 124) in German, a near equivalent of ‘rascal’ which was not, however, used in the first occurrence of “παλιάνθρωπος” discussed above. This sample is not *stricto sensu* queer related, yet it does complement the picture of queer in the novel by underlining that there was a threshold *even they*, the unmanly, immoral queers, were not supposed to cross.

## 2.2 Same-sex practices and other activities associated with non-heteronormativity

A similarly negative image is reserved for the queer characters’ sexual behaviour and their lifestyle. Not only are their sexual practices described in unfavourable terms, but in contrast to the heteronormative male characters of the novel, who have secure jobs with a steady income and seem to be well-respected members of society, gay and bisexual men are associated with shadowy and criminal acts and are presented as having various vices.

Non-heteronormative orientation is characterised by Nina as “ανώμαλες τάσεις” (p. 52), a phrase that can only be perceived in Greek as referring to a person’s sexual preferences, translated word for word in all the works examined, with “abnormal inclinations” (p. 47) in the English text; “tendenze anomale” (p. 49) in the Italian translation, and “abartigen Neigungen” in German (p. 41). However, the French translator opts for the more general “mœurs douteuses” (p. 61; back-translated as ‘dubious morals’), which might be taken to refer to an overall or unspecified moral

decadence, thus effacing the sexual aspect of the Greek phrase. Nonetheless, it should be noted that the immediate context in which the collocation is embedded in the Greek text, which is maintained in all the translations, recognises this orientation as common and inevitable, at least at a young age: “Δεν ήταν ούτε ο πρώτος ούτε ο τελευταίος νέος με ανώμαλες τάσεις. Αν δεν το ήξερα τότε, το ξέρω τώρα. Μπορεί να μη διορθωνόταν ποτέ του [...]” (p. 52). Chioles’ translation reads: “He wasn’t the first nor the last young man with abnormal inclinations. And if I didn’t know it then, I knew it for sure now. Perhaps he could never set himself straight [...]” (p. 47). Nina’s statement about her brother’s orientation is accompanied by the phrase “μπορεί να μη διορθωνόταν ποτέ του” (p. 47; ‘perhaps he would never be able to fix himself’), which portrays homosexuality as a fault that needed to be corrected. The French translation accurately reproduces the Greek text, using the equivalent to the Greek verb ‘to correct’, becoming “peut- être ne se serait-il pas corrigé” (p. 61). The German translation contains a similar choice, “Vielleicht hätte er sich nie gebessert” (p. 41), with the verb “sich bessern” used in the sense of not being able to improve or mend one’s ways, which implies a moral fault. The most interesting case, though, is probably the English translation which reads “Perhaps he could never set himself straight” (p. 47). By containing the word “straight” in the English idiom, this dynamic equivalent creates an extra layer of meaning. Although not in explicit semantic juxtaposition to a word that would denote non-heteronormative sexual orientation, the presence of the word “straight” in this context highlights the gay identity of Dinos.

Elsewhere, Taktis has Nina refer to her former husband’s conduct as “βρωμιές” and later on as “καμώματα” (p. 39; ‘filthy acts’ and ‘antics’), hence making her oscillate in her descriptions between using a rather harsh word and an expression that implies sassiness or childish behaviour. As far as “βρωμιές” is concerned, the English text features a literal translation, i.e. “filthy stuff” (p. 34), while the Italian translation employs a semantic equivalent: “porcherie” (p. 38). Similarly, in German, the word is translated as “die Sauereien” (p. 31), a word which might be taken to mean ‘dirtiness’ and ‘indecent’ or ‘a mess’, making the impact of the word slightly milder, albeit with connotations related to a lack of morality. Interestingly enough, both the Italian and German translators employ words whose root is a word equivalent to ‘pig’, a common metaphor for dirtiness. By the same token, the French translator uses the word “saloperies” (p. 47), which maintains the sense of filthiness and also suggests indignity.

The word “καμώματα”, on the other hand, is used in Greek to describe exclusively women’s or spoiled children’s behaviour. Therefore, its use in Taktis’ text undermines the male character’s conventionally perceived masculinity. This queering aspect is not maintained in the translations. The word becomes “nasty business” (p. 34) in English and, similarly, its equivalent “imprese” (p. 38) in Italian. In French, the word “agissements” (p. 47), which means ‘schemes’, is used, denoting again an attempt to trick or exploit. An interesting semantic shift occurs with the German text: the word “Heldentaten” in the translation (p. 31) bears the meaning of ‘heroic deeds’. Although it is used ironically, it nevertheless traditionally alludes to male behaviour, and is thus placed on the opposite pole of the Greek word in an essentialist gender binary. Hence, this could either be taken as a reversal of the queerness of the text, an almost anti-queer choice, which reforms the text into heteronormativity, or it may conversely be considered a choice that underscores the irony in the text.

The negative references to non-heteronormative orientation are paired with unflattering descriptions of gay practices. These range from subtle references or innuendos to same-sex couplings that may shock even contemporary readers. Nina's description of her adolescent brother's activities falls into the former category, but still associates same-sex desire with people who are socially marginalised or belong to the underworld: "Ο Ντίνος εξαφανιζόταν με δυο φίλους του —αυτούς που του 'φαγαν το κεφάλι— και πήγαιναν και συναντούσαν διάφορα ύποπτα υποκείμενα κοντά στις μπανιέρες. Τι έκαναν, ο Θεός κι η ψυχή τους" (p. 48),<sup>8</sup> which becomes "Dino would disappear with a couple of his friends – the ones who ruined him in the end – and go with them to meet various shady characters who hung around the showers. Only God and their souls know what they were up to", in Chioles' translation (p. 43). These men are also "shady" in Lacarrière's translation, "des gens plus ou moins louches" (p. 57), and seem suspicious in Josing-Gundert ("diversen verdächtigen Subjekten") and also in Minucci with the addition of the adjective "strange": "gente più o meno strana e sospetta" (pp. 45-46).

In other parts of the novel, same-sex love is reduced to intercourse that is depicted as indecent and despicable in every possible way. The following example is quite graphic. It comes from Ekavi's monologue in which she relates her reaction after her son's return from a visit to a monastery. Ekavi seems to be tolerant of robust male sexuality, but not when it comes to her son, especially with respect to his prostitution—in this case with a monk as his client:

Όπως μάθαμε εκ των υστέρων, είχε πάει στο Άγιον Όρος. Θα 'χεις ακούσει ότι στο Άγιον Όρος απαγορεύεται να πατήσει το πόδι της γυναίκα – ούτε καν θηλυκό ζώο. Μα οι άντρες, Νίνα μου, είναι άντρες. [...] Όταν γύρισε, είχε την ξετσιπωσιά να μου φέρει ένα κατοστάρικο. "Πάρ' το από δω, παλιάνθρωπε!" του φωνάζω. "Τολμάς να μου δίνεις τα λεφτά της αμαρτίας! Τι διαφέρει, βρε τομάρι, ο άντρας που απαυτώνει τον καλόγερο για λεφτά απ' τη γυναίκα που πουλάει το κορμί της στον πρώτο τυχόντα; (p. 99)

The English translation reads:

We found out later, he had gone off to Mount Athos. As you know, no woman may step foot on Mount Athos – not even a female animal. But men will be men, Nina. [...] When he came back, he had the nerve to bring me a hundred-drachma bill. –"Take it back, you filthy man!" I shouted at him. 'You dare to bring me the wages of sin! You dirty brat, just tell me, if you can, what the difference is between the man who lays with a monk for money and the woman who sells her body to the first taker?' (p. 98)

The Italian and German translation do not deviate significantly from the source text. Nonetheless, the French text becomes:

Comme je le sus par la suite, il s'en alla au mont Athos. Il avait dû entendre raconter des histoires sur les moines et voulait y prendre du bon

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<sup>8</sup> Baths, showers, and hamams are a common place for gay encounters in many different countries (and are also depicted in literature, e.g. in Korovin's '55 (2012, p. 275); Papamarkos' *Giak* (2016, pp. 88-91).

temps... Mais tu connais les hommes aussi bien que moi, ma Nina. Quand il revint, il eut le culot de me rapporter un billet de cent drachmes! "Ôte ce billet de ma vue, voyou! lui criai-je. Comprends-tu au moins que tu as fauté? Quelle différence y a-t-il, espèce de monstre, entre l'homme qui se laisse séduire par un moine pour de l'argent et la femme qui vend son corps au premier venu? (pp. 117-8; our emphasis)

This excerpt could be back-translated as 'As I learned later, he went to Mount Athos. He must have heard stories about monks and wanted to have a good time there ... But you know men as well as I do, my Nina. When he returned, he had the nerve to bring me a hundred drachma note! "Take that note out of my sight, you thug! I shouted at him. Do you at least understand that you made a mistake? What difference is there, you monster, between the man who lets himself be seduced by a monk for money and the woman who sells her body to the first comer?'. The French translation radically modifies the source text, by omitting the reference to the rule that prohibits women's presence on Mount Athos and substituting it with an entirely different piece of information. According to the adaptation employed instead, the rumours of the monks' promiscuity is what attracts Dimitris to the place where he can freely enjoy sex with other men. Thus, the French translation attributes queer-ness not only to one male character but to an entire male population. Moreover, the description of the act "se laisser séduire par un moine", which is much more radical than "απαυτώνω", attributes the initiative to the monks, presenting a shift in agency: although in the original it is Dimitris who is the active partner in intercourse, in the French translation Dimitris passively lets himself be seduced by the monk. Further on, 'sin' is downplayed to 'mistake', perhaps to moderate or excuse the effect of the act, since there are religious subjects involved. Dimitris is also presented as sharing part of the fault, as indicated by the phrase "espèce de monstre" that his mother uses to address him, which could be considered as expressing society's attitude towards such practices.

The queer characters are associated throughout the book with all sorts of indecent or illegal acts that range from exploitation and prostitution to drug abuse and incest. An aspect that might seem obsolete or even amusing to contemporary readers, but was well-rooted in the mentality of a part of the Greek society of the time is the inclusion of communist ideology in a list of defects, which in this case characterises the homosexuals in the novel, as Nina's account of Dimitris' life illustrates: "Μα κοντά σ' όλα του τα ελαττώματα, μες στη φυλακή απόκτησε κι άλλο ένα: έγινε κομμουνιστής" (p. 153); translated by Chioles as "But along with all his other vices, while in prison, he picked up one more: he became a communist" (p. 156).

A similar excerpt in which Nina compares her brother Dinos to Dimitris is also indicative:

Δε μπορούσα να καταλάβω τι σόι κομμουνιστής ήταν, και πώς συμβιβαζόντουσαν οι παραλυσίες του και η παντελής έλλειψη επιβολής στον εαυτό του, με τον κομμουνισμό που, όπως διαβάζαμε, απαιτούσε απ' τους κομμουνιστάς αυταπάρνηση και σιδερένια πειθαρχία. Τουλάχιστον ο γιος της κυρα-Εκάβης ήταν άντρας. Μπορεί νάχε κάνει μερικές μουνταριές αυτού του είδους, όπως φαίνεται ότι κάνουν, δυστυχώς πολλοί νέοι, αλλά δεν είχε χάσει τον ανδρισμό του. Δεν άφηγε ούτε αρσενικιά γάτα που λένε. Η κυρά Εκάβη μούλεγε πως τον είχε τσακώσει ακόμα και με

την ξαδέρφη του τη Γωγώ. [...] "Βρε παλιάνθρωπε!" του λέω. "Κοντά σε όλα είσαι κι αιμομίχτης;..." (pp. 155-156)

The passage initiates with a reference to Dinos' homosexuality as "οι παραλυσίες του", a word that denotes licentiousness or moral decadence. The French and Italian translations feature the same-root word: "vices" (p. 181) and "vizi" (p. 131), which might be taken to refer to sexual practice as well. On the contrary, the German and English translations underscore the moral aspect of the word with the use of "Schlag" (p. 124; back-translated as 'slovenliness') and the phrase "collapsed character" (p. 159), respectively.

Chioles translates the excerpt in the following way:

I couldn't for the life of me understand what kind of communist he would make, how he could reconcile his collapsed character, his total lack of will-power and self-discipline, how he could reconcile all that with communism, which, we'd always been told required of its followers complete self-denial and iron discipline. At least Hecuba's son was a man. Maybe he had a few skirmishes of the other kind somewhere in his past, it seems unfortunate that most young men have, but he'd never lost his manliness. If it were to satisfy his manhood, not only would he never turn away anything in skirts, he'd never say no even to a male cat, as the saying goes. Hecuba told me that she'd even caught him in the act once with his cousin Georgia. (pp. 158-159) [...] 'You shameless man!' I said to him. 'All the rest isn't enough for you? now we have to put up with incest, too!...' (p. 160)

The English translation is considerably longer and this is due to the challenge posed by the Greek proverb and the idiosyncratic qualities of certain words in the Greek text, such as "μουρνταριές", a word that signifies the will for or the actual engagement in multiple sexual affairs, usually by a male within a heterosexual setting, but also implies filthiness. While Chioles opts for a longer explanatory version "a few skirmishes of the other kind somewhere in his past", which mitigates the meaning by implying an experience of conflict or a personal fight, rather than sexual indulgence, the translators into every other language offer a version along the axis of filthiness: "porcheria" (p. 132) in Italian, "saloperies" (p. 181) in French (both discussed previously) and "Ferkelei" (p. 124; 'dirty business') in German. The French word, "saloperies", in this particular context is actually a hypernym, without a specific sexual reference, pointing to a filthy act of immorality and deception.

As far as the reference to the Greek proverb is concerned ("Δεν άφηνε ούτε αρσενικιά γάτα που λένε"), Chiolis translates it word-for-word and also employs a lengthy, two-line translation to explain it. Lacarrière, on the other hand, omits it altogether:

Nous ne pouvions comprendre quel genre de communiste il était, ni comment il pouvait concilier ses vices et le relâchement total de sa vie avec le communisme, qui exigeait de chaque militant de l'abnégation et une volonté de fer. Le fils d' Ekavi, lui, était au moins un homme. Il s' était sans doute, comme beaucoup de jeunes, livré à quelques saloperies sans avoir pour autant perdu sa virilité. Ekavi m' avait même dit l' avoir surpris avec

sa propre cousine Gogo! 181-2 [...]“Espèce de vaurien, lui dis-je, il ne te manquait plus que d’être incestueux!...” (p. 182).

Minucci substitutes the proverb with a sentence that illustrates its literal meaning: “Non aveva pace finché non s’era fatto tutte le femmine che gli stavano intorno” (p. 132; back-translated as ‘he wouldn’t find peace until he had all the females that were around him’). Josing-Gundert opts for a similar solution, but uses a rather debasing metonymy for women instead: “Er ließ nichts aus, was Beulen in der Bluse hatte, wie man so sagt.” (p. 124; back-translated as ‘He didn’t leave out anything that had bumps in the blouse, as they say’). What is interesting about the reference in the Greek text is that the actual proverb is indeed used for insatiable straight men, but its content is structured as follows “He doesn’t even let a *female* cat go by” (our emphasis). Thus, Taktsis’ use of a “*male* cat” (our emphasis), instead, is a witty queering of the text. Unfortunately, as all the translations demonstrate, it either goes unnoticed or is deliberately re-formed to the conventional societal expectation the common proverb expresses, that males (should) seek after females.

This, however, is not the only part in which Taktsis, as a queer himself, playfully queers the text. Another case is the use of the word “μπινέζ” (p. 170), which appears in several instances. A slur used for men, but also a common address among gay men, it is most commonly taken to mean “homosexual”, according to Petropoulos (p. 99). Nevertheless, the English and Italian translators dismiss it, using words devoid of sexual connotations, instead, thus misrecognising or minoritising the reference. More specifically, “μπινέζ” becomes “creep” in the English translation (p. 181), and “carogna” (p. 143; ‘rascal’) in Italian. When it comes to French, however, queering is maintained through the use of “pédale”, a derogatory word used for ‘homosexual’. The German translation, “Arschficker” (‘arse-fucker’), is the most protruding, in terms of intensity, shifting the focus to a very specific image commonly associated with homosexual practice. It is worth noting that the equivalent in Greek would probably not be tolerated in a novel published during the ’70s.

## Conclusion

Taktsis’ idiosyncratic novel presents a bold and vivid sketch of queerness, illustrating the conventional biases associated with homo-, bisexuality, and queerness, but simultaneously subverting the stereotypical image of masculinity. The descriptions of queer characters and their practices as well as the shady acts associated with them are depicted as frowned upon but are also presented as inevitable or widespread, penetrating every layer of society. This queerness is not only located in specific descriptions but also on a textual level, where it is alluded to in a more implicit manner. This paper sought to identify these elements of queerness and compare the translation approaches with respect to them in the English, French, Italian and German translations. With respect to the translated texts, there does not seem to be a homogeneous picture regarding the languages examined.

As far as the translation in English is concerned, the excerpts discussed above show a conscious effort on behalf of Chioles to both accurately transfer the denotative meaning, but also preserve the subtle nuances and the connotations involved in Taktsis’ portrayal of the queer. He seems to not only recognise the queerness of the



text in most cases, but to deliberately attempt to reconstruct Taktsis' unconventional universe and convey the inherent queerness, for example when “ὄμορφος” becomes “handsome” and “beautiful” soon afterwards, blurring the gender divide.

The French translation seems to be the least faithful to the Greek original when compared to the other translations. In fact, Lacarrière takes liberties with the text on the lexical, syntactical and even pragmatic level. Several of his choices either provide a loose transfer of meaning only partially covering the semantic content of words and phrases linked to queerness or do not convey their connotative aspect. There also seems to be a certain lack of consistency with respect to the intensity of queer features, for example when “γυναικωτός” is translated as “pédé”, while elsewhere “ἀνάνδρος” (‘unmanly’), is flattened into the more limited “le lâche”. It is worth observing that this is the only translation where omission was chosen as a strategy for dealing with references to the queer.

In the Italian translation, Minucci seems to adhere primarily to the denotative meaning of the text. What is particularly interesting in her approach is her treatment of those elements attributed to or associated with queer characters which are used in a pejorative sense in the Greek text. Her translation employs words and phrases which are relatively more neutral with respect both to the source text and the other translations. This displays a tendency to mitigate the derogatory aspect of certain references, creating thus a queer image which seems to sound less criticised and more respected.

The German translation comes across consistently as the least neutral and the most provoking one, favouring clear, straightforward sexualised images even when these are not present in the Greek text. In fact, the pattern in certain cases seems to be extreme heterosexualisation, an actual reversal of the queerness of the text, which not only effaces the queer, but transforms it into heteronormative images, as well.

The differences in the translations might be attributed to a variety of factors which complement the translation norms of each target language: the available expressive means of each language, which are shaped by the discursive context, in turn defined by the dominant ideology and norms of the cultural and social context; the translators' positionality in terms of background, personal preferences, translating style and their stance with respect to queerness; readers' expectations. Given the fact that queer identities are dynamic and in flux, and whatever meaning is attached to them is prone to change, one cannot dismiss the fact that these texts reflect an image of queerness that crystallises in time, but might be perceived differently by readers who discover the texts much later than the time when the novel and its translations were first produced. Even so, *The Third Wedding Wreath* and its translations remain texts which offer a subversive view to gender identities.

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## Περίληψη

Θεοδώρα Βαλκάνου – Κυριακή Κουρούνη

**Κουίρ (queer) ταυτότητες σε μετάφραση:  
η περίπτωση του μυθιστορήματος *Το Τρίτο Στεφάνι* του Κώστα Ταχτσή  
σε διαφορετικές γλώσσες**

*Το Τρίτο Στεφάνι* του Κώστα Ταχτσή αποτελεί ένα εξαιρετικά δημοφιλές μυθιστόρημα της νεοελληνικής λογοτεχνίας, με υψηλές πωλήσεις επί σειρά ετών, παρά την αρχική του απόρριψη από πολλούς εκδότες, η οποία είχε ως αποτέλεσμα τη δημοσίευσή του ιδίοις αναλώμασι το 1962. Το μυθιστόρημα έγινε διάσημο για την πρωτοποριακή χρήση της γλώσσας, όπως αυτή αποτυπώνεται στις ζωντανές αφηγήσεις ανάμεσα στις δύο πρωταγωνίστριες, και για την ανυπόκριτη αναπαράσταση της ελληνικής μικροαστικής τάξης της εποχής. Θεωρείται, επίσης, αξιόλογο έργο για την τολμηρή περιγραφή ρευστών σεξουαλικών ταυτοτήτων. Ο Ταχτσής απεικονίζει τις ομο- και αμφιφυλόφιλες αρσενικότητες σε συνδυασμό με το στοιχείο του κουίρ στη γλώσσα, προκειμένου να ανατρέψει τα ετεροκανονικά έμφυλα στερεότυπα που επικρατούσαν στην ελληνική κοινωνία της εποχής του. Η μελέτη, λαμβάνοντας υπόψη το πλούσιο υπο-κείμενο του μυθιστορήματος, εντοπίζει στοιχεία κουίρ στις περιγραφές των μη ετεροκανονικών χαρακτήρων και τις δραστηριότητές τους, καθώς και σημεία όπου αποτυπώνεται η διάσταση του κουίρ σε κειμενικό επίπεδο. Στη συνέχεια, εξετάζει συγκριτικά τη μεταφορά τους στις μεταφράσεις προς τα αγγλικά (Chioles, 1985), γαλλικά (Lacarrière, 1981), ιταλικά (Minucci, 1992) και γερμανικά (Josing-Gundert, 1984), με στόχο την εύρεση και ανάδειξη μοτίβων στην απόδοση του κουίρ στα συγκεκριμένα μεταφράσματα.