

## Σύγκριση

Αρ. 33 (2024)



**Vassilis Alexakis, the migrant Greek child. About the reality of in-between fictional characters and literary spaces**

*María Recuenco Peñalver*

Copyright © 2025, María Recuenco Peñalver



Άδεια χρήσης [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

### Βιβλιογραφική αναφορά:

Recuenco Peñalver, M. (2025). Vassilis Alexakis, the migrant Greek child. About the reality of in-between fictional characters and literary spaces: About the reality of in-between fictional characters and literary spaces. *Σύγκριση*, (33), 52–63. ανακτήθηκε από <https://ejournals.epublishing.ekt.gr/index.php/syγκrissi/article/view/39185>

**MARIA RECUENCO-PEÑALVER**

University of Malaga (Spain) – University of Cape Town (South Africa)

**Vassilis Alexakis, the migrant Greek child.**

**About the reality of in-between fictional characters and literary spaces**

### **1. Introduction: Vassilis Alexakis, his life and his self-translated work**

Vassilis Alexakis' novels make him one of the greatest literary exponents of the contemporary Greek diaspora in French-speaking countries and by extension of the greatest examples of migration literature or mestizo literature. This «literary métissage», as it is called by Françoise Lionnet, cited in Wilson (2011, p. 134) or migrant literature is defined by Russell King, John Connell y Paul Whyte, in the prolog to *Writing Across Worlds. Literature and Migration* (1995, p. xv) as follows:

Migrant literature is individual, subjective, diverse: it reflects but also may exaggerate or even invert the social experience that drives it. ... For some groups, migration is not a mere interval between fixed points of departure and arrival, but a mode of being in the world – “migrancy”. The migrant voice tells us what it is like to feel a stranger and yet at home, to live simultaneously inside one's immediate situation, to be permanently on the run, to think of returning but to realize at the same time the impossibility of doing so, since the past is not only another country but also another time, out of the present. ... It tells of long-distance journeys and relocations, of losses, changes, conflicts, powerlessness, and of infinite sadnesses that severely test the migrant's emotional resolve. It tells of new visions and experience of the familiar and unfamiliar. For those who come from elsewhere, and cannot go back, perhaps writing becomes a place to live.

If the reader knows Alexakis' work, I am quite sure all the above can easily resonate. Allow me, nevertheless, to give a bit of a background to the ones that are not very familiar with Alexakis' life and/or work.

In 2007 he was the recipient of the Grand Prix du Roman de l'Académie Française for his 2007 novel *Ap.-J.C.* and in 2012 he was awarded one of the greatest literary French rewards, the Prix de la Langue Française for the whole of his literary work. He moved to France in 1961 to study Journalism in the city of Lille, when he was 17 on a scholarship for 3 years, during which he experienced important economic difficulties, adaptation and linguistic problems. Later on, in 1964, he went to Paris to look for his first job and so he started working at a newspaper. He mastered the French language, which had troubled him during his studies, and remained in Paris until 1966, after which he went back to Greece to do his military service. His idea was to stay in Greece, but 1974 dictatorship of the Colonels quickly dissuaded him and after fulfilling his obligations with his country, he returned to Paris. He quickly settled there, both professionally and personally, got married in 1969 and began working as a cartoonist and a journalist specialized in Greek literature, which allowed him to discover his interest in

literature and writing. Alexakis started then writing in France and in French. He wrote novels, short stories, scripts, a travel guide, among others. It was after writing for a few years that he started missing his Greek language and swapped into Greek, which was followed by what resulted in a long list of self-translated novels.

Regarding this swapping of writing languages, Alexakis always defended that he chose the first language in which every book was going to be written according to the topic of each novel, as well as the characters' language, as he defended in Bessy (2011, p. 241).<sup>1</sup> By doing so, Alexakis carried out what Wilson (2011) named as «horizontal translation» by which both languages are treated equally. This is indeed how it worked from a certain point on, and especially over his last years, for we can clearly differentiate two creative stages in his production.

His first works were in French and mostly about France, and rare mentions to Greece or Greek language or culture are made. Alexakis' very first work was *Le Sandwich* (1974), he wrote then *Les Girls du City Boum-Boum* (1975), followed by *La Tête du chat* (1978), *Talgo* (1983), *Contrôle d'identité* (1983), *Avant* (1992) and *Paris-Athènes* (1989). It is worth to highlight that in the middle of this first creative stage, Alexakis wrote the novel *Τάλγκο*, firstly in Greek in 1981. He then self-translated it to French (*Talgo*) and was published in France in 1983. In his own words, it is the book that gave him his Greek identity back and helped him to discover the possibility of finding a balance in between the two languages. He so then started self-translating his works, which became the identity sign of his bilingual work and made him part of the literary scene of both countries.

The second stage in his literary production started with the writing of his 1995 novel *Η Μητρική γλώσσα*. This second period is characterized by a more important use of modern Greek as first writing language, a systematic resource to self-translation and a very strong presence of Greece and the Greek language as topics in the novels. In the middle of this second stage, there is also a work written first in French, *Les Mots étrangers* (2002), a novel about learning a new language. The books that followed were *Η Καρδιά της Μαργαρίτας* in 1999 (*Le Cœur de Marguerite*), *Les Mots étrangers* in 2002, *Θα σε ξεχνάω κάθε μέρα* in 2005 (*Je t'oublierai tous les jours*), *μ.Χ.* in 2007 (*Ap. J.-C.*) and *Η πρώτη λέξη* in 2011 (*Le premier mot*). In 2012, he published *L'Enfant grec*, and his very last novel was published in 2015, *La Clarinette*, before he passed away in January 2021. All the works belonging to this second stage are clearly bilingual and are based on a clear complementarity of the two languages in the author's consciously bilingual universe.

Other than the fact that he wrote in two languages and referred very often to both of them, Alexakis wrote also about languages —mainly French, and Greek, but also others— together with different repeated topics like bilingualism, puns, self-translation, language acquisition and learning, and also about travels, coming back, duality, nostalgia, very typical from the type of literature we started this paper referring to.

---

<sup>1</sup> « Aujourd'hui je choisis la langue en fonction des personnages. Si mes personnages sont grecs, même s'ils vivent à Paris, si leur langue naturelle est le grec, j'écris en grec ». Same method as the one used by the writer who is the main character of *Les Mots étrangers* (p. 141): « J'écris la première version dans la langue de mes personnages. J'ai besoin de me tenir au plus près d'eux pour imaginer leur histoire ».

There is also a very strong correspondence between real situations, memories, places and people belonging to Alexakis's life, on the one hand, and, on the other, fictional characters and situations in his books. To the extent that some main characters make very often think of them as the author's alter egos. That is why numerous scholars consider him undoubtedly an autobiographical writer. He systematically rejected this idea whenever he had the opportunity to,<sup>2</sup> with only three exceptions: the novels *Talgo*, *Paris-Athènes* and *Je t'oublierai tous les jours*, even though at the beginning of his literary career he had no problem to consider himself an autobiographical writer, as stated by Bessy (2008, pp. 54-58)

Other very frequently repeated topics in Alexakis' novels that make his works a good example of migrant literature are trips in between France and Greece, or cultural aspects and words in other languages and their meaning, as well as the experience of migration and spatial movements and questions related to identity. He speaks a great deal about loss, particularly the ones of the loved ones (the mother in *La Langue maternelle*; the father in *Les Mots étrangers*; or the brother in *Ap. J.-C., Le Premier mot* and *L'Enfant grec*). It is probably not a coincidence that Alexakis wrote these novels after losing those same relatives as the main characters of his books.

Lastly, as it is frequent in migrant literature, Alexakis' works speak about spatial movement. The geographical dislocation is reflected in his books through numerous trips (by train, plane, boat...), characters who leave or have gone somewhere (on many occasions, France or Greece), descriptions of scenes in different cities or various apartments, etc., which can be understood in two ways: on the one hand, as the initial expression of the author's own dislocation, after the separation from his family and his native country; and, on the other, later on, as a search for new references and possibilities of belonging. In Alexakis' narrative we also find frequent time jumps between the present and the past and associations of ideas that make the narrative sometimes adopt unexpected turns. This discourse of displacement in Alexakis, in short, which can be understood as dislocation and instability, as a lack of references and ultimately as a search, is inevitably associated with the experience of migration, with nostalgic memory and with the feeling of uprooting and *xenitiá*.

## 2. Hybridity, identity and relationship with space

Alexakis' experience of movement and his ever-changing relationship with his two languages and cultures, his own understanding of the writing task and his own work as an author and translator, his constant and particular use of elements in his books coming from both worlds, the fictional and the real one, the autobiographical elements, the intertextuality, the self-translation, reveal the author's need to share and to claim his own right and need to a hybrid identity through writing. He is someone who somehow belongs to more than one country, more than one language, and more than one way of writing, and his works are proof of that as well as means to it. In this way, his hybridity, both personal and professional, is shaped, and his works allow us to observe his own process to do so.

---

<sup>2</sup> See Alexakis' interviews by Levanda Strouthou (2007) and Marchand (2002) where he strongly defended the fact that his works are way less autobiographical than what people believe.

In terms of Alexakis' relationship with space, we need to recall what Joseph Brodsky (1994, p. 10) says regarding exiled writers and their languages: «... the condition we call exile is, first of all, a linguistic event: an exiled writer is thrust, or retreats, into his mother tongue». Christine Brooke-Rose (1998, pp. 10-13), establishes different types of literary exile (that is, experienced by writers) and distinguishes what she calls linguistic exile, which refers to the adoption of a language other than the mother tongue in which to prepare their works when moving to a different country. According to her, the evolution of the linguistic process that certain authors go through until they make the new language their own can be seen in many of these works, written in the language of the other, a reflection of the association between linguistic assimilation and the necessary distance to create topics that transcend the national or the regional and come closer to a linguistic reflection.<sup>3</sup>

In this way, a large number of works by exiled writers frequently use literature, either to externalize, shape and record their experiences, simply share them with their readers or even to somehow overcome them through writing. Nancy Huston, Ariel Dorfman, Vladimir Nabokov, Julien Green, Jorge Semprún, Eduardo Manet or Eva Hoffman and Vassilis Alexakis himself, are only a few examples of this.<sup>4</sup>

In all these cases, and many others, language and literature can become something similar to a shelter in the face of a situation of exile, whether voluntary or forced, in addition to, as Said (1994, p. 144) points out, the necessary tool to create the “new world” that, according to him, is necessary, when dealing with the losses and sense of disorientation that exile brings.<sup>5</sup> In addition to a refuge or linguistic home, writing also constitutes for exiled writers the fastest, cheapest or sometimes even the only means of returning to the longed-for native country, while they remain in the host country. Hence, in some of these works we can perceive the creation of an intermediate territory, the “in-between” space, a third place or third country between the one from which one comes and the one to which one arrives.

Alexakis speaks about it in *Je t'oublierai tous les jours* (2005): « Un troisième pays après la Grèce et la France, qui ne figure sur aucune carte, occupe désormais mon esprit »;<sup>6</sup> and even before that in *Talgo* and in *Paris-Athènes*, as «the emptiness, the void».<sup>7</sup> The South African scholar Frances Antoinette Vosloo

---

<sup>3</sup> See, among others, Said (1994, p. 144): «It is not surprising that so many exiles seem to be novelists, chess players, political activists, and intellectuals» and Castellani (2001, p. 410): « ... les exilés volontaires, les exilés politiques ou économiques fournissent donc un corpus extrêmement riche et varié d'écrivains qui vont s'exprimer dans une autre langue que leur langue maternelle ».

<sup>4</sup> For more information, see the website <<http://www.exiledwriters.co.uk/writers.shtml>> [last accessed: August, 2024], dedicated to exiled authors living in Europe, a large part of whom deal with the topic of exile in their works.

<sup>5</sup> «... much of the exile's life is taken up with compensating for disorienting loss by creating a new world to rule».

<sup>6</sup> Alexakis explains this situation during the round table organised by the French Institute of Athens in 1985: « Le grec est la langue de ma mère, le français celle de mes enfants. Je ne pense pas qu'il y a lieu de choisir [...] Peut-être ai-je trouvé dans les deux langues un territoire où je me sens moi-même ». Cited in Jouanny (1998, p. 57).

<sup>7</sup> In *Talgo* (p. 105): « Les gens transportent des pots de fleurs, des valises, des enfants, moi je transporte un vide ; je suis le chargé de mission du vide, l'ambassadeur du vide, l'envoyé spécial du vide ; mon véritable pays est le vide » ; and in *Paris-Athènes* (p. 21): « Alors que j'avais cru trouver un équilibre entre deux pays et deux langues, j'ai eu la sensation que je marchais dans le

(2010), speaking about Antjie Krog's self-translation uses the term «in-between space»,<sup>8</sup> while Steiner (2009, p. 19) refers to it as «placelessness». This feeling of lack of references, uprooting and dislocation that is found explicitly in many works is what usually leads (depending on the circumstances of each case) to a feeling of loss that results in the personal questioning experienced by Alexakis.<sup>9</sup> For many exiled authors, bilingual or not, it is very common and highlights the complexity of existence in a multicultural context, the different stages that a person has to go through and the need for inner reconciliation. Paul Whyte (1995, p. 3) in this regard says that these changes or stages constitute a complicated process,<sup>10</sup> which is characterized, according to him, by a clear ambivalence or duality. For these works that emerged from the experience of migration, geographical displacement is of vital importance. Robinson (1994, pp. xx and xxi), very significantly, compares them with «something of a mapping device» and speaks about their writers as «blind bats who emit chirps in order to hear them bounce against buildings and trees: From the echoes they can determine where they are». Lalagianni and Antoniadou (2010) describe it as writing about "l'entre-deux" or "la désappartenance" (non-belonging) and understand it as the writing through which the reordering of the devices related to identity is carried out, in order to create a feeling of belonging. Mestizo or migrat literature is a reality in practically all geographical areas, as is self-translation; therefore, its study should, in my opinion, take an important place in the establishment of the literary canon of each country.

When it comes to writers from the Greek diaspora, many of them have been associated with the character of Ulysses. Stuart (2003, p. 284), for example, mentions Cavafis, Moréas, Psijaris, Casantsakis or Seferis, while Oktapoda-Lu (2005) does the same with Mimika Kranaki, referring to her as a character in constant movement, in continuous search of her homeland and her origins, embarked on a journey full of experiences, whose destination is not the place of origin (although it may seem so), but the journey itself. Alexakis has also been compared to the Homeric character.<sup>11</sup> His works belong to the literature of mestizo or migration, for that they reveal the combination of the different realities to

---

vide. Comme dans un cauchemar, je me suis vu en train de traverser un gouffre sur un pont qui, en réalité, n'existait pas ».

<sup>8</sup> «... hybrid space, an in-between space».

<sup>9</sup> See Said (1994, pp. 140-141): «Exiles feel, therefore, an urgent need to reconstitute their broken lives»; Whyte (1995, p. 1): «Migration therefore changes people and mentalities. New experiences ... lead to altered or evolving representations of experience and of self-identity»; or Oktapoda-Lu and Lalagianni (2005, p. 112): « ... la migration constitue une situation de crise pour l'identité, étant un changement " d'une telle importance qu'elle ne met pas seulement en évidence mais en péril l'identité " ».

<sup>10</sup> «Shifts of identity are highly complex, sometimes unstable, and often have reversible elements built into them. The titles of various works on migration, produced by creative writers or by social-scientific researchers, suggest that migrants may live in a number of worlds, and move between them on a daily, annual or seasonal rhythm. Other changes resulting from migration include attempts to re-create elements of former lives ...; attempts to integrate or assimilate completely ...; or the creation of a new identity which is characterized by a feeling of independence from both the society of origin and the social structures of the destination».

<sup>11</sup> Redouane (2010): « Ulysse des Temps modernes, Alexakis cherche sa voix ; son identité aussi. Entre Paris et Athènes, le chemin sera long. La quête aussi. Les romans d'Alexakis fourmillent d'allusions et de renvois, photographiques presque, du parcours de l'écrivain, de sa quête existentielle » and Harang (1995) « ... modeste Ulysse d'autocar ».

which the author belongs, and in them, the journey, the movement, in a word, the displacement, takes on a special importance. Antoniadou (2006a, p. 443 and 2006b, p. 229) uses the term “transhumance literature” to refer to his writing, in that he tries to inscribe himself “... not in fidelity or in collaboration, but simply in another place.”<sup>12</sup>

Displacement is therefore of crucial importance not only for Vasilis Alexakis’ life but also for his work. There are authors, such as Bessy (2008a) or Oktapoda-Lu and Lalagianni (2005, pp. 112-115), who see in his writing an attempt to redeem his conscience after having left Greece and understand exile as the driving force of creation and filter of his writing. I agree with this idea. The change of country, city, language or, what is the same, constant change and movement represent one of the particularities of Alexakis’ work. If at the beginning of the author’s career they were somehow a problem, the fact of using them in his works and analyzing them through writing contributed greatly to the process of his linguistic and cultural recovery. However, it is important to note that in the mid-1980s the author considered returning to Greece and abandoning French. This crisis, largely provoked by the questioning from French literary critics, was the cause of a painful relationship with the Other. He managed to overcome this stage of questioning, mainly because of his condition of being displaced, thanks to the acceptance of his duality (linguistic, cultural and spatial), and through and thanks to the clearly vindicative writing of *Paris-Athènes*, the work that marks the turning point in his evolution.

In pp. 83-84 of *Paris-Athènes*, Alexakis manifests: « Je m’étais forgé une nouvelle identité, à l’opposé de celle qui était réellement la mienne. Je me reconnaissais dans tous les personnages de roman qui ont deux visages. Je fus le docteur Jekyll. Je fus tous les meurtriers au visage d’ange qui opèrent dans le roman policier ». He also speaks openly about his problems to welcome his parents in Paris;<sup>13</sup> or the fatigue this dual belonging causes him (p. 266): « Je suis pour ma part mon propre sosie. Ma fatigue est peut-être due aux efforts que j’ai fournis depuis longtemps pour conquérir une nouvelle identité sans perdre l’ancienne ». *Paris-Athènes* is therefore, as we have already seen, the novel in which the latent parallelism between the linguistic problem and the personal questioning in Alexakis becomes evident both for him and for the reader.

Once Alexakis is at peace with the fact that he belongs to more than one reality at many levels, we can establish that the study of Alexakis’ works allows us to see that what the author carried out throughout his long literary career was a constant, although probably involuntary at the beginning, search, but also a (re)definition of his linguistic identity, above all, but also cultural and geographical identity.

In 2010, however, Alexakis’s brother death brought about a return to autobiographical elements and the importance of languages as one of the novel’s main themes, as well as to research as the backbone of the story of *Η πρώτη λέξη*

<sup>12</sup> « L’écriture d’Alexakis est une “ écriture de transhumance ” puisqu’il s’efforce d’écrire “ non dans la fidélité, ni dans la collaboration : simplement ailleurs ” ».

<sup>13</sup> (p. 224): « À Paris, je m’étais si bien installé dans la peau de mon personnage que la plupart du temps je n’avais pas l’impression de simuler. Cependant, chaque fois que mes parents me rendaient visite, je devenais très maladroit. Leur présence suffisait à ressusciter mon double. Je ne savais plus comment me comporter, quoi dire. J’étais capable de jouer un rôle mais pas deux à la fois ».

[Le première mot] which is self-translated into French. Two years later, 2012, he writes a book in French first, about his childhood heroes, since in his own words, are the only family that is left for him after losing his parents and his brother.<sup>14</sup>

### 3. L'enfant grec

This 2012 novel, *L'Enfant grec*, makes very clear the importance of the relationship between Vassilis Alexakis and both fictional characters and also space. The novel's main character (who could very well be Alexakis) is forced to stay at a hotel after a leg operation since he is unable to reach his own apartment due to the fact that there is no lift and he lives in a fifth floor (same situation as for the author at the time he was writing the book).

The novel appeared in France in 2012 and was self-translated in 2013 and presents a few differences compared to the previous books in terms of Alexakis' traditional way of working. Firstly, because the French version got published before the Greek version was finished; and secondly, because nearly a year passed between the publication of the two. This work also represents a return to French, which although the author attributes to practical reasons,<sup>15</sup> can also be associated with other psychological reasons, similar to those that led him to the creation in French of *Les Mots étrangers*, that is, the acceptance of both the brother's death and the idea that most of his family members had by then disappeared.

We have already seen that the experience of displacement and the use that Alexakis makes of his languages are closely intertwined in a problem of identity that develops over time. We have also seen that this problem can be related, both to his personal life and to the configuration of his literary work. The use of autobiographical references in the author's work reinforces this appreciation, just like, in my opinion, the combination of self-referential elements with literary fiction is at the origin of a certain confusion that existed about the author himself, from the beginning of his career. It might seem that, with this combination of autobiographical and fictional elements in his works and the confusion they can give rise to, the author intends to share or extend his personal conflict to the readers, as if Alexakis was trying to make them aware of his hybrid identity and his belonging to various realities. Be that as it may, as the author makes the union of fiction and reality one of the particularities of his work, Alexakis' readers are often led to wonder who Vasilis Alexakis really is. The answer to that question points to the consideration of the existence of different Alexakis.

First of all, we could talk about Alexakis, the author, the real person, with his identity conflict in the past, his two languages and his belonging to two coun-

---

<sup>14</sup> In Bascos' interview (2011) he says: «Το επόμενο μυθιστόρημά μου θα έχει ως θέμα τους ήρωες των παιδικών μου χρόνων. Σκέφτομαι ότι έχω χάσει τους γονείς μου, έχασα πρόσωπα τον αδελφό μου, η μόνη οικογένεια που μου μένει είναι η οικογένεια των μυθιστορηματικών μου ηρώων, οι Τρεις Σωματοφύλακες, ο Ροβήρος ο κατακτητής, ο Γιάννης Αγιάννης... Αυτοί δεν πεθαίνουν ποτέ, είναι πάντα εκεί. Με αυτούς μεγάλωσα, είναι σαν τους θεούς μου, σαν μια δεύτερη οικογένειά μου. Θέλω να τους ξαναβρώ».

<sup>15</sup> As the writer explains in an interview published in the Greek platform NewsBomb.gr: «Είναι γραμμένο γαλλικά, επειδή το θέμα (του) είναι γαλλικό, ο χώρος είναι γαλλικός, όλη η ιστορία διαδραματίζεται στον κήπο του Λουξεμβούργου οπότε μου ήταν πιο φυσικό να το γράψω γαλλικά» <<http://www.newsbomb.gr/politismos/story/243898/vasilis-alexakis-oi-ellines-synevalanstin-anaptyxi-tis-germanias>>.



tries, which would lead us to talk, at the same time, about Alexakis as an author and Greek translator and Alexakis as a French author and translator. Secondly, we could talk about Alexakis as a character in each of his books, under different names and circumstances, who appears to the reader through numerous autobiographical elements of the works.<sup>16</sup> Finally, we can talk about a third fictional Alexakis, created by the real Alexakis, the result of the fusion of the author and self-translator Alexakis, and his creation: an intermediate, hybrid character, the result of the (con)fusion of the previous ones.

With his literary combination of reality and fantasy, Alexakis might very well be reinventing not only himself, but also space. His books could be the space in between, where he can freely just be: a Greek and a French author; narrator and character; in Greece or in France. A space in between just like the catacombs where we see the main character of *L'Enfant grec* at the end of the book, depicted as the place “deprive d'adresse, qui flotte à la surface du temps comme le jardin de Callithéa” (p. 281), where “la frontière entre le réel et l'imaginaire” is (p. 307), or the space where he feels himself in every time he opens one of the volumes of his dear companion, the Grand Robert dictionary: “un espace qui n'appartient à aucun lieu”.

In that sense, *L'Enfant grec* could be the epitome of the way Alexakis craft creates the place he was always longing for. Just like Bessy (2008, p. 76) states<sup>17</sup> the continuous “game” with the autobiographical and referential component, impregnating his novels with ambiguity, allows the author to place himself between borders and from there question, or even subvert, a series of dichotomies such as: fiction and reality, autobiography and fiction, the real and the imaginary, the invented and the true or the own and the foreign. Questioning dichotomies such as those mentioned are, ultimately, raising the problem of identity, showing it as something fluid, constructed, multiple and fragmented.

Finally, to close this section, it is also worth to mention the fact that the ideas of mortality and immortality play a big role in the book as well. In the program *Étonnants Voyageurs* of 2013,<sup>18</sup> Alexakis speaks about it in the following

---

<sup>16</sup> In almost all of his books there are young people who go to Lille, who say goodbye to their parents before leaving Greece, who write letters to their mother, characters who smoke a pipe, bilingual writers, people who live between Paris and Athens, etc. Bessy (2008, p. 61) explains it in the following way: « Chez Alexakis, le personnage devient souvent auteur et l'auteur parfois personnage ». Leauthier (2004) uses Alexakis' words when saying: « Le travail du romancier n'est pas d'avoir des opinions mais de bâtir des personnages » and adds « Notamment le sien, omniprésent ou en ombre chinoise dans nombre de ses livres ».

<sup>17</sup> « Alexakis se fictionnalise, se montre et s'observe sous le masque de l'autre dans un mouvement de déplacement autofictionnel. En se mettant en scène dans ses écrits, en réécrivant incessamment les mêmes scènes douloureuses de sa vie, Alexakis vise à atteindre une sorte de paix identitaire. ... L'œuvre d'Alexakis matérialise donc la possibilité de se livrer à une écriture intime entre réalité et fiction qui incarne parfaitement le caractère instable, pluriel et construit de l'identité. ... dans l'espace ouvert par une démarche littéraire rappelant le concept d'identité narrative ricœurienne, Alexakis se donne le droit d'expérimenter à partir de la mise en fiction de sa propre vie et d'être à la fois lui-même et autre. ... il mélange les genres en se jouant des idéologies et des catégories littéraires acceptées, ce qui lui permet de créer une esthétique originale et personnelle de l'écriture de soi. Alexakis opère donc, peut être de manière inconsciente, à la fois une subversion du genre autobiographique classique mais aussi une subversion d'une vision essentialiste de l'identité ».

<sup>18</sup> « Programme Étonnants Voyageurs 2013. Café littéraire avec Vassilis Alexakis, Mark Behr, Pete Fromm. Comment tout a commencé » from March, 2013 available in <<http://vimeo.com/67126240>>, from minute 37:43.

terms: «Maybe my goal is to also become a character in a novel. In fact, my crutches often made me think that I was a manipulated puppet, because, in the end, the characters in my novel, unlike the people in my family, do not die. Maybe it is just an attempt to escape the sinister destiny».

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

The study of Alexakis' linguistic evolution and his literary use of movement and autobiographism allow us to conclude that the author's use of these elements is linked to a clear claim, personal and creative, in terms of his own conception of literature and identity. He is one of the purest examples of both personal and literary contemporary hybridity, in the same way that his works serve as excellent examples of the literature of migration and self-translation.

For Alexakis, writing in the other language entailed a form of (linguistic) shelter and a restorative element as it offered the author a new perspective when facing difficulties, like painful distance from his country and his family or the loss of his loved ones. Because of all of the explained in this paper, we can conclude that for the author there is indeed a link between the references that he makes to places, the constant naming and description of streets, apartments, rooms, etc, and his need to know where he is or even where he wants to be.

Alexakis' work is the reinvention of the self, is a new approach on literature, and on literary translation, is the (con)fusion of the physical being and the literary being, and it is a claim — the claim of a very difficult to classify both person and writer. The claim for the right of the in-between, of not being just one thing or the other, or something and the opposite, but the claim for being whatever or whoever he created for himself.

## WORKS CITED

- Antoniadou, O. (2006a). *L'alterité à travers le roman francophone grec du XXe siècle*. PhD. Thessaloniki, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. Dir.: Dr. Georges Fréris.
- Antoniadou, O. (2006b). Globalisation and Identity: Vassilis Alexakis's case. *Echinox Journal* 11, 217-235.
- Bessy, M. (2011). *Vassilis Alexakis : exorciser l'exil*. Amsterdam: Rodopi.
- Bessy, M. (2008). *Vassilis Alexakis : exorciser l'exil. Déplacements autofictionnels, linguistiques et spatiaux*. PhD. Louisiana, Louisiana State University. Dir.: Dr. Jack Yeager.
- Brodsky, J. (1994). The Condition We Call Exile (pp. 3-12). In Marc Robinson (ed.): *Elsewhere altogether. Writers on exile*. San Diego, Nueva York y Londres: Harcourt Brace & Company.
- Brooke-Rose, C. (1998). Exil (pp. 10-24). In Susan Rubin Suleiman: *Exile and Creativity: Signposts, Travellers, Outsiders, Backward Glances*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Castellani, J.-P. (2001). La Langue de l'Autre. In *Littérature et nation* 24, 405-412.
- Harang, J.-B. (1995). Alexakis au bord de l'Homère. Tel un Ulysse en autocar, Vassilis Alexakis revient, en français, se frotter in situ à "La Langue maternelle". *Libération*, 4 September.
- Jouanny, R. (1998). Le vertige d'un romancier entre deux langues: le cas d'Alexakis. *Français et francophones. Tendances centrifuges et centripètes dans les littératures françaises / francophones d'aujourd'hui*. Beirut: Ed. Schultz & Stellmacker, 55-66.
- King, R., Connell, J. & White, P. (1995). *Writing across worlds. Literature and migration*. Londres y Nueva York: Routledge.
- Lalagianni, V. & Antoniadou, O. (2010). Problématique identitaire et bilinguisme dans les romans de Vassilis Alexakis. In *Les Cahiers du GRELCEF* 1. <[http://www.uwo.ca/french/grelcef/2010/cgrelcef\\_01\\_txt09\\_lalagianni.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/french/grelcef/2010/cgrelcef_01_txt09_lalagianni.pdf)> (August, 2024).
- Leauthier, A. (2004). « Ambidextre du texte ». *Libération*, 3 August. <[https://www.liberation.fr/portrait/2004/08/03/ambidextre-du-texte\\_488237/](https://www.liberation.fr/portrait/2004/08/03/ambidextre-du-texte_488237/)> (October, 2024).
- Oktapoda-Lu, E. (2005). Mythes de la double identité ou l'odyssée de Mimika Kranaki. *Francofonía* 14, 189-202.
- Oktapoda-Lu, E. & Lalagianni, V. (2005). Le véritable exil est toujours intérieur. Métissage et imaginaire chez les écrivains francophones grecs. *French Forum* 30/3, 111-139.
- Redouane, N. (2010). Criză identitară și bilingvism în opera lui Vassilis Alexakis. *Phantasma* 18, 159-168.
- Robinson, M. (1994). *Altogether Elsewhere. Writers on Exile*. Harcourt: Brace & Company.
- Said, E. (1994). Reflections on exile (pp. 137-149). In Marc Robinson (ed.): *Altogether Elsewhere. Writers on Exile*. San Diego, Nueva York y London: Harvest.
- Steiner, T. (2009). *Translated People, Translated Texts*. Manchester: St. Jerome.
- Stuart, S. (2003). Linguistic Profit, Loss and Betrayal in *Paris-Athènes*. *Francophone Post-Colonial Cultures*, 284-295.

- Vosloo, F. A. (2010). *Writing through Translating and Translating through Writing: Antjie Krog as writer/translator*. Tesis doctoral. Universidad de Stellenbosch, South Africa. Dir.: Dr. Ilse Feinauer and Dr. Louise Viljoen [in afrikaans].
- Whyte, Paul (1995). Geography, Literature and Migration (pp. 1-19). In Russell King *et al.*: *Writing across worlds. Literature and migration*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Wilson, R. (2011). Transplanted Subjects: Self-translation processes in translingual narratives. *Oltre oceano* 5, 123-138.

## Περίληψη

María Recuenco Peñalver

### **Ο Βασίλης Αλεξιάκης, το ξενιτεμένο ελληνόπουλο. Η πραγματικότητα των λογοτεχνικών χαρακτήρων και τόπων, σ' έναν ενδιάμεσο χώρο**

Ο Βασίλης Αλεξιάκης (Αθήνα, 1943-2021), ενώ αρχικά επέλεξε τα γαλλικά ως γλώσσα γραφής όσο ζούσε στη Γαλλία, μετέπειτα στράφηκε στην ελληνική γλώσσα, πρακτική που τον ώθησε σε μια συστηματική διαδικασία αυτομετάφρασης και προς τις δύο κατευθύνσεις για τα περισσότερα έργα του. Ιδιαίτερα γνωστός συγγραφέας τόσο στη Γαλλία όσο και στην Ελλάδα, αποτελεί εκφραστή της λογοτεχνικής υβριδικότητας, καθώς και μία από τις πιο χαρακτηριστικές περιπτώσεις σύγχρονων λογοτεχνών που αυτομεταφράζονται. Το 2012 τιμήθηκε με το Prix de la Langue Française για το σύνολο της καριέρας του. Την ίδια χρονιά, μετά από μια σοβαρή επέμβαση στο πόδι, ο Βασίλης Αλεξιάκης διέμεινε για ενάμιση μήνα με πατερίτσες σε ξενοδοχείο κοντά στον Κήπο του Λουξεμβούργου στο Παρίσι, ακριβώς όπως ο κύριος χαρακτήρας του δέκατου τέταρτου και προτελευταίου μυθιστορηματός του, *Ο Μικρός Έλληνας*, που έγραψε κατά τη διάρκεια εκείνης της περιόδου. Σε όλα του τα βιβλία είναι εμφανής η ανάγκη του να μιλήσει για τον εαυτό του αλλά και για το θέμα του χώρου. Το έργο του βρίθει αμέτρητων χωρικών αναφορών, χαρακτηριστικό που οφείλεται στο γεγονός ότι βρίσκεται έξω από ένα περιβάλλον που του είναι οικείο ή εξαιτίας της μακροχρόνιας μετακίνησής του ανάμεσα στις δύο αγαπημένες του χώρες; Υπάρχει, άραγε, σύνδεση μεταξύ όλων των γεωγραφικών αναφορών και της υπαρξιακής ανάγκης του ανήκειν; Στο παρόν άρθρο θα διερευνήσουμε, με αφορμή το προαναφερθέν μυθιστόρημα, τη σχέση του Βασίλη Αλεξιάκη με τον χώρο και την ενδεχόμενη σύνδεσή του με την επανεφεύρεση του λογοτεχνικού χώρου στο έργο του.