# *The* CHARIOTEER

*A Review of Modern Greek Culture*

NUMBER 10 1968

## THIRTEEN POETS OF SALONIKA

*An Anthology*
*Selections and Translations*
*by* Kimon Friar

## THE ART OF JANNIS SPYROPOULOS

## CAVAFY'S *ARS POETICA*

*Critical Essays*

*Book Reviews*

*Published by*
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# *EDITORIAL*

"THE POETS of Salonika? Splendid! But what about the poets of Vlahokerasia? When are you going to present them?" Thus from an old friend of *The Charioteer* when he learned that a Salonika issue was forthcoming. To someone who does not know him, his question would seem myopic, the outburst of a parochial mind, not worth an answer.

He was speaking of the place where he was born. It is a village somewhere among the mountain fastnesses of Laconia. He is, however, not in the least parochial. He knows that in American terms he might as well have been asking about the poets of, say, Horseshoe Junction, Nebraska, in relation to the poets of Boston. His tone was rhetorically playful and yet implied expectations of a definite, favorable reply. He did not wait for it.

Swept along by an unlaconic eloquence, he went on to describe how vibrantly the poet's craft still thrives in the Peloponnesean jumping-off-place of his boyhood. On public occasions of drinking and dancing, the men of his village, young and old, take turns upon familiar themes and spin out stanza after stanza, recitatives all impromptu. Far from being dulled by their steepflavored wine or their strenuous ethnic dances, their wits are sharpened against each other's improvisations, and the competition to display their prowess in poetry is as ardent as in other manly arts. The scenes he evoked call up images of an archaic world. It seems the very sort that fathered *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* and that depended above all on a prowess for life.

In an American listener his words inflicted some wistful regrets that there is no such place for poetry, spontaneous or premeditated, not even for a jiggety-jog rhyming spirit, among those who drink and dance on American occasions. The instinct of putting words into a metric pattern has become so faint among Atlantic peoples that poetic skill for them is hardly akin to any sort of prowess. For them it tends to derive from much that is unmanly and is expressive not of an excess of life but a non-life. It is not so much an art as it is a game to be played among mirrors. But then for what peoples has poetry ever been so sacred a sport as for the Greeks, to be enacted, in the supreme figurative sense, among the thigh-bones of burnt offerings to the God.

No matter what regrets about American times and customs the words of the Laconian gentlemen may arouse, they are, for the student of Greek

literature, very much to the point. For they keep pulling up sharply the fact that Greece is, as she has always been, a mother of poets. Small as she is, maybe because she is small, she has never neglected to foster in each generation the particular traits that identify her offspring. In the humblest as in the proudest ages of her history, the most dominant of these traits has been the urge toward poetry. Because of that very urge the Greeks are best known for their love of liberty. It is a love that springs from what is deepest in every Greek heart—the need to be singular and to express that singularity. What else is poetry but that need made palpable?

Hence, an issue of *The Charioteer* devoted to the poets of a small Laconian village would not be a digression into parochial trivia but would cast light upon the long, lustrous, unbroken tradition of Greek literature from Homer's day to our own. To embark upon such an issue would not be wise. It would provoke jealous outcries from almost every corner of Greece. For there is rarely a Greek village that does not have its cluster of poets who vie among themselves and the poets of neighboring regions in a display of poetic genius.

If Greece does not lack poets, neither does she lack anthologists. In these difficult days when every circumstance seems to be conspiring in favor of the anonymous, she has been especially fortunate to have the service of distinguished scholars who are sensitive critics and skillful translators. Because of their indefatigable attention to detail, the varieties of poetic experience in Greece have not been blurred. The late Professor Moses Hadas of Columbia University, in his invaluable collection *The Greek Poets* (The Modern Library), reveals his selfless devotion to Greek poetry and his strong sense of duty as an anthologist to select the representative as well as the best works. "The anthologist of Greek poetry," he writes in his Preface, "must be haunted by the thought that his ancient colleagues were responsible for the loss of the bulk of classical Greek poetry. He may draw solace from the reflection that if what they failed to include fell into oblivion, perhaps what they did include would not otherwise have survived. Happily the power of the anthologist is no longer so absolute, for full printed texts are preserved in many libraries; nevertheless his responsibility both to the ancients and to posterity remains great. Whatever the anthologist's intentions, for a large number of readers the Greek poets he chooses, and the versions in which he chooses to present them, come to constitute a sort of canon."

Professor Hadas strikes the core of his matter in his Introduction. His opening statement that "for the ancient Greeks" poetry was a "natural and

necessary commodity" more than for any other European people, needs only one word less to be timelessly true. Poetry has always been "natural and necessary" to the Greeks. The very meaning of the Greek word *poetry* or *poesy* which is *to make* refers to something concrete, not illusory or abstract, to an action, not to a thing. The word suggests how intrinsically viable is the poetic condition.Wherever we turn in *The Greek Poets* we see that what the Greek poets *made* was life and the life they made never ceases being alive. "When I am asked by some rich man to dine,/ I mark not if the walls and roof are fine,/ Nor if the vases such as Corinth prizes—/ But *solely* how the smoke from cooking rises./ If dense it runs up in a column straight,/ With fluttering heart the dinner-hour I wait./ If, thin and scant, the smoke-puffs sideway steal,/ Then I forebode a thin and scanty meal." This from Diphilus, companion to Menander.

Throughout that little book we hear the many voices of Greece and the pages vibrate with countless, fleeting nuances of sound and meaning, from Samos and Cos and distant Rhodes, from every island, big and little, from her mountains and coasts, heartlands and hinterlands, the Attic shore, the Ionian, the Sicilian. It is never a faceless crowd, that pale procession who make way for our silent, breathless encounters.

And here is Antipater of Thessaloniki, who lived at the end of the first century, B.C.: "Two sailors, when the vessel sank,/ Clung to one plank their lives to save./ Tom foully struck Jack off the plank,/ And doomed him to a watery grave./ Avenging Justice eyed the strife,/ And punished quick. The sequel mark./ Jack swam ashore and saved his life,/ Whilst Tom was swallowed by a shark." Though it resembles a jingle in a Victorian schoolbook, it tells us something about Antipater and makes us wonder how many more such anecdotes he had up his sleeve and whether they were all so proper.

Greece now is again fortunate to have the discriminating force of Kimon Friar selecting, translating and editing the works of modern poets from all parts of Greece. As translator of the *Odyssey* of Kazantzakis and as the former editor of this magazine, he and his remarkable *daemon* need no introduction to our readers. The monumental work that he is now preparing will be as definitive and invaluable for the literature of modern Greece as the work of Professor Hadas is for ages past. Like Professor Hadas, he is scrupulously aware that "the poets he chooses, and the versions in which he chooses to present them, (will) come to constitute a sort of canon."

The baker's dozen from Salonika presented here delineate the private anguish of the poet even while they speak of agonies in the world at large.

The twentieth-century preoccupations with violence and death are here, and shades of T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound sometimes flit between the lines. That the total effect is Greek cannot be questioned. There are innumerable, fleeting nuances that invite and at the same time defy analysis. We never forget, though, that we are walking not only in the path where Antipater walked but also in the footsteps of Sappho and of Anyte of Tegea and of any number of other long-dead poets who extended the time of their lives by transfixing a moment of their awareness into words and who thereby added another dimension of time to moments in our own life.

BEBE SPANOS
*for Parnassos and the Staff of* The Charioteer

# *AN INTRODUCTION TO THE SALONIKA POETS*

BY GEORGE ODYSSEUS

## I

JUST AS EVERY individual has his own particular poetry, so has every city. The city of Thessaloniki, or Salonika (in its shortened form) is no exception. From the very beginning, its geographical position has determined the course of its destiny in the Hellenic world. Stretched along the North Aegean Sea, amid Mt. Olympos (that mythical abode of the gods) and Mt. Athos (that hermitage of orthodox mysticism) it once dominated the entire stretch of the Mediterranean.

A brief glance at the city's historical past will reveal the subterranean sources of its poetic creativity. It was founded in 315 B.C. by the Macedonian king Kassander, who gave it the name of his wife, Thessaloniki, the sister of Alexander the Great. Macedonian in origin, Roman by circumstance of war, Byzantine in its spiritual renaissance, then yoked under Frankish and Turkish rule for many centuries, the city has always remained —like the rest of Greece—stubbornly Hellenic. Having passed through so many adventures and misadventures, Salonika, with its present 500,000 inhabitants and its throbbing business and industrial activity, strives now to survive in the modern mechanized world. It is not surprising that an authentic and provocative school of poetry has been born in a place of such historical significance.

The school of poetry in Salonika differs from the various schools in Athens and has its own color and identity. Its first Promethean characteristic in its difference from Athens lies in its natural environment: the harsh Macedonian landscape coupled with the softness of atmosphere, in sharp contrast to the mild contour of hills and the brilliant transparency of light in Attica. The light in Salonika does not have that dazzling clarity for which Greece is world renowned; the light in Salonika is subdued and refined. Consciousness, therefore, goes underground, goes esoteric, whereas the Athenians live in the clear and extroverted light of day. And yet, as though to confute these geographical distinctions, it was the mystical and idealistic Plato who was born in the clear Attic light, and the scientific and logical Aristotle who was born in Macedonia. Salonika is more deeply impregnated with Byzantine tradition than Athens, as is evident in such poets

as Vafopoulos, Karelli, or Pentzikis. On the contrary, such Athenian poets as Seferis and Elytis carry with them in their souls all of ancient classical Greece, the southern Aegean Sea with its myriad islands. Thus, the Salonika school of poets has a particular esoteric quality or climate of spirit, an introversion of exquisite sensitivity which has already influenced the entire range of modern Greek poetry.

The publication of a volume of poetry in Salonika becomes a literary event, and the percentage of bad poetry is therefore comparatively smaller in proportion to the many fabricated publications in Athens, where poets from many regions have gathered. The poets of Salonika though introverted are dedicated to a clarity of form and expression which significantly distinguishes them from the Athenians who have followed more closely the obscurity of European, primarily French, surrealist and symbolist schools. The irrational, with a few inevitable exceptions, is not congenial to the Macedonian temperament.

The modern school of Salonika has already claimed three separate generations of poets, and a fourth is in the process of being born. Along the entire genealogical tree of poetic creation, the tradition of Solomos and Kalvos has played a dominant role, and, more recently, the aesthetic and stylistic mannerism, the new orthodoxy of Cavafy. But in the last analysis, the school of Salonika has not remained completely isolated in a Macedonian provinciality but has extended its roots into French symbolism (though not surrealism), into the philosophy of existentialism, and has even partaken of the bitter taste of Eliot's *The Waste Land.*

## II

The first generation of poets made its appearance in the thirties, and includes Vafopoulos, Themelis, Pentzikis, Karelli, and Varvitsiotis. With the publication of the magazine *Kokhlias* (Snail) in 1945, this group stamped its seal on what had hitherto been scattered and individualistic orientations. Later, the poets Pavleas and Stoyanidhis attached themselves to this group, which became increasingly concerned with the subjective problems of existentialism and the dialectics of lyrical sensibility.

George Vafopoulos was born in 1906 in Gevgeli, a town near the Yugoslavian border. He completed his high-school studies in Salonika and for a while majored in mathematics at the University of Athens. From 1939 to 1965 he was Director of the Municipal Library of Salonika and in this capacity was invited by the British Council to visit Great Britain in 1951, and by the United States Department of State to visit America in 1957.

He is the author of six books of poetry and of a poetic drama. At first he concerned himself with the traditional forms of poetry which had dominated Greek poetry in the interval between the two world wars, but he passed quickly from a post-symbolistic modern sensibility to an individualistic style of his own, a curious and successful mixture of classical and Byzantine techniques. He was the first significant modern poet of Salonika. The central theme of Vafopoulos's poetry is the existentialist agony of death, rising out of the anguish he endured on the death of his first wife, herself a poet of note. He has since spent his entire life coming to terms with death on a plane of multiple transformations. In "Apartment House" the dead "have the privilege of rising, of loving, and of dying once more." To paraphrase one of his last verses: his God is death, because Death is the only god. Nevertheless, he has also been entirely successful as a poet of irony, wit, and satire in a triumph of elliptical visions. He is capable of poems that are rich in symbolic structure and intensity of atmosphere, as in "The Statues," where, caught in their frozen expression and immobility, the statues "feel time's crucifixion."

Zoë Karelli was born in 1901 in Salonika, received the tutorial education of a girl of good family according to her class and period, married at the age of seventeen, and then attended courses in philosophy at the University of Salonika. She is the author of eleven books of poetry, of two poetic dramas, of many literary essays, and has translated the poetry of William Carlos Williams, Eliot's *Family Reunion*, and Kimon Friar's "Introduction" and "Synopsis" to Kazantzakis's *The Odyssey: A Modern Sequel*. In 1955 she won the First National Award in Poetry and has been presented with the Palmes académiques by France. Karelli has transformed her feminine nature into a poetry of intellectual depth and width, into a kind of masculine femininity. Though her poetry nourishes a profound spiritual inquiry, she has also cultivated unworldly gardens of existential anguish where the four horses of the apocalypse run unbridled, emiting ideas that flash like flame. Either deliberately or subconsciously, she has managed to combine the balanced beauty of classical Greece with the mysticism of Byzantium in the contemporary climate of our anguish, and in a style uniquely her own. By projecting her sensibility into historical symbols and events, as in "The Adolescent from Anticythera," she comments on contemporary events, metaphysics, and death.

George Themelis was born in 1900 on the island of Samos, studied literature at the University of Athens and has been teaching in the high schools of Salonika since 1939. He is the author of eleven books of poetry,

of several books of essays on poetic themes, and is the translator into modern Greek of *Prometheus Bound* and *Oedipus the King*. In 1955 he was awarded the Second, and in 1961 the First National Award in Poetry. Themelis appeared late on the literary scene, in 1945, but immediately won the general approval and deeply influenced the younger generation with his intense gaze into infinite expanses of personal and universal states of the soul. Hurrying to make up for lost time, he published book after book in a flood of esoteric elevations, organizing the form of his verses on the models of ancient Greek lyrical choruses. In his last books he probes deeply into the human existential condition where love and death still remain his primary themes. In an intermezzo of ancestral nostalgia, he recalled the heroes of contemporary Hellenism and sang of their gallantry in a series of lyrics that are epical in theme, such as "Athanasios Dhiakos," idealizing the beauty of modern Greek folk tales.

Nikos Gabriel Pentzikis, the brother of Zoë Karelli, was born in 1908 in Salonika. He studied chemistry in France and later opened a pharmacy of his own in Salonika. This he has now abandoned to become the representative for Northern Greece of a pharmaceutical firm in Switzerland. A man of many talents, he is not only the author of two books of poetry and of five novels but has also taken his place among the painters of modern Greece. His position in Greek literature and art is highly idiosyncratic. Somewhat daemon-driven, he is the only consciously religious poet of Salonika, though of a pagan cast. His main contribution, perhaps, may lie in his prose writings where, when the interior dialogue does not dominate, we are astonished by an almost virginal purity of contemplation, coupled with rhapsodic style. As a poet, he is difficult because he moves in a space of condensed universality, bestowing, like James Joyce in *Ulysses* (parts of which he has translated) heroism to insignificant details. In "Scattered Leaves," written in a harsh rhetoric with an almost demagogic obsession for seemingly unrelated events, he wanders in Daedalian corridors, possessed by a mysticism which has affinities to William Blake's. When Pentzikis is not writing prose or poetry, he paints in a certain impressionistic and pointillistic style modified by Byzantine mosaic techniques, presenting a more concrete and optical vision of his poetic world.

Takis Varvitsiotis was born in 1916 in Salonika where he studied law at the University and is now a practicing lawyer. The author of seven books of poetry, he was awarded the poetry prize in 1960 by the Group of Twelve in Athens, and the First Prize in poetry by the Municipality of Salonika. Among his many translations from French and Spanish poetry is St. John

Perse's *And You, Seas.* Varvitsiotis is *par excellence* the representative of French symbolism in Salonika. His poetry is permeated with a childlike innocence and tenderness which rises out of a happy and congenial disposition of soul, and which floods all his physical and metaphysical world. Entirely detached from the whirlpool of social events, he sings, in a melody of "pure poetry," of leaves, flowers, wellsprings, the wind, the birds and the stars, though of late his verse has deepened with the lamentation of passing things and persons. A symbolic radiance shines through his poetry, imparting to words vibrations not normally associated with them. He creates a lyrical world of his own and transforms it into dreams.

Sarandos Pavleas was born in 1917 in the town of Platsa, in Mani, in the Peloponnesos, but moved to Salonika at an early age. He is now professor at the Experimental College of the University of Salonika and is the author of nineteen books of poetry. In his torrential offerings, he has orchestrated his world into a synthesis of humanistic optimism. Essentially simple and earthy, his poetry vibrates with a spontaneous sincerity, though often he dilutes his emotions by overextending them in an untamed enthusiasm of verbal virtuosity. His best poems, however, seem to spring out of a well of fresh mountain water, gushing and pellucid.

George Stoyiannidhis was born in 1912 in Xanthi, near Kavala. Though he lived in Salonika since early youth, he now runs a confectionary store in Kavala and is the author of six books of poetry. Writing at first out of a transparent lyrical disposition, he began to harvest his solitude in a scenery of dreamlike music. He sought the origins of beauty as though in an azure sea, recalling and repeating his memories until, laden with the guilt that many men of innocence feel in our contemporary world, he attempted to deal more and more with the concrete world about him. In the poem "Half and Half" he expresses deeper human emotions in a curious combination of arithmetic and despair. Finally, in his poem "Memories," he cries out to the world: "Only poetry can save you."

## III

The second generation of Salonika poets, who appeared in the first years after the Second World War, included Anagnostakis, Kirou, and Thasitis. All these poets were deeply influenced by the torment they underwent during the harsh German-Italian Occupation of Greece, and all became involved in the consequent Resistance Movement. They rallied around the magazine *Xekinima* (Starting Point), founded in 1944, and with unyielding resolution and youthful enthusiasm all espoused the freedom

of an enslaved people. Their social attitude may remind us of Auden, Spender, Lewis, and MacNeice during the Spanish Civil War. Even to this day, this group carries with it the scars of its martyrdom, though it has long since attempted to heal its wounds and to lull to sleep the nightmares of a scorching experience. In a crisis of conscience, these poets saw that the unique aim of poetry is man himself, the human creature in his social struggle.

Manolis Anagnostakis was born in Salonika in 1925 from a family originating in Crete. He took his degree in medicine at the University of Salonika, then went for further study to Vienna and Stockholm. Today he is a radiologist and the author of six books of poetry, of many critical articles and a book of criticism. He took an active part in the Resistance Movement and in the Civil War that followed. Condemned to death by a military court, he spent three years in jail but was finally released. Some of his dearest friends were lost on the battlefield or before firing squads, and his nightmare experience has become the basis of some of his best poetry, as in "Love Is The Fear." His claims for introspection in his later poetry ring true because they spring out of his intensified agony, his personal involvement. In his poem "The Dead Man," for instance, he mocks at conventionality, and in the refrain of the poem expresses with irony the decadence of a middle-class posture. Between 1953 and 1961 he edited the magazine *Kritiki* (Criticism), which has exerted a strong influence on critical thinking in postwar Greece.

Klitos Kirou was born in Salonika in 1921, studied in the Greek-American preparatory school, Anatolia College, and took his degree in law at the University of Salonika, but never practiced law. For the past twenty years or so he has worked for the Commercial Credit Bank of Greece and is now the director of its branch in Salonika. The author of five books of poetry and many books of translations from French, Spanish, and English poetry, he has beautifully transposed into modern Greek MacLeish's *The Pot of Basil* and Eliot's *Ash Wednesday*. A close friend of Anagnostakis, he underwent the same searing experiences during the Occupation and Resistance. "The people of my generation did not die in hospitals," he writes in one of his poems, "they shouted frantically to firing squads." His poems are testaments of a brilliant and persuasive sincerity. In his latest collection, however, he has become more introspective, his remorses have become more imagistic, his probings less social and more individualistic, as his translation of *Ash Wednesday* testifies.

Panos Thasitis was born in 1925 in Molivos, a town of Lesbos, where his parents had settled in 1922 as refugees from Asia Minor. They moved to

Salonika in 1928 where Thasitis took his degree in law at the University and is now a practicing lawyer. Like Anagnostakis and Kirou, he played an active role in the Resistance Movement. He is the author of three books of poetry and one of poetry criticism. He began writing in a lyrical vein but gradually reached a density of imagery that has made him one of the purest intellectual poets of Salonika. In their architecture, his poems attempt to reach an equilibrium between the antagonisms of heart and mind, of theory and routine. His Prince of Putrefaction is a symbol of decadence in an environment of political and economic might which forces poets to come to terms with the modern world as it really is. Concerned more with phenomena than with hypotheses, his humanism springs out of his isolation and his introspection to explore a world of unknown spaces.

## IV

The third generation of poets in Salonika appeared after 1950 and includes Christianopoulos, Aslanoglou, and Ioannou. Though freed from any involved experience with the War and the Resistance, this group has nonetheless been tormented by the barbarity of the postwar period, by its disparity and solitude, its shattering of any social cohesion. These poets turned away into an exploitation of their own inner hinterlands, from which they send messages of private despair and confession to an industrial and mechanized world bent on devouring innocence and dreams.

In this group Christianopoulos has consciously played a leading role, particularly with his magazine *Dhiagonios* (Diagonal), founded in 1958. He was born in 1931 in Salonika, took his degree in ancient Greek literature at the University there, and for many years worked in the Municipal Library of the city. Now he has set up his own office as professional copyreader and is the author of six books of poetry, one of short stories, one of poetic criticism, and one of translations primarily from ancient Greek and Latin. Christianopoulos began with a poetry set in historical times, influenced by similar uses of historical personages and places in Cavafy, as in his poems on St. Agnes and Oedipus which, though set in historical periods, succeed in depicting the current feeling of his times, not without deliberate use of anachronisms. He has long since abandoned such devices to write a poetry of direct confessional simplicity, anti-heroic, anti-idealistic, and anti-lyrical, as in "Ruined Quarry" or "I Forsake Poetry," where he has probed into himself with a relentless honesty. Poetry, for Christianopoulos, has become a catharsis of almost narcissistic incision. In this he has deeply influenced the poets of his generation.

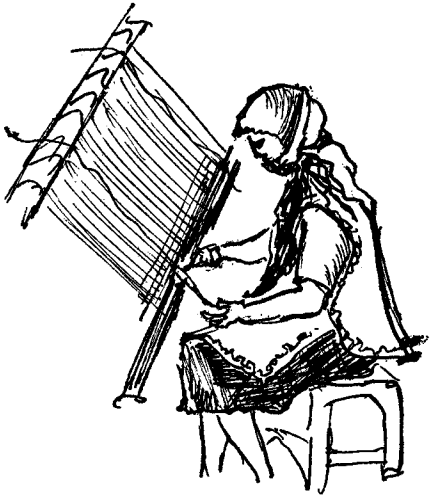
Nikos-Alexis Aslanoglou was born in Salonika in 1931, studied in the Greek-American preparatory school, Anatolia College, and then for many years traveled widely throughout the world. He is now in France studying the literature of that country and is the author of three books of poetry and one of poetic drama. At first influenced by Themelis, then later by Seferis and Elytis, he has condensed his experience as a victim of modern barbarism into allusions of dramatic passion. His wide travels, however, have given his more recent poetry a less local and a more universal quality. The driving immediacy of his vision is apparent in such poems as "Litohoron Station."

George Ioannou was born in Salonika in 1927 of refugee parents from Thrace. After taking his degree in literature at the University of Salonika, he taught in many high schools throughout Greece, and during two years founded the Greek high school in Libya. He has published two books of poetry, one of prose sketches, four collections of Greek folk songs and ballads, and has translated into modern Greek Euripides's *Iphigenia in Tauris*. Beginning as a poet of a refined yet controlled adolescent passion, he gained increasingly in intensity, particularly influenced by the slum district in which he was raised and by the sufferings of his Jewish neighbors during the German-Italian Occupation. Like the other two poets of his generation, he also developed a style which epigrammatically depicts the nakedness and loneliness of his particular microscopic world. Economical and compact, his poems often end with a line which brings his message to startling conclusion. The naked, almost masochistic truth is, for Ioannou, the essence of modern poetic expression.

## V

The three generations of Salonika poets represented here have, each of them, their own defined experiences and aesthetics, clearly evident, I believe, in the poems with which Kimon Friar has chosen to represent them in this small anthology. The first generation sprang out of the traditional forms of poetry and literature which reigned during the periods between the two world wars. Though considerably influenced by the European symbolist and existentialist climate, it succeeded in forming its own Greek, almost Byzantine, expression, and unconsciously created the basis of a new school. The second generation sprang out of the agonies and despairs of the Second World War, the Civil War, and the Resistance Movement, all of which brought to Greece calamities of tragic proportions. The hesitant voice of social protest began to be heard individually, though it has had

historical resonance in the folk poems and ballads created during the Ottoman Occupation and the Greek War of Independence. The third generation in its maturity rejected any conformation to intellectual or social poetry and explored, instead, a confessional expression of almost narcissistic obsession. Oppressed by the brutality of the modern mechanized world, this generation offered, in its sincerity, a new apocalypse, unique in modern Greek poetry. And although the attitude and aesthetics of these various generations may find their counterparts in several Athenian schools, they have all written with a flavor, technique, and color which clearly belong to Salonika. The Macedonians have always had a deep reverence for poetry. When Alexander the Great razed the entire town of Thebes, he left only one house standing: that of Pindar.



# *THIRTEEN POETS OF SALONIKA*

*Selections and Translations by KIMON FRIAR*

## I *GEORGE THEMELIS*

### ATHANASIOS DHIAKOS

*Your wings, O Angels, fly everywhere, and are unwithering.*
—DIONYSIOS SOLOMOS

They bewail the shape of the cross.
They weep for that intrepid sword which shattered in seven pieces,
For the rosemary and silver fir of mountain peaks that rise in
black smoke
That days may not find the cross,
Nor fountainheads nor girls who come to pour out their tears;
That mother earth may not hide it
Who has delicate trees, cracked houses,
Fishes that talk, stones that have an air about them,
Visionaries,
And the dead who converse in their wide graves
And have nightingales in cages and eyes that watch from afar.

Who knows how many swallows have launched out toward the seas
To scatter flaming sparks on islands and lost ships,
How many secret heartbeats became prayers and begged the Angels
To leave the sleep of the heavens and come down on earth
To see how well some of Their kindred creatures still maintain
Their blood,
How preciously they hold Them, written down in their destiny;
They become flames, they become flaring candles to light Their way.

"He was simple," They replied, baptizing Their wings in the smoke,
"Like isolated rocks to which the sea gives birth.
He had the clean heart of new waters that try out their voices,
The waist of cypress trees that lean over graves,

The nobility which the patience of rain chisels on columns,
The eyes of small children when they kiss under the trees,
The beauty of enfleshed Incorporeals

"He lifted the stake on his blood-stained wing
And his knife slid into his heart's edge.
He turned and saw that the boughs had blossomed around him,
That hands now hung down dead like withered leaves.
And not a sound was heard, not a twig stirred.

"He greeted Death and gazed on the white flowers
And the smoke that rose to take him.

"The lances of ancient times bent low as their shadows huddled close,
The scimitars cracked which had once been warm and steaming,
The steeds whinnied bitterly and the mountains brimmed with tears.
And the tormented crosses lowered their haloes
When they saw the skylarks touching the earth
And digging, shedding their feathers to hear the brothers below
Who lie in their graves now turned to stone, who haunt bridges;
When they saw the sun turning its face away,
The sea beating itself with three hollow stones,
And the pale roses dripping with bitter blood.

"Let bells resound
Let statues rise and rivers stop.

"Rise, O pigeons,
Call the swallows from their Spring and the eagles from their azure spaces,
Call the brothers, all the children of the aerial generation,
And come that we may take the dead man away,
Come that we may bury him by scattering the ashes he left,
That light may increase and the wind be disburdened . . ."

On the three stairs, in the three heavens, they have lit all the lights,
They have opened and are counting petal by petal all the rounds of the Eternal Rose.

## ΥΜΕΝΑΙΟΣ

Τέλεια, πυκνή, ἀναπόδραστη μοῖρα τοῦ ἔρωτα
Καὶ τοῦ θανάτου· κατάκτηση πρῶτα, ὕστερα παραίτηση,
Ἀνάβαση πρῶτα, ὕστερα κατάβαση,
Πτώση τοῦ σώματος καὶ θλίψη τῆς ψυχῆς
Καθὼς ἀνοίγει ἡ μοναξιὰ καὶ καταπίνει
Ταπεινωμένα κόκκαλα καὶ σωριασμένα.

Ἔρχεται ὁ ἔρωτας καὶ μᾶς ἐμπαίζει,
Ἕνας θεὸς ἢ ἕνας δαίμονας.
Μᾶς γδύνει χωρὶς ντροπὴ καὶ φόβο.
Μᾶς ἀφήνει γυμνοὺς γιὰ νὰ κρυώνουμε,
Νηστικοὺς γιὰ νὰ πεινοῦμε,
Καθὼς στὴν ἔσχατη κρίση.

Πεινοῦμε τὴν πείνα του, κρυώνουμε τὴ γύμνια του.

*

Ἔρχεται ὁ ἔρωτας καὶ μᾶς ἀλλάζει.

Σκιὰ μές στὴ σκιὰ
Σιωπὴ μέσα στὴν ἄλλην σιωπή.

Τὰ χείλη μας μυρίζουν ἄνοιξη
Καὶ χωματίλα, τὰ στήθη μας ὥριμο μῆλο.

Μές ἀπ' τοὺς κήπους τῶν νεκρῶν ἔρχεται ὁ ἔρωτας.

Τὰ μέλη μας τρέμουν καὶ τὰ σπλάχνα
Ἔχουν τὸν πυρετὸ μιᾶς πυρκαϊᾶς,
Τρομαγμένα πετάγματα, ζῶα ποὺ τρέχουν
Καὶ τὸν ἀναπαλμὸ μιᾶς ὑψωμένης θάλασσας,
Ὑπόκωφα κύματα καμπυλωτά,
Καὶ τὸ βαθὺ νυχτοκολύμπι τοῦ ψαριοῦ.

Λαμποκοποῦνε τὰ μαλλιὰ ἐπάνω στὰ προσκέφαλα,
Φέγγουν τὰ χέρια μές στὸ πάθος τῆς ἀγάπης,
Δάχτυλα ψάχνοντας τυφλὰ μέσα στὴ σάρκα.

*

Ἀπὸ στῆθος σὲ στῆθος φτάνει στὶς ψυχὲς
Ὁ ἔρωτας, καθὼς πάνω σὲ κλίμακα.

Οἱ ψυχὲς δὲν μποροῦν νὰ μιλήσουν.
Δὲν ἔχουν γλῶσσα, ἔχουν σιωπή,
Ἔκπληξη ἀπόρρητη καὶ θλίψη,
Ἀνάμνηση καὶ τρόμο τοῦ κενοῦ.

Ν' ἀντιφεγγίσουν μόνο μποροῦν,
Νὰ κινήσουν τὰ δάκτυλα
Ν' ἀνοιγοκλείσουν τὰ μάτια καὶ τὰ χείλη.

Νὰ κοιταχτοῦν, ἡ μιὰ τὴν ἄλλη, σὰν σὲ κατρέφτη.

## HYMENEAL

Perfect, dense, inescapable destiny of love
And of death; conquest first, and then resignation.
Ascent first, then descent,
Fall of the body and sorrow of the soul,
Like solitude when it opens and swallows
Bones heaped high, humiliated.

Love comes and mocks us,
A god or a demon,
Strips us without shame or fear,
Leaves us naked to shiver in the cold,
Leaves us fasting that we may hunger,
As in the Last Judgement.

We hunger his hunger, we shiver in the cold of his nakedness.

*

Love comes and changes us:

Shadow within a shadow,
Silence within the other silence.

Our lips smell of springtime
And of earth, our breasts of ripe apples.

From within the gardens of the dead, love comes.

Our limbs and our entrails tremble.
They are as fevered as a conflagration,
Frightened flights of birds, animals that run,
And the throbbing of the swollen sea,
Hollow and curving waves
And the deep swimming of the fish at night.

Heads glitter on the pillow,
Hands glow in the passion of love
Groping on flesh blindly for fingers.

*

From breast to breast love reaches
Souls, as on a ladder.

Souls cannot speak.
They have no tongue, they have silence,
Speechless astonishment and sorrow,
Remembrance and dread of the void.

They can only reflect light,
Make fingers move,
Open and close eyes and lips.

Look into each other's eyes, as in a mirror.

## II *ZOË KARELLI*

### DESIRES

Youthful desires,
like very beautiful youthful lovers,
with the irreproachable innocence of the impetuous,
with incomparable pride and nobility.

They have vanished.
As it is said of certain young men
that the gods loved them
and they died young.
Perhaps they disappeared without any possibility of returning
on a lovely evening
with the full-flooded, honey-colored light of the moon.
Let us thrust aside the common conception,
the loathsome thought,
that profane hands stifled them
on lawless beds
in rooms rented for cheap pleasures.

These restless ghosts of desire
which reappear,
tragic and very beautiful faces,
confess to some kind of crime,
nonetheless.

## Η ΣΥΝΟΔΕΙΑ ΤΩΝ ΠΟΙΗΤΩΝ

Νά, τούτ' εἶναι ἡ συνοδεία
ἀπ' τοὺς ἱερεῖς τοῦ λόγου,
ποὺ πᾶν τραγουδώντας γιατὶ
μόνο νὰ τραγουδοῦν, νὰ λὲν
λόγια ξέρουν αὐτοὶ κι' ἀπὸ κεῖ πέρα
τίποτ' ἄλλο μὴν περιμένης
ἀπ' τὸ χέρι τους. Οὔτε καμιὰ τελετὴ
ἐπιβλητική, οὔτε λειτουργία
ξέρουν ἄλλη, παρὰ μόνο ν' ἀπαγγέλουν,
ν' ἀγγέλουν λόγια, ποὺ λὲν πὼς τὰ βλέπουν.
Γιὰ κοίταξε τὸ βλέμμα τους.
Λένε πὼς βλέπουν ἀγγέλους
οἱ ἄνθρωποι αὐτοί,
πὼς οἱ ἄγγελοι τοὺς δίνουν λόγια
ν' ἀγγίξουν στὰ διψασμένα στόματα.
Πράγματι νηστεύουν καὶ φαίνονται
στερημένοι. Κοίταξε τὰ πρόσωπά τους,
εἶν' ἀλλόκοτα, ἔτσι ἀλλοιωμένα
ποὺ μιλοῦν, ἔτσι ποὺ θέλουν
νὰ μᾶς πείσουν πὼς μᾶς χαρίζουν
τῶν ἀγγέλων τὰ δῶρα,
ἀγγελίες ὑπέροχες. Τὰ ζητοῦν
μὲ προσευχὲς καὶ μὲ μεγάλους καϋμούς,
παρακαλοῦν μὲ ἀγῶνα,
τὰ δέχονται μὲ συντριβή.

**Εἶναι**

πράγματι ἄλλη τῶν ματιῶν τους ἡ ἔκφραση
κι' ἀλλοιώτικα γίνονται τὰ μιλήματα
ποὺ αὐτοὶ τραγωδοῦν, οἱ ποιητές,
γιὰ νὰ αἰσθανθοῦμ' ἐμεῖς τὶς διαφορές τους.
Βέβαια νὰ τυραννιστοῦν αὐτοὶ πρέπει,
γιὰ νὰ πιστέψουμε ἐμεῖς,
γιὰ νὰ μᾶς πείσουν. Ἔχουμε ἄλλες
ἀπασχολήσεις ἐμεῖς, αὐτοὶ
ἀπασχολοῦνται μὲ τὰ μάταια λόγια.
Θέλουν νὰ τὰ συγκρατήσουν,
νὰ μᾶς τὰ χαρίσουν λέν,

γιὰ νὰ τοὺς δεχτοῦμε στὴν τελετὴ
τῆς ζωῆς. Τοῦτοι τῶν λόγων
οἱ ἄνθρωποι γιὰ νὰ μᾶς κερδίσουν,
λέν, πὼς θὰ μᾶς ὀνομάσουν ἐμᾶς
καὶ τὴ σημασία τῆς ζωῆς μας.

## THE PROCESSION OF POETS

Look, this procession of poets
is made up of priests of the Word
who go singing, because these
know only how to sing, to speak
words, but from there on
expect nothing more from their hands.
Nor do they know some imposing
ceremony or any function
or ritual, but only how to recite,
how to proclaim words,
which they insist they can *see*.
Look at their eyes.
These men declare
they see angels,
that angels give them words
with which to touch their parched mouths.
In truth, they fast and seem
deprived. Look at their faces,
which are odd because of the very awkward
way they speak, because they want
to persuade us they are giving us
a gift of angels,
and miraculous angelic messages. They seek them
with prayers and great anguish,
they implore with much striving,
they accept them with contrition of spirit.

In truth,
the expression of their eyes is another thing,
and the words these poets tragically sing
become altered
that we may understand their difference.
Of course they must be tormented
that we may believe,
that they may persuade us. We have
other concerns, and they
concern themselves with vain words only.
They want to preserve them, they say,
to present them to us,
that we may accept poets in the ceremony
of life. These men of words,
in order to win us over,
say they will give us names
and the meaning of our lives.

## ADOLESCENT FROM ANTICYTHERA

I have come again for your sake.
As I walked on, I observed
the Corinthian vessels well;
they impressed me, of course,
with the grace of their shapes and their paintings.
I thought of the throbbing life
of that notorious city. Afterwards,
almost on purpose, I lingered in the halls
where the light seems somewhat watery.
I don't know whether this is due
to the color-tone of the walls,
the immobility of the exhibits,
or the glass of the showcases.
I lingered, therefore,
holding my anticipation of your presence
like a joy.

For a while Kroisos held my attention,
"Pause here and pity him . . . destroyed by belligerent Ares."
In the movement, in the placement of the hands,
a particular turn betrayed the spirit
which remained there still
and indicated the controlled desire
of the body as it leaned forward.
Imagined rustling of the lives of statues
when the sculptor has been able to catch
the vital moment. . . .

Wondrous youth,
unique moment, you are not only
the adolescent of perfect beauty,
of radiant youth,
that harmony in the form of the limbs' music
of him who keeps his posture and holds it
in natural strength and power,
like the stone or the plant
which exist both simple and perfect together;
hands spread out in ideal balance,
divine curvature,
indestructible innocence of caught time,
smiling face of incorruption,
heightening of our perishable position.

Reality and magic,
smooth surface of life,
convex and concave curves
from the impetuosity hidden within you,
guided and controlled.

Offering and acceptance of existence,
in movement and immobility both,
like the balancing of a regal bird.

You were born
before we were taught the meaning of sin.
You are the concession of the spirit

that quenches insatiable privation
and annihilates cupidity.
Though filled with longing, you remain ready to deprive yourself.
Every foreign disposition to your shape
glides away from you.
You seek the spirit's value,
yet it is you who proffer it, alive and serene body.

Frugal meeting with the absolute,
naked mystery,
form snatched from necessity,
you rise as the music of one sound,
divine sufficiency, created in human terms.

You were not tormented by that love
which is an uncertainty,
anguish and painful submission,
even though in your glance is held
the wondrous human melancholy,

for you are the work
of a man who loved his life
in a glory both arrogant and modest.

## III *GEORGE T. VAFOPOULOS*

### ΠΟΛΥΚΑΤΟΙΚΙΑ

Στὴν πολυκατοικία μας τούτη, οἱ δικοί μας νεκροὶ
δὲν ροχαλίζουν μονάχα. Ἔχουν τὸ προνόμιο
ν' ἀνασταίνωνται, ν' ἀγαποῦν καὶ νὰ πεθαίνουν πάλι.

Τὸ βράδυ ἀνεβαίνουν μὲ τὸ ἀσανσέρ, ὅπως οἱ δίκαιοι
ἀνέρχονται, γιὰ νὰ κριθοῦν ἐνώπιον τοῦ Κυρίου.
Καὶ τὸ πρωῒ κατεβαίνουν καὶ πηγαίνουν νὰ καοῦν
στὸ κρεματόριο τοῦ καζανιοῦ τῆς κεντρικῆς θερμάνσεως.

Νά γιατί ἡ πολυκατοικία μας βαρειὰ μυρίζει:
Εἶναι ἡ ἀποφορὰ ἀπὸ τὸ μαγειρεῖο
τοῦ καθημερινοῦ θανάτου. Ὄχι τοῦ ἄλλου.
Ἐκεῖνος ἀναδίδει ἐξαίσιον ἄρωμα.

«Ἡ μεγάλη νύχτα καὶ τὸ παράθυρο», 1959

### APARTMENT HOUSE

In this apartment house of ours, our own dead
do not only snore. They have the privilege
of rising, of loving, and of dying once more.

At night they ascend in the elevator, the way the righteous
mount up to be judged in the presence of the Lord.
And in the morning they descend and go to be burned
in the crematory boilers of the central heating system.

This is why our apartment house smells so foul.
It is the stench that comes from the kitchen,
of daily deaths. Not of that other death.
For that emits a sweet aroma.

## TASTE OF DEATH

To study death in books
is an academic exercise in a seminar.
To count its blows on men's temples
can accomplish nothing more than a lesson in arithmetic.

Death does not exist either in wars
or in poison or in daggers.
Or in the night wards of hospitals.
It exists in the burning fuse
that only in your own secret channels
advances in a slow step from that first day.

And if you are able to sense this steady pace,
you will be granted the unique taste of death.
But you will not feel the explosion.
Because then you will have seen that which is called death
wearing your own face on its face.

## DEAD YOUTH

I: Within this grave a dead youth lies.

YOU: What, shall we still be talking of graves?
Youths do not live in cemeteries now.
They stand erect on rocks and stone the sun.
They plunge in waves and wrap themselves with seaweed.
Even when young men stroll amid the tombs
they are still dreaming, singing, and pursuing love.
How may a youth be found within a grave?

I: Within this grave a dead youth lies. He never
stood on rocks to measure himself with the sun.
He never wrapped his naked body with seaweed.
He only dreamt. Love never heard his song.
His voice within him dwindled and fell away.
And this is why he lies now in this grave.

YOU: How strange: this youth was killed by his own voice.
His voice was like a throbbing hand grenade
which he held but threw when it was much too late. . . .
Young men today have need of clever hands.

I: This youth, who now dreams here, did not have hands:
they had turned to heavy memories within him.

YOU: Youths have no past, and so do not have memories.
But they have hands with which to point at the sun.
But they have hair which may be tossed in the wind.
And voices, that they may quarrel with the loud sea.

I: This youth had traveled far beyond the sun.
This youth had passed beyond the spreading sea.

YOU: Beyond the sun? Beyond the spreading sea?
But we, who have discovered the first sun,
but we, who have sailed across the very first sea,
but we, whose voices sang in the first seashell,
saw nothing other than their simple joy.
And we can swear that no beyond exists.

I: The sun and sea can dim all watchful eyes.
They never let you see the first death too.

YOU: Beyond the spreading sea, beyond the sun,
how can one possibly see the first death too?

I: This young man always carried death within him.
It was for this he went beyond the sun.
Beyond the spreading sea, beyond the song.

YOU: And even beyond the song? What can there be,
I wonder, beyond the translucent song of joy?

I: The vast night, silence, and all solitude.

YOU: Ah, ah! It is for this the young man died.

I: No. But because he could never go beyond love.

## THE STATUES

During the day even the statues have no expression.
If as it sometimes happens in a movie theater
the projecting machine should suddenly stop,
though the electric fan still keeps on running,
you will notice that on every fixed figure immobility wears
an arrested mask caught in a frozen expression.
During the day the statues wear a similar kind of mask.

But when night slowly begins to emerge from the thick
foliage, to creep softly with circumspection
and then stand with closed eyelids behind the back
of the park keeper, he shudders without knowing why.
He notices the hour, seizes the bell's tongue suddenly
and breaks open its enclosures of sound to the startled air.
Then the birds become small marble figures,
and the last cries of children hang frozen in mid-air.

Night binds time tightly to the locked iron gate.
But how can the statues feel time's crucifixion
since they hang about it, hovering in mid-air?
They seem to be like those stopped alarm clocks
that have lost their ancient, primordial memory.
Night winds them up one by one, and then withdraws.

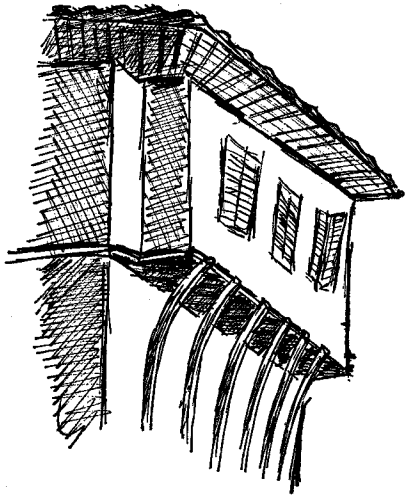
Now the statues remember, they feel the swarming itch
of time, and their naked bodies shiver.
Then they wear their masks inside out
and step down from their pedestals to stretch a while.

But now they are not what they presented
to petrified time. This girl who cups
her naked breasts, like a white bird,
is not a girl. She is the spirit which has shaped her
and which has dwelt in her from the beginning. Now
she remembers, shivers, and falls in love with herself.

During the day the statues have no future. The museums,
into which they sometimes withdraw with weariness,
are the lost cemeteries of the past
wherein death holds time in a narcotic trance.

The statues have the past only: but not that
eternally present in the marble quarries.
This is that decisive moment of the past when the spirit
has come to dwell in them forever.
But as soon as it became present, the alarm clock stopped
and cast away its key into the vast night.
And on their white faces time turned immovably to stone.

Night now holds their key; she winds them up
one by one, then transports them into the future,
which stretches out beyond time: because night
is beyond time and beyond death.



## IV *NIKOS GABRIEL PENTZIKIS*

### PARALLEL THOUGHTS

Our thoughts are living ΙΧΘΕΙΣ
silvered glimmering fish on wet searoads
the maternal waters of the universal sea
on the claws of the deep water-precipices the fishes
gather, silent expressions of horizontal position
newly wed mothers are accustomed to saunter
on the pier with their baby carriages
along its entire length with its benches and its lanterns
a folksy image with vendors of dried fruit and nuts
"don't go too far away" mummy and daddy shout
the child with its tricycle spins in circles
young girls like flowers and young men in love
after an absence of many years the professor
finds it difficult to adjust to daily routine
cannot justify the interruption of his thoughts
almost fears that his return may mean death
"it's turned cold, it's time to return home"
the householders say, well armored in their overcoats
they fear the children may catch cold
but an orphan strips and for a few coins
dives from the ladder's head at the boat landing
and then sprawls out on the pier once more
his immature pecker like a fountain of truth gazing at the sky
"heavenly father give him the strength to dive
again and again for the price of his daily bread"
without doubt the weather will turn rainy
clouds will gather above the red buildings of the harbor
like ashes hiding the solid appearance of matter
for the embodiment of the soul demands moisture
as when the prince impatiently cracked open the walnut shell
and the beautiful maiden who leapt out and begged for water
died because they found themselves far from any fountain
the adversary wind will present things in another light
hiding the sun under goatskins of water

and bringing it back to dry the sailing boats
the world will come to a fierce boiling point
"your health, wife! what good food have you prepared today?"
amid today's and tomorrow's episodes
the sun that stretches its big legs and tears the clouds to tatters
the waves of the sea that turn as green as the fresh leaves of an
almond tree
the troubled cares of the householders and the orphan
deep within him continue the thoughts of the professor
"now I understand that in maritime navigation
the horizontal position is not the only one that exists
medusae like flowers rising vertically
break off from the zoophytes of deep waters
and the seashore proceeds unpredictably
suddenly a fish leaps out of the water
all are woven like the rich embroideries of the Word
for the skirt of the Most Blessed Madonna"
the bell of a ship weighing anchor is a yearning
*Well then all sins flow from woman* I remember
*But the best also has its source in woman* I repeat
*into many sins have I fallen.*

## SCATTERED LEAVES

Scattered leaves of autumn
the farmers waited for rain to begin their sowing
the wind whirled and opened the celestial heavens
"what road is taken by the yellow leaves that fall?"
the Apostle of Nations taking a contrary road
from Neapolis now Kavala
reading in "The First Epistle to the Thessalonians"
*but I would not have you be ignorant brethren*
*concerning them which are asleep that ye sorrow not*
*even as others which have no hope*
the belfry as tall as a far-seeing lighthouse
with arched openings toward all the points of the horizon
what is and is not a series of coincidences
in the garden are graves with crosses

far away and opposite, the fire was consuming the ships
his dearly beloved mother died
outside the wooden door the girl sat and waited
like a butterfly resting on a flower
a beautiful butterfly and an empty letter box
though the doors were closed
she would come at night and find him
at the gulf's end into which the hinterland flows
into the open sea that swallowed his father
when he could not understand his son's actions
or that bereavement means victory and a great joy
the ship comes to load up wheat from the wharf
at which prudent interpreters of the living dream
commenting on the scene point their fingers
behind them the village is a tombstone with eyes
which an abundant vegetation of lofty stature shadows
amid the towering roofs of the foliage
and the low-lying shrubs, the ivy,
a devotion and a warm faith, crawls
exactly as you were and everyone was
when all dove under the surface
where Mardonios' fleet was shipwrecked
but we know of course that the treasure was saved
in seacaverns where seals wail
on the crystalloid rocks of the Mountain of Holy Name
a succor to whoever has contrived many things and great
the sun that plunges into the basin of his mother
mourned by all who have faith in him because he vanishes
offering another possibility out of the watery depths
*take us to strange lands*
*take us to lands beyond*
*blow O wide wide sea*
*blow O fair wind blow*

## V *G. X. STOYIANNIDHIS*

### MEMORIES

How long will they keep coming, will you keep returning
before you withdraw; summer has slipped away
(you never touched the bread and fruit on the table)
before you could enjoy it, tuck it under your skin,
make it flesh of your flesh and not only a glance.
Why then do you want to return
even though by secret corridors;
some one else is always sleeping in your bed.
If you are to die in another way, for when
you die nothing can restrain you and dreams are lost,
only poetry can save you.

### ΜΙΣΟ ΚΑΙ ΜΙΣΟ

Μισὸ καὶ μισὸ ἴσον ἕνα
ἕνα καὶ ἕνα ἴσον χίλια μάτια στὸν κόσμο,
αὐτὸς ποὺ ἀλλάζει δὲν εἶναι ὁ ἴδιος τὴν κάθε στιγμὴ
τὸν γνωρίζεις ἐσύ, ὁ ἄλλος ποὺ ἔρχεται, ὕστερα
τὸν ἀφίνεις κι' ἐκεῖνος ξανάρχεται πάλι
ἄλλα πρόσωπα, ἄλλη ἄνοιξη
σ' ἕνα ξένο παράθυρο,
εἶναι ἕνας κόμπος καινούργιος ποὺ σὲ παιδεύει, σὲ πνίγει,
ὁ ἀέρας στυφός, σὲ σκουπίζει σὰν ἕνα χαρτί.

Ὅμως μισὸ καὶ μισὸ εἶναι ἕνα ὄνειρο,
τὸ ἄλλο μισὸ ξύλινο πόδι ποὺ σοῦ κολλῆσαν,
ἡ ἐπιστροφὴ ἀπ' τὸ θάνατο,
τὰ παιδιὰ ποὺ ξεσηκώνουν τὸ σπίτι
καὶ δὲν ἔχουν ἡλικία ἐπιστρέφοντας,
κάθονται γύρω ἀπὸ τὸ τραπέζι ξανά, δὲ λείπει κανείς,
τὸ σπίτι γεμάτο, γεμάτη ἡ καρδιὰ
τὸ καλοκαίρι δροσερὸ καὶ ἀνάλαφρο,
χαίρονται οἱ νέοι κι' οἱ ποιητὲς τραγουδοῦν

συνεχίζουν ἀφελεῖς τὴ ζωὴ
σὰ νὰ μὴν ξέρουν πὼς μισὸ καὶ μισὸ ἴσον θάνατος
ξεχνοῦν δὲ θυμοῦνται τί ἔφαγαν χθὲς
ἂν ἔφαγαν ἢ κοιμήθηκαν νηστικοί,
γλιστροῦν ἀπὸ θλίψη σὲ θλίψη σὰ νἄταν πουλιὰ
μιὰ στάλα φῶς πρωϊνὸ ἀσυλλόγιστο.

Λοιπὸν μισὸ καὶ μισό; Καλημέρα σας,

## HALF AND HALF

Half and half equal one,
one and one are equal to a thousand eyes in the world,
he who changes is not the same person every moment,
you know him, the other person comes, afterwards
you leave him and he comes again,
other faces, another spring
in an unfamiliar window;
it's a new knot that torments you, chokes you,
the air is acrid and wipes you like a piece of paper.

But half and half equal a dream,
the other half is the wooden leg they've clamped onto you,
a return from death;
the children that put the house in an uproar
have no age when they return,
they sit around the table again, no one is missing,
the house filled, the heart filled,
the summer cool and light,
the young rejoice and poets sing,
continue their lives naively
as though they did not know that half and half equal death;
they forget, cannot remember what they ate yesterday,
whether they ate at all or went to bed hungry,
they glide from sorrow to sorrow as though they were birds,
a drop of thoughtless light in the morning.

Well then, half and half? Good morning to you all.

## VI *TAKIS VARVITSIOTIS*

### A SMALL MONUMENT TO THE WEST WIND

You shall have need of a flaming mantle
That you may conceal your exquisite hesitations.
You shall have need of a flamewhite steed
That you may dip his musical mane in tropical storms.

You shall have need of a sword with all the glitterings of constellations
That you may penetrate at night into our nightmare dreams,
That you may open a window at dawn
And plant orange blossoms in our eyes.

You who enwreath the palaces and the conflagrations,
Who dry up all rivers and tears,
Who detect crimson dancing girls in the curving bows of smoke,
Who mature the beauty of children
By deepening their gaze with the pain of a certain expectation,

Pity the lonely and barren rock
For even it possesses a warm heart because of your breathing.

Console the artless girl
Who with a small lamp, all alone, gathers brushwood in the forest,
For her lips have been dyed with the azure blood of the iris
Which you wounded in your passing,
And her hands are two luminous streams.

Help the dead to open their eyes, if only for a moment,
And to gaze about them,
Then cover them once more with a rose-colored snow
That they may remember a little warmth and a certain earthly
splendor.

You bring hyacinths with you and somnambulistic glitterings,
Hot afternoons, stifled sounds, distant legends,
Nightingales mirroring all the vegetation of the heavens.

You transform the chimneys into stone angels
Who then keep guard over the terrified sleep of houses.
You draw circles and rosettes on ashy windows.
You uproot the tragic smile of masks.
You water our roots with the toxin of nostalgia.

Come then and cast your light on our tormented flesh,
Tear out the bitter bark of trees,
Set fire to the eyelashes of all birds
Or adorn them with night agates,
Scatter sulphurous colors on all beds
That women may not hide, wrapped round in their bedsheets,
But may walk naked on earth and grow fruitful,
That their breasts may brim with green grass and sun,
That newborn roses may blossom under their skin.

## ΜΗΝ ΠΕΙΣ ΠΟΤΕ ΣΟΥ

Μὴν πεῖς ποτέ σου δὲν εἶν' ὄμορφη ἡ ζωή,
Ὅταν θὰ δεῖς τὸ φῶς νὰ χαμηλώνει,
Ὅταν τὰ φύλλα τὰ ξερὰ θὰ πέφτουνε στὰ πόδια σου
Κι' ὅλα τὰ σήμαντρα θὰ χαιρετοῦν τοὺς ἴσκιους.
Μὴν πεῖς δὲν εἶναι ὄμορφη ἡ ζωή.

Ὁ λόφος θὰ ντυθεῖ μὲ τῶν ματιῶν σου τὴν ἀχλύ,
Τὰ χέρια θ' ἀγκαλιάζουνε τὴν ἐπιτύμβια στήλη,
Καὶ τῆς φωνῆς σου τὸ πουλὶ θὰ μένει πάντα σταυρωμένο.
Ὅμως μὴν πεῖς δὲν εἶναι ὄμορφη ἡ ζωή.

Τῆς μέρας οἱ ἦχοι δὲν φτάνουν ὥς τὰ χείλη σου τὰ ὠχρά,
Οὔτε οἱ ἀνοίξεις πιὰ θὰ τραγουδοῦν κάτω ἀπ' τὰ βλέφαρά σου,
Μόνο ἕνα σύννεφο καμιὰ φορὰ θὰ σὲ δροσίζει τὴν αὐγὴ
Κι' ἕνα λουλούδι θὰ ντυθεῖ μετέωρα τὴ σιωπή σου.

Χρόνια καὶ χρόνια θὰ περάσουνε, μὰ ἐσὺ νὰ μὴ ζητήσεις
Τὸ χρῶμα σου νὰ ξαναδεῖς μὲς στῶν ἀγγέλων τὸ σκιόφως,
Μὴ λησμονήσεις τ' ἄσπρα τριαντάφυλλα
Μὴν ἀμελήσεις τ' οὐρανοῦ τὴ γύρη,
Μὴν πεῖς δὲν εἶναι ὄμορφη ἡ ζωή.

Τὴν ἀκατάλυτη μοῖρα τῆς πέτρας μὴ φθονήσεις,
Τ' ἄσπιλα μάρμαρα, τὴν παγωμένη στάλα,
Τὴν ἄφθιτη, ποὺ κρέμεται ἀπ' τὸ δέντρο τοῦ καιροῦ.
Οὔτε ἕνα ὄνομα γυμνὸ καὶ πικραμένο σὰν τὸν ὕπνο σου.

Μόνο κατέβα πιὸ βαθειά, πολὺ βαθειά, μέσα στὴν κοίτη,
τῆς γῆς, ὅπου ξαπλώνουνε τὶς ρίζες τους τὰ κυπαρίσσια
"Ωσπου ἡ βραδυὰ νὰ γείρη ἀτάραχη νὰ ἐμπιστευθεῖ
Τὸ πιὸ ἀπόκρυφο ἄστρο της μές στὴν ὑγρή σου κρύπτη.

Κ' ὕστερα σχίσε τῆς ἀράχνης τὸν πλοκὸ ποὺ σὲ τυλίγει,
'Ανασηκώσου μὲ τὰ ὀστὰ γεμάτα μουσική,
Κι' ἂν εἶν' ὁ ἴσκιος σου τόσο πλατὺς, τοὺς δυὸ μας νὰ σκεπάσει.
Μὰ πρόσεξε μὴ γελαστεῖς, μὴ λησμονήσεις,
Μὴν πεῖς ποτέ σου δὲν εἶν' ὄμορφη ἡ ζωή.

## DO NOT EVER SAY

Do not every say that life is not beautiful,
When you see the light flickering low,
When dry leaves are falling at your feet
And all the sistrums are greeting the shadows.
Do not say that life is not beautiful.

The hill will dress itself in the haze of your eyes,
Your hands will embrace the gravestone slab,
And the bird of your voice shall remain forever crucified.
But do not say that life is not beautiful.

The sounds of day will never reach to your pale lips,
Nor will springtime ever again sing under your eyelids,
Only a cloud will cool you at dawn from time to time,
And a hovering flower will mourn your silence.

Year after year shall pass, but do not seek
To see your color again in the dusk of angels,
Do not forget the white roses,
Do not be neglectful of the heaven's pollen,
Do not say that life is not beautiful.

Do not be envious of the indestructible destiny of stone,
The immaculate marbles, the frozen waterdrop,
The everlasting one, which hangs from the tree of time,
Not even of a name as naked and bitter as your sleep.

Only descend deeper, much deeper, into the bed
Of earth, where the cypress trees spread their roots,
Until the night shall lean without fear over your damp crypt
To entrust it with her most secret star.

Afterward, tear apart the spider's web which entangles you,
Rise up with your bones filled with music,
Even though your shadow is so broad it can cover both of us.
But be careful, do not be deceived, do not forget,
Do not ever say that life is not beautiful.

## THE EARTH IS NOT THIS WORLD

You insist on glorifying the earth,
But the earth is not this world.
It is a swarm of myrtles,
It is a swarm of oleanders,
Favored by all the graces that waters have.

Celestial lights which weave
A music for eternity,
A hushed procession for life
Of scattered leaves,
And a hard ivory for death.

Earth is these birds
Who wash themselves in a golden and summery rain
Then suddenly turn into flowers;
The sunrise within that other sunrise
Before the roses waken.

It is your innocent eyelash
Which shall repose on earth one day,
A motherly heart,
It is a bosom ploughed
By poor and righteous hands.

Put on your ears and listen
To her blood which mounts with your blood
And leaps with waterspouts toward the stars,
And then in the outmost cosmic solitude
Unceasingly sketches a whiter luminosity.

Immerse yourself in the darknesses completely
To see how a certain azure
And unexplored breath strips away your lips,
And these trees whose slightest shudder
Is a shudder of your most ancient origin.

Then you will understand that the earth
Is not a material weight, but that love for which you hope,
A divine smile on the edge of a wing,
A dazzling snow which dissolves into a thousand prisms,
The curve of joy and the wave's curve.

Then you will understand that the earth
Is the dizziness of heights, the trophy of a victory,
The body of your beloved, the road which leads
From the bog of night
As far as the fragrance of daybreak.

## VII *SARANDOS PAVLEAS*

### TOMORROW

Butterflies will be born and we shall be the clay of swallows,
a fistful of unrecognizable bones for the hope of the desparing.
Didn't you recognize perhaps the stylish Ladies on the mural
paintings of Knossos,
the earthquakes in Pompeii,
gazing at you with the eyes of adventure,
full of the glances of young men, hunting, and love?
Tomorrow the ship on which we voyaged comes, and you no
longer exist;
what window shall we fling open to wait for you,
to what hope shall we give birth that it may welcome you?
You may be the butterfly round our lamp,
You may be the sudden soul that buzzes in our curtains,
you may exist in birds that shiver with cold, in animals that endure,
in roosters that awaken us,
you may be a countryside breeze,
the house to which we shall return to rest,
tired out with struggle and sacrifice.

### ECHO

I shout into the echo, into its abyss, does anything after me exist?
Where is God? Why this terrestrial fear?
"Why?" says the echo.
Is death not an exile and a desolation that heals our souls?
"Our souls."
Our imprisoned and terrified souls here?
And is God not a huge ocean that tames every power by running
it aground?
"By running it aground."
The poplar tree overflows in the kindness of a wintry sky.
We live briefly, in the twinkling of God's eyelid.
"Of God's eyelid," the echo says again.

Lightning flashes, it rains that the earth may be plowed.
"Be plowed."
Good weather comes that seed may be buried.
"Be buried."
That bones may again turn into light, idea, emotion, and a dog's faithfulness.
"Faithfulness."

The dreams and plans of the sand are faithful.
"Faithful."
And does not loneliness come from God?
"From God," says my faithful friend, the echo.
And is not man alone?
"Alone."
The cankerworm goes to the North opposite.
"Opposite."
And is not love a beautiful intoxication?"
"Intoxication."
And is not man a music of the universe, the music
he longs for but which on earth he cannot find?
"Cannot find."
Is not the body a celestial chamber in whose depths
are heard the laughter of meaningless things?
Am I not the maximum and minimum synthesis of the universe?
Am I not like the ant as I wait for my wing to heal?
"Yes, for my wing to heal."
And fortunately, as soon as the soul is freed, it acquires a swift, impetuous wing.
"A swift, impetuous wing," my companion echo repeats over and over again.

## VIII *KLITOS KIROU*

### I SPEAK WITH BROKEN VOICE

I speak with broken voice I do not beg
For your pity within me a thousand mouths speak
That once cried angrily at the sun
A generation that chanted its rights
Waving festival banners shaking swords
Writing the exquisite verses of early youth
Watering crops with superfluous blood
Little children abandoned to the sky's mercy.

My generation was a lightning bolt whose thunder
Was smothered my generation was persecuted
Like a bandit dragged behind barbed wire
Shared life and death like holy bread
The people of my generation did not die
In hospitals they shouted frantically to the firing
Squads their hands were magnets
They ate bitter bread smoked newspapers
Asking humbly for a place on this earth.

Wherever they stood their shadows took root
Though you try in vain they can never be uprooted
They will appear before your terrified eyes
Now we have understood everything we have understood
Our strength and this is why I speak
With broken voice that weeps
Whenever I remember them.

### THE VOICE AND THE POET

A voice fades away on the street corner a voice
Lights up in the upper floors will descend the stairs
Slowly slowly will touch the ground will pierce
Into the ground will sink deeper and deeper

Will be trampled down by wild beasts crowbars automobile
Wheels iron and cement its sound
Will contain vibrations of fire will resemble
A lover's complaint will wrinkle the spreading oil of silence

The poet will kneel tenderly
Dig up some earth
Cup it in his palms
And plant it in a flower pot

In spring many small voices shall bloom

## NIGHT HAS ITS OWN CRIES

The night has its own cries has many cries
The birds that pour out of your mouth are also
Its cries they cleave all the scales of sound
Start out from your heart and terminate again
In your heart become entangled with the humble cricket
With your pulse with the night watchman's footprints
With the creaking of stairs with what must
And must not be done shrink into silence and start again
Reach high up to a star where your hope flickers
Or deep down into a well where the same star again
Is mirrored and afterwards fight one another
Grow hoarse slowly dwindle away other cries sprout
Roll roaring in your blood walk the tightrope
Of stretched nerves in the blind darkness slip
And finally drown in waves of dawn

The night has many cries has cries of its own
Innumerable cries love comes more often
At night death comes even more often
At night different dreams come and help you escape
At night the knife of the killer the trumpet blast
Of the revolution are all heard only at night

The cries of night choke you drive you mad
The cries of night bring joy the cries
Of night bring sorrow bring you and take you away
Open holes in your body and pour into your ears
Like scalding oil reveal forgotten worlds
A dark room above the roar of the street
A moon tied to your leg with a thread
The ground on which you reclined in the heart of summer
Inviting your hands inviting your feet
To thrust themselves within it and turn into roots

The night has cries of its own you cannot
Escape its cries one day they will betray you
The night never forgets it is the Alpha
And the Omega the kiss and the sigh

The night is a beloved woman

## FILTER

There she was
Unseen in the midst of brightness
Day and night
She healed his wounds
Magically transformed
    tears into sound
    black into white
    water into fire

There was not even time
To feel pain
He himself
Had been transformed

## IX *PANOS THASITIS*

### HIGH IN THE HEAVENS

Afterwards we came, afterwards we remained, you and I and
the others,
—men, as they say; all of us at times children at times young
at times names only.

Do not feel sad! High in the heavens
our old cohabitant numbers await us once more.

When the executioner whistles
and the horses to which you were tied run in opposite directions,
the constellations suddenly glow, tremble
and speak of you, separating
from your scattered blood
from your shattered limbs a new direct line,

Holding to their order unperturbed.

### THE PRINCE OF PUTREFACTION

The prism of steel dawns naked.
Painless Aphrodite,
out of the hum made by a million thoughts,
next to the dreadful cutting edge of the light.

The new year goes by on iron sandals.
The year is not dangerous, firm but gentle,
twisting and turning in the closed greenhouses
of the numbers.
Between its light and its wellhead
we exist for the first time.

Desolation! But innocent friend
of light, desolation by darkness ravaged.
Desolation of justice. Serenity.
(Half in darkness and half in shadow,
The Prince of Putrefaction goes by,
dragging behind him the long body of old music,
summing up flowers in his murderous eyes.
—O arrogant fragrance of the year,
remain in your high chambers.

Far from him.)

## X *MANOLIS ANAGNOSTAKIS*

### CHESS

Come, let's play chess.
I shall give you my queen
(She was once my beloved
But now I have no beloved)
I shall give you my towers
(For now I no longer shoot at my friends
They have died a long time before me)
And this king was never mine
And then, what do I want with so many soldiers?
(They march ahead, blind, without even dreams)
I shall give you all, even my knights
I shall keep only this crazy bishop of mine
Who knows how to advance on one color only
Striding from one corner of the board to the other
Laughing at all your many panoplies
Forcing his way suddenly into your lines
Throwing your solid battle array into confusion.

And this is a game without end.

### A THIEF

A thief
And another thief
"Stop thief!"
(Who were being chased, by whom?)

I stood in my place motionless
Amidst the frantic crowd
And the fearful cries.
No one touched me.
I lit another cigarette.

This was for me foreign history.
I was not afraid.
I had nothing any more they could steal
No one feared me
There was nothing they had I wanted to steal.

## Ο ΝΕΚΡΟΣ

Ἦρθαν τὰ πρῶτα τηλεγραφήματα
Σταμάτησαν τὰ πιεστήρια καὶ περιμέναν,
Ἔγιναν οἱ παραγγελίες στὶς ἁρμόδιες ἀρχές.

Μὰ ὁ νεκρὸς δὲν πέθανε τὴν ὁρισμένη ὥρα

Ὅλοι φορέσαν τὶς μαῦρες γραβάτες
Δοκίμασαν στὸν καθρέπτη τὶς συντριμμένες πόζες
Ἀκούστηκαν οἱ πρῶτοι λυγμοί, τὰ θλιβερὰ ἐγκώμια.

Μὰ ὁ νεκρὸς δὲν πέθανε τὴν ὁρισμένη ὥρα.

Στὸ τέλος οἱ ὧρες γινῆκαν μέρες
Ἐκεῖνες οἱ φρικτὲς μέρες τῆς ἀναμονῆς
Οἱ φίλοι ἄρχισαν νὰ διαμαρτύρονται
Ἔκλεισαν τὰ γραφεῖα τους σταμάτησαν τὶς πληρωμὲς
Γυρνοῦσαν τὰ παιδιά τους ἀδέσποτα στοὺς δρόμους.
Ἔβλεπαν τὰ λουλούδια νὰ μαραίνονται.

Μὰ ὁ νεκρὸς δὲν πέθανε τὴν ὁρισμένη ὥρα.

(τόσα καὶ τόσα πράγματα ποὺ δὲν προβλέπονται
τόσες συνέπειες ἀνυπολόγιστες, τόσες θυσίες.
Σὲ ποιοὺς ὑπεύθυνους νὰ διαμαρτυρηθεῖς, ποῦ νὰ φωνάξεις;

Μὰ ὁ νεκρὸς δὲν πέθανε τὴν ὁρισμένη ὥρα.

## THE DEAD MAN

The first telegrams began to arrive
The newspaper presses ground to a halt
Orders were given to the proper authorities.

But the dead man would not die on the appointed hour.

All wore their black ties
Rehearsed broken-hearted postures before their mirrors
The first lamentations began to be heard, the wretched laudations.

But the dead man would not die on the appointed hour.

Finally the hours dragged into days
Those dreadful days of waiting
His friends began to protest
Closed their offices, stopped all payments
Their children wandered in the streets like outcasts.
They watched the flowers withering.

But the dead man would not die on the appointed hour.

(So many many things never foreseen
So many incalculable consequences, so many sacrifices
To what responsible person can you protest, where can you shout?)

And the dead man would not die on the appointed hour.

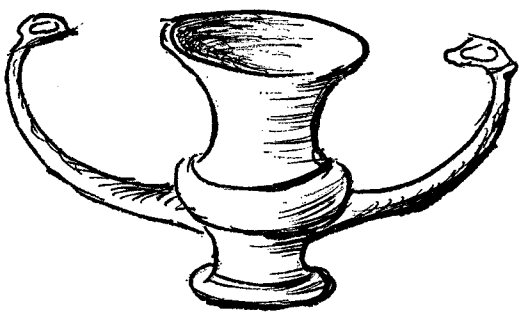
## LOVE IS THE FEAR

Love is the fear which unites us with others
When they subdued our days and hung them like tears.
When with them died in wretched disfigurement
The last forms of our childhood emotions.
And what holds back the hand that men offer you?
Does it know how to clasp firmly when reasoning deceives us
At the moment when time stops and memory is uprooted

Like an absurd affectation beyond all meaning?
(And they return one day without a single wrinkle in their brains
They find their women and their children grown older
They go to the small shops and coffee houses of the neighborhood
They read every morning the epics of each routine day.)
Do we die perhaps for others or because in this way we conquer life
Or because in this way we spit out all trivial effigies one by one
And for a moment in their parched minds a sunray passes
Something like a dim recollection of a zoic prehistory.
Days come when you no longer have anything to consider
Erotic encounters and stock exchange enterprises
You cannot find mirrors into which you may shout your name
Simple aims in life guarantee something topical
Tediousness, longings, dreams, transactions, frauds.
And if I think at all, this is because habit is more easily acquired
than remorse.

But who will come to hold back the onrush of the sudden storm?
Who will count the raindrops one by one before they vanish into
the earth
Before they become one with the mud, like the voices of poets?
Suppliants of another life, deserters of the Moment,
Their putrescent dreams seek an inaccessible night.

Because our silence is the hesitation for life and for death.



## XI *GEORGE IOANNOU*

### THE LESSON

I saw him as I was going to school;
bloodless now, sallow, almost dead.
Kneeling Jews around him with the Star of David.

Late at night when they struck him, I awoke;
my mother caressed me, brought me close.
I trembled like a bird cupped in a palm.

The boy seated beside me at school shook in spasms;
his neighborhood had not slept all night.
Others a bit further on paled and spit blood.

Meantime we learned the verb for the day:
*amo, amas, amat. . . .*

### A MOUSE

All its body twisted
and turned, bit itself, screamed.
On its back a cloud of fire,
but he could find no way to put it out.

Women with water shouted *a mouse,*
and it trembled in the guffaws of the neighborhood.

If at least it could only burn a house down,
the most beautiful house, a tall one in particular.
There outside, however, his flesh fell away.

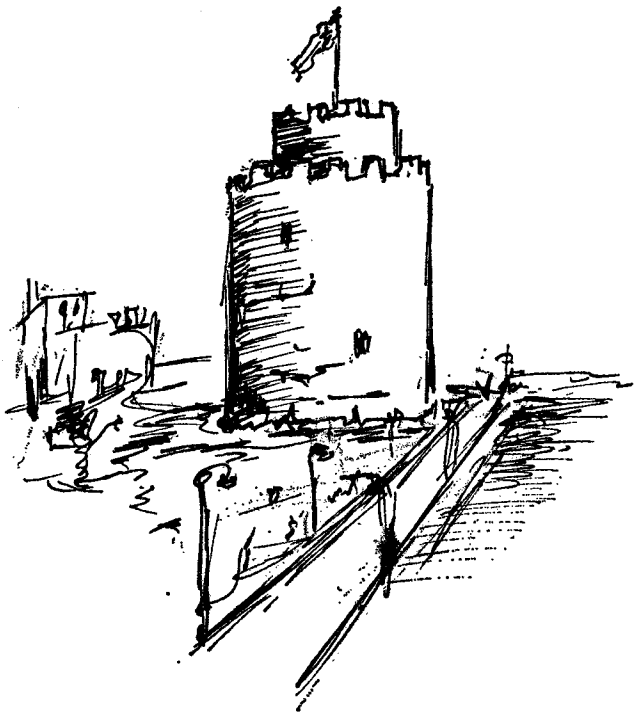
Bring cool violets for these wounds.

## THIS ABSCESS

Ready to spring, I crouch,
shrink in fear, bide my time.

I abdicated early from day,
put away all useless confessions.
Guilt lies heavily upon me, I've grown ripe.

This abscess will burst like the sun.



## XII *DINOS CHRISTIANOPOULOS*

### YOUR LOVE-MAKING IS LIKE THE SUNSET

your love-making is like the sunset
the sun falls into the waters, night comes

this is why I want to drink you, to swallow you
to dissolve in the semi-darkness of your body
but then don't stand like this, like a statue
do not speak to me in the plural
pierce into my marrow as deeply as you can
wring out your loneliness into my blood

find ways to retard the night

### ΡΗΜΑΓΜΕΝΟ ΝΤΑΜΑΡΙ

Ἔρχονται ὧρες ποὺ τί νὰ σοῦ κάνουν πιὰ καὶ τὰ χαμόγελα
πέφτουν ἕνα ἕνα σὰν τὰ ἑπτὰ πέπλα τῆς Σαλώμης
καὶ στὸ τέλος ἀπομένεις γυμνὸς καὶ τότε ἀρχίζουν ὅλα νὰ κραυγάζουν
τὰ μάτια κραυγάζουν: ἐμεῖς εἴμαστε ποὺ ρουφήξαμε τόση ὀμορφιὰ
τὰ χέρια κραυγάζουν: ἐμεῖς εἴμαστε ποὺ συντελέσαμε στὴν ὑποταγὴ
τὸ σῶμα κραυγάζει: ἐγὼ εἶμαι ποὺ συσπάστηκα στὴ κτηνωδία τοῦ καλοκαιριοῦ
οἱ στίχοι διαλαλοῦν τὰ μυστικά μας
γίναμε πιὰ σὰν ἰδιωτικὸ ἡμερολόγιο σὲ ξένα χέρια

ἔτσι εἶναι, δὲν ὠφελοῦν πιὰ χαμόγελα ὅσο κι' ἂν εἶναι ἀνοιχτόκαρδα
οὔτε ὠφελεῖ νὰ κρατᾶς τὸ στόμα κλειστὸ ὅταν ὅλα κραυγάζουν
καὶ τί νὰ τὴν κάνεις τὴ διπλομανταλωμένη ἀξιοπρέπεια τῆς σιωπῆς
τώρα ποὺ ὅλοι ξέρουν τὶς νύχτες ποὺ ἱκετέψαμε, τὶς ἀγκαλιὲς ποὺ συσπειρωθήκαμε
καὶ εἶναι τὸ πρόσωπό μας ἕνα νταμάρι ρημαγμένο
κι' εἴμαστε σὰν ψημένα κάστανα ποὺ εὔκολα τὰ ξεφλουδίζει κανείς.

## RUINED QUARRY

there are moments when not even smiles can help you any more
they fall one by one like the seven veils of Salome
and in the end you are left naked and then all things begin to shriek
the eyes shriek: it is we who have sucked in so much beauty
the hands shriek: it is we who have contributed to your submission
the body shrieks: it is I who was so convulsed in the bestiality of summer
our verses proclaim our secrets
we have now become like a personal diary in the hands of strangers

that's how it is, smiles can help no longer, no matter how open-hearted
nor does it help to keep your mouth shut when all things shriek
of what use is the double-bolted dignity of silence
now that all know of the nights when we implored, the embraces
    into which we coiled
our face is like a ruined quarry
and we are like burned chestnuts which anyone can peel easily

## I FORSAKE POETRY

I forsake poetry does not mean betrayal
does not mean I open a window to commerce
the preludes have finally ended the hour of the deluge has come
all those who are not sufficiently damned must at last fall silent
must find new ways to grow despondent in life
must open trenches that death may circulate throughout their bodies

I forsake poetry does not mean betrayal
let them not accuse me of easy solutions, of not having dug deeply
of not having plunged the knife to the most naked of my bones
but I too am a mere man, I have finally wearied, how shall I put it
is there anything more frightfully fatiguing than poetry?

I forsake poetry does not mean betrayal
one can find many ways to nurse his catastrophe

## VERSES OF ST AGNES FOR ST SEBASTIAN

You will die before you become bored with prayer. . . .

The soldiers of the firing squad
lie down and make love exactly like all the others,
they smoke, adore to be photographed
and light candles similarly to Aphrodite and to Hestia.
There is nothing that stands between your chest and them,
only their arrows which shall raise you to heaven
and this faith of yours which torments mankind.

Disrobed of your military tunic
thus in your nakedness you seem more saintly.

Tomorrow a multitude of men shall be named Sebastian:
children playing in courtyards, young men working in factories,
presidents of philanthropic societies, agitators, men of letters.
Tomorrow your name shall pass from mouth to mouth,
brethren shall commemorate you in martyrologies,
and lithographs of your martyrdom shall be circulated.
But you, tied to a tree and drenched in blood,
pale and exhausted, ideal in your pain,
do not forget us there in Paradise,
we who for the Faith were herded with you,
but chiefly do not forget how we touched
the first night after the flogging,
the most innocent, the most accidental touch of our bodies,
at that moment when our lips were singing the praises of the Lord.

## ANTIGONE: IN DEFENSE OF OEDIPUS

Men of Athens, why do you look at us so curiously?
This is my father, Oedipus,
who at one time was a powerful king and now
wanders in your market place, wounded
by fate, ragged and blind,
playing with his small broken-down barrel-organ.

Men of Athens, every obol you give us
adds a crack to our hearts;
the secrets of our Royal House grow heavy
with all that your imaginations have heaped on them.
Let us alone—until when will you continue to drag us
here and there, like a gypsy with his bear,
how long will your tragedians continue to mount us in your theaters,
besieging us for details
and asking us how it all happened,
why he never managed to avert this crushing blow?

Men of Athens, is it not enough for you
that my father was once a poet,
the first to introduce symbolism,
who with his epigram "Reply to the Sphinx"
saved the lives of many of you—not to mention
the aesthetic pleasure derived—why
do you poke into his private life
and search for Oedipus complexes,
illicit loves,
and pleasures which the current morality forbids?

The "Reply to the Sphinx" should have been enough for you.
You should have left the rest in semi-darkness.
After all, he did it in complete ignorance,
whereas you do it with complete consciousness.

## XIII *NIKOS-ALEXIS ASLANOGLOU*

### "BUTTERFLY" 1951

I don't know whether by this landmark we've reached, in the warm light,
anything can be discerned other than the asphalt with its dry pepper trees;
the dusty sun at day, the company buses, the electric lights at night.
We've lived through our green years like the closed withered love of a young girl; until now
they wounded us, but this was because of the costly sacrifice, they tormented us,
but this was because of the secret gratification. My dear friends,
so many scattered hopes on this frontier, so much thoughtless movement
amid light that distorts our faces, under a sky that cannot wait.

This place we've reached finds us still in the same spot. Limping
through uncertain relationships and again limping. My dear friends
in this landscape there is much movement, emotions are measured,
scanty and capricious, as you watch it gliding away and disappearing
amid the multicolored lights. I don't know what remains now,
as I gaze with a false eye, enunciating words with borrowed voice.

### THE RUINS OF PALMYRA

As time passes and I advance somewhat
deeper into acceptance, the more do I understand
why you acquire weight and take on the significance
men give to ruins. Here where everything
is swept clean, marbles and stones and history,
you remain with your incandescent breathing to remind us
of a passing amid beauty, the remembrance
of him who remained imperceptibly silent within me,
writhing in his own downfall, and even
in that of others who unsuspectingly lapse into a deep sleep.

As time passes and I advance deeper
into an unmoving autumn that in mellowing cleanses
the sidewalks with light, the more do I see
in the gilded gift of the sun an abandoning
of all I have waited for and never received, of all
I have squandered thoughtlessly, until now
I remain only a stranger, a man in tatters.
But when
amid fragmented memory I haul up
ruins, I find a profound answer as to why marbles
and stones and history remain to remind us
of your passing amid beauty—a secret answer
to all I have waited for and never received.

## LITOHORON STATION

The beginning glows strangely in my memory. It's the glimmering
behind the night when light retreats from corners
like a telephone network and you hear
an incoherent void amid the open lines,
an ecstasy of confused voices amid the wires,
at night in the station with the sea for company,
two or three rocks and an open bay without horizon
and the sun like a sorrowing Sunday amid the Citadels.

I shall not forget this glimmering by the station,
the passion that outstrips the enjoyment of the body and changes
from flesh into spiritual agony,
the agony brought by muffled voices to the threshold of night,
the agony that loneliness brings closer to the other person, the loneliness
within the other, the loneliness
within the other's passion—everything terminates at the last frontier,
lights in the barracks grow dim
and soft footsteps dwindle away. Pray
for the sentries that keep watch all night.

# *NOTES*

"I wish to thank each of the poets represented in this small anthology for helping me in translating their poems, either in direct personal collaboration, or through correspondence. For the clearing up of many doubtful points in poems throughout the anthology, I wish to thank Lela Anagnostakis, Andonis Decavalles, Zoë Karelli, Klitos Kirou, George Odysseus, and Nikos Gatsos."

KIMON FRIAR

GEORGE THEMELIS

*Athanasios Dhiakos*: Hero of the Greek War of Independence. He studied for the priesthood, was made a deacon and joined the janissaries of Ali Pasha in Yannina. But when war broke out, he fought fiercely with the Greeks against the Turks. Captured in April of 1821, he was bound to a stake and slowly roasted over fire. As he was dying, he is said to have recited a famous folk couplet: "Ah, see what a time Death has chosen to snatch me away/ Now that the boughs are blossoming and the earth sprouts with grass." His exploits and death are celebrated in many folk ballads and in a long poem by Aristoteles Valaoritis.

*Your wings . . . withering*: A variant version from Dionysios Solomos's poem "The Free Besieged," Draft B, Fragment 8, verses 1–6.

ZOË KARELLI

*Adolescent from Anticythera*: The bronze statue of a youth by an unknown artist of about 240 B.C., now in the National Museum in Athens. Because in his extended right hand it seems likely that he held something round, it is thought he may be Paris, the work of the sculptor Euphranos, presenting the apple of discord to Aphrodite. He was part of the cargo of a boat shipwrecked off the island of Anticythera in the first century A.D. which transported statues of bronze and marble from Greece to Italy.

*Pause here . . . Ares*: Part of an inscription on the base of a kouros known as Kroisos and carved out of Parian marble about 520 B.C.

NIKOS GABRIEL PENTZIKIS

*fishes* (in "Parallel Thoughts"): In the singular, the Greek word for fish, ΙΧΘΥΣ, is an acrostic for "Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour." Since ancient times the fish has been a symbol of life, but after Christ it became the special and secret symbol of Christianity because some of the apostles were fishermen, and because Christ performed the miracle of the loaves and the fishes.

*embodiment . . . moisture*: Plotinus and Porphyrios wrote that the soul cannot manifest itself unless water is present.

*Well then . . . sins fallen*: In 830 Euphrosini, mother of Emperor Theophilos, invited the most beautiful maidens of Byzantium to the palace and directed him to give a golden apple to the one he wanted for wife. Theophilos wanted to give the apple to Kassiani, the most beautiful of the maidens, but in order to test her intelligence, asked her, "Do all the vices of the world originate in woman?" (meaning Eve). Kassiani answered, "But all good things also have their source in woman" (meaning the Virgin Mary). Theophilos found her answer so provocative that he gave the apple instead to Theodora, though he never ceased loving Kassiani. In bitterness, Kassiani became a nun and wrote the famous *troparion* sung on Holy Tuesday before Easter, from which the last line of this section has been taken. (In "Scattered Leaves").

*opened the celestial heavens*: According to a Greek fable, on certain religious holidays, the heavens open and God listens to the desires of mankind.

*Neapolis*: The ancient name of the present Kavala. Because it was there that Paul first disembarked to preach Christianity in Europe, it was later also named Christoupolis.

*First Epistle*: IV, 3.

*Mardonios*: Brilliant young general and son-in-law of Darius, whose Persian fleet was shipwrecked off Mt. Athos. The myth about the treasure is to be found in a short story of Alexandros Papadhiamandis.

*take us . . . blow*: Barcarole of the early twentieth century, here printed in inverted fashion, as appropriate to the dead who sing it.

### Nikos-Alexis Aslanoglou

*"Butterfly" 1951*: The name of a confectionary shop in Salonika frequented by athletes and men of letters.

*Litohoron Station*: The railroad station of a small harbor at the foothills of Mt. Olympos.

# *THE ART OF JANNIS SPYROPOULOS*

A Critical Mosaic by Allen S. Weller, Charles S. Spencer, J.-P. Hodin
*Adapted by Belle Rothberg*

EVEN BEFORE he was awarded the UNESCO prize at the Venice Biennale in 1960, Jannis Spyropoulos, the first Greek artist to be so honored, had gained international recognition as an abstract painter with a distinct and powerful personality. Spyropoulos was born in 1912 in Pylos, a small town on the Peloponnesean coast. After completing his studies in Paris, he returned to Greece and now resides in Athens.

No Greek artist can escape the artistic past of his country, the fusion of the classical and baroque with the deep emotional vitality of the Greek people. Equally important to his Greek heritage is the influence of Byzantine art, basically composed of classical and oriental elements, of logic and emotion, formal design superimposed on amorphous spirituality that keeps seeking concrete expression. This sums up a good part of the effects in the paintings of Jannis Spyropoulos. His rich canvases reflect his deep personal involvement in the traditions of Greece.

His evolution has been interesting but inevitable. His early work was principally concerned with the colorful variety of the Greek scene. All of the themes of the young artist happily involved in his world appear: landscapes, studio still life, streets, crowds, port scenes, seascapes, figures, portraits, nudes. Influenced by Cézanne and the Impressionists, Spyropoulos first embarked on a romantic period after his study in Paris. His canvases were distinguished by a rather monotonous grayness of color, although he continued to paint landscapes and portraits with a strong emphasis on volume. He already had a feeling for structure which he did not abandon even when he aimed at a greater freedom of expression. By 1945, he started using stronger colors, and by 1950 the myriad subjects of his paintings began to coalesce into a style that became more and more disciplined and controlled. Descriptive elements began to be obscured as the totality of a complete and mature style emerged. The pictorial space was divided into small sections, with sketchy figurative elements tending toward a naive or primitivist concept of form. This primitive element evolved gradually into patterning and further simplification: a slow development that culminated in abstraction, with the linear element retaining its importance.

The link with the visibility of objects was definitely broken in 1955 and

only the inner essence of the natural phenomena was rendered. The two following years were devoted to the development of a strictly constructive style. The later works resemble architecture or rock formations, brilliantly lit with deep shadows, suggesting aerial views. The color accents of his middle period became subdued, more Byzantine and even more refined, so that his paintings seem to be produced on parchment or by the antique method of encaustic. The effect is that of the patina of time passed, as though the artist is reaching back into his childhood. It is like Chinese or Japanese paintings, though Spyropoulos's sources are all within the European framework, especially the Greek. While his paintings express a serene maturity, there are also elements of tension and conflict. This compelling dichotomy gives an underlying sense of excitement and drama to the surface beauty. It is a mixture of the simple and the sophisticated, like the complex human being for whom painting is the only possible expression.

The inner logic of construction reveals itself during the process of his work. He paints in a frenzy, the canvas on the floor, the work proceeding directly with the brush without any drawing or sketch. Spyropoulos strives not for the accidental but for the balance of all elements, the rational as well as the emotional. Although his work is abstract, it is fundamentally rooted in the experience of nature.

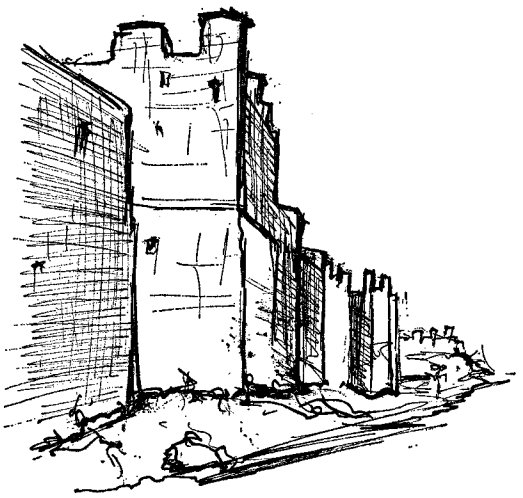
Basically, he is still as deeply influenced by the Greek landscape as he was when he first began to paint—by the color of the Greek fields, the olive trees and vines, the barren, craggy mountains and the never-ending convolutions of the Greek coastline, seen for most of the year in the brilliant clarity of the Greek sun. Spyropoulos remains, therefore, the most Greek of painters, with a sense of a characteristic environment sustaining everything he does. It is no accident that the most constant element in his work has been its color. Through color, the artist has organized and reflected his most personal experiences.

Spyropoulos's most recent work is both lyrical and dynamic; curved lines have replaced the straight, angular shapes. It is a highly abstract art, but all of its specific origins are reflected with a positive force that keeps it from being vague or illusory. The newest paintings reveal astonishing technical complexity in the rich variety of textural relationships. It is this combination of the technical discipline with emotional and intuitive expression that marks his work as something of a rarity. No matter how bold or decisive the large design may be, the actual handling of the medium is elegant and restrained. The lean quality of the paint itself suggests a richness and depth of physical being far in excess of its actual structure. The canvas

ground plays an important part in the total effect. Block-like forms build into cyclopean structures that seem to impose order on an elemental universe, with sudden vistas of cool distances, and accents of energetic, contrasting color against monochromatic earth-tones.

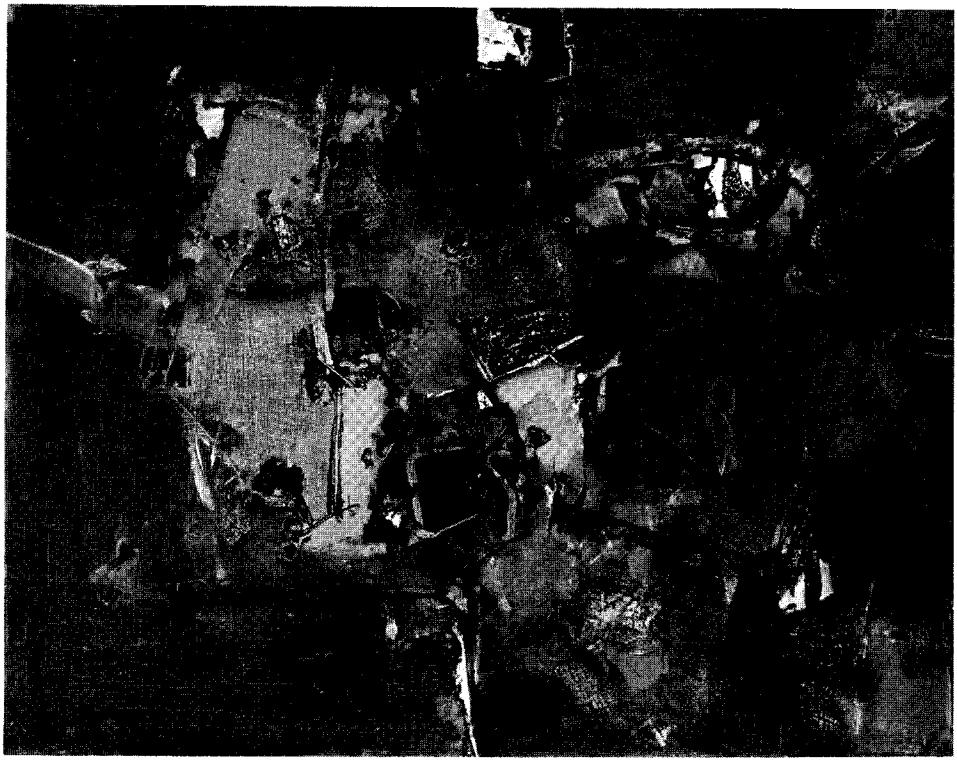
The world that Spyropoulos portrays is essentially humanistic, even in the abstract language he employs. There is no trace of the shattering experience that the head-on encounter between man and machines has inflicted upon many contemporary artists. The angular forms that Spyropoulos creates are the shapes of nature herself, not the sharp-edged forms of man-made, industrial things. Now when the world of the artist seems to become more and more an area of inward sensations and tensions to be explored, or a reflection of an utterly man-made environment, it is an invigorating experience to participate in an art like that of Spyropoulos whose roots lie deep in the earth. It is the sensation of rock and soil and sea and sky, transformed and transfigured by the spirit of the artist, that gives his work a depth and a sensitivity seldom encountered today.

His paintings are extremely beautiful, with a sense of color that is rich and yet subdued, like Byzantine icons or the Greek earth. The shapes are complex and they interlock with great strength, but they express tenderness as well as power, peace as well as tension, discipline as well as unleashed emotion. In spite of these conflicts, their final effect is of joy and beauty, lyrical poems that affirm the human spirit.

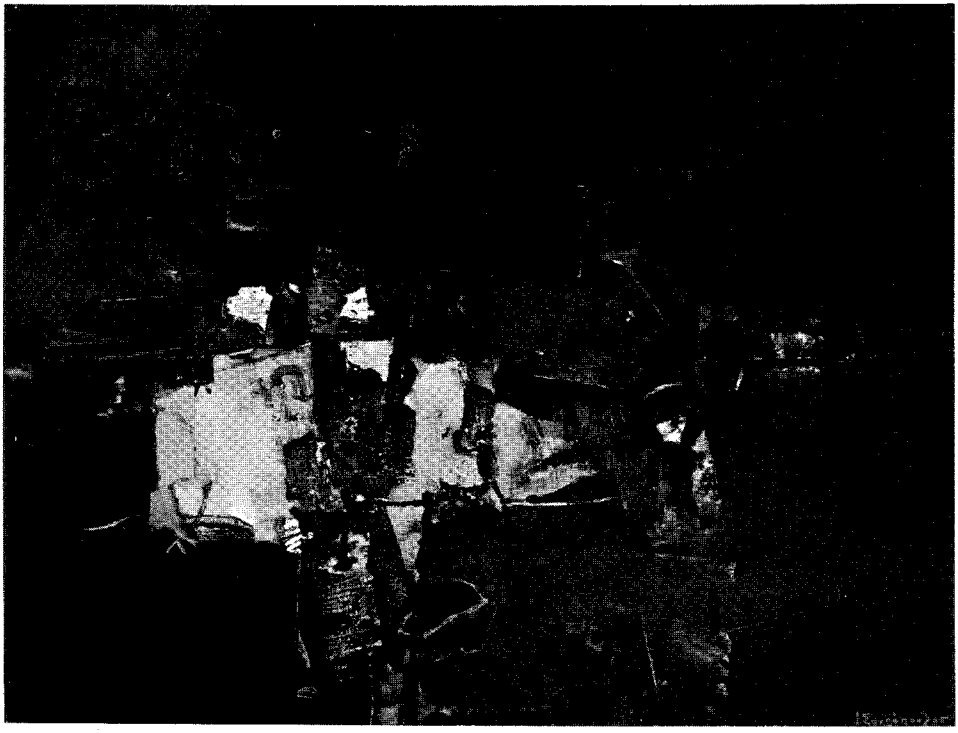


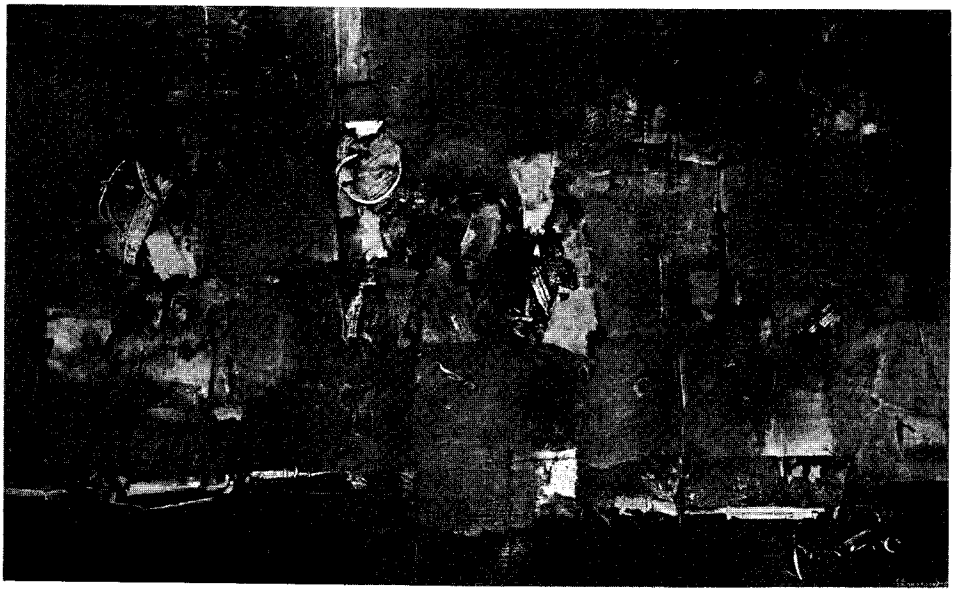
A FRAGMENT, oil on canvas, 35 × 40½ in., 1963

ALKAR NO. 9, oil on canvas, 28¾ × 39¼ in., 1963



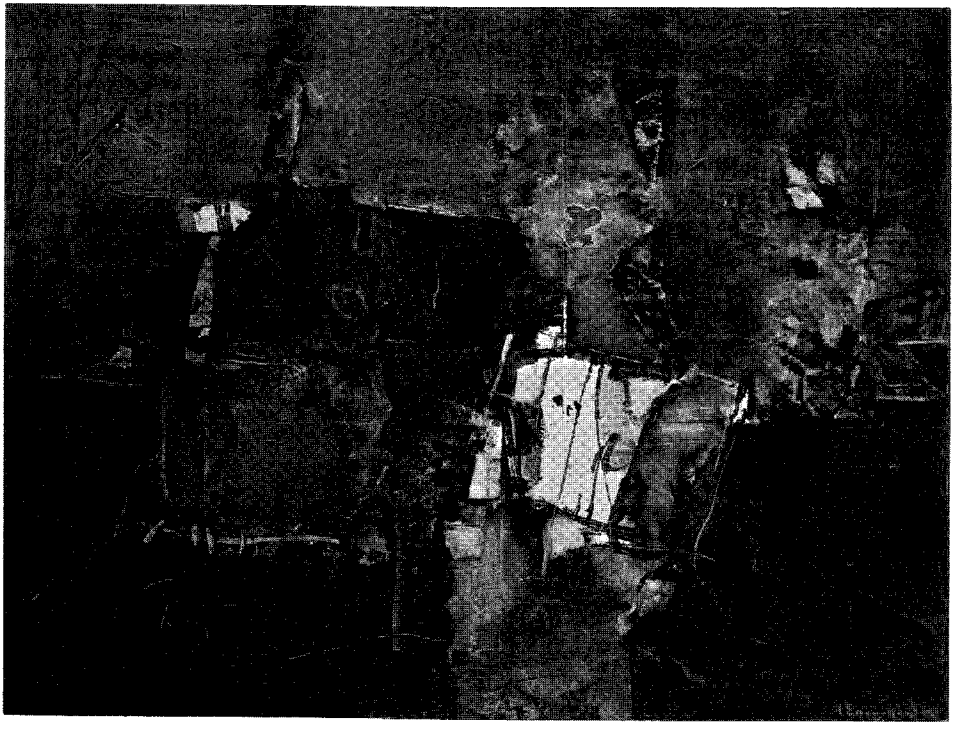
PYRASSOS, oil on canvas, 44¾ × 57½ in., 1963



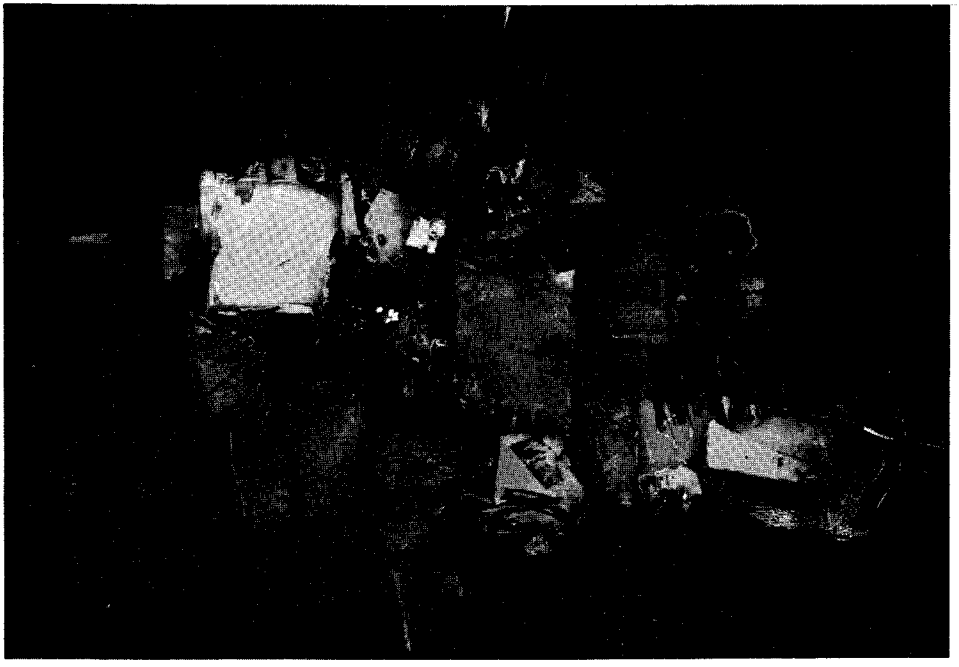


ATHYTON, oil on canvas, 63½ × 38¼ in., 1963

PELLINI, oil on canvas, 28¾ × 36¼ in., 1963



*Opposite:* ROTHOS, oil on canvas, 28¾ × 36¼ in., 1963



VILLOS, oil on canvas,
44½ × 63 in., 1963

ASTROS, oil on canvas,
25½ × 21¼ in., 1963

# *THE "POETICS" OF CAVAFY*

BY A. DECAVALLES

THE MAJORITY of Cavafy's readers may not be aware of the existence of the document we reprint here with the permission of its finder and editor Mr. Michael Perides. While gathering material for his book *Ho vios kai to ergho tou Konstantinou Kavafe* (*The Life and Work of Constantine Cavafy*, Athens: Ikaros, 1948), Mr. Perides was going through the poet's archives and came upon fifteen manuscript pages of varying length and age, written partly in ink, partly in pencil, with corrections, emendations, additions and deletions. All indicated that the text was meant for publication if the poet ever went back to it to give it its final form. He never did.

Of the two obvious parts that the manuscript consisted, the first, with its regular, tidy and homogeneous handwriting, showed that it had already reached a form close to being final. Not so the second which, although written earlier, was finally left in a less developed stage.

The reading, or rather decipherment of the text was not easy. It took Mr. Perides's skill and long familiarity with the peculiarities of the Cavafic manuscripts, as well as the verification of the results of his efforts by Professor Gwyn Williams of the University of Constantinople and by Mr. G. P. Savvides, the distinguished Athenian scholar and critic. The major difficulty was Cavafy's system of abbreviated forms that he used at times in his writing where words were shortened to two or three letters.

The outcome of these efforts appeared finally in *K. P. Kavafes: Anekdota peza keimena* (*C. P. Cavafy: Unpublished Prose Pieces*), edited and commented by Michael Perides and published by G. Fexis in Athens, in 1963, on the hundredth anniversary of the poet's birth and the thirtieth of his death.

The text was in English, a language with which the poet was familiar enough from the days of his childhood so as to speak it fluently at home, with his brothers and friends, and even to use it extensively in his essays, notes, private diary and much of his correspondence. He, however, never wrote his verse in it.

It was Mr. Perides who gave the untitled text its quite justified title. The few pages we are in possession of give us a most revealing insight into the theoretical background, the poetics that stood behind and shaped Cavafy's poetry as we know it, its relationship to life and experience, its

artistic and philosophic objectives. We regret only the fact that this essay was left unfinished.

Two dates that we find in the first part, July and October 1903, probably the dates of the final revision of that part, mark a significant turning point in the poet's development. Far from being a precocious genius, Cavafy went through long years of trial and experimentation. The few extant remnants of his early verse do not reveal him the poet that he was to be, but around 1903, when he was forty years old, he had already found his way, had already mastered the secrets of the art that was to be characteristically his own for the next thirty years. In his collected *Poems*, published in Alexandria two years after his death, of the poems written before 1911 only twenty-four were included, only those he wanted to save for posterity. The word *scrutiny*, mentioned in the beginning of "Ars Poetica," is highly characteristic of Cavafy's critical approach to his own work which, as is known, he subjected to constant revisions and changes until the very end of his life. The word is also especially revealing of the time, circumstance and spirit in which "Ars" was written. In 1903, as if ready now to launch himself, with clear beliefs, objectives, prospectives and mastered media, upon his future development, he seems, for an instant, to turn a scrutinizing eye back upon the already covered distance, the written poems, to see whether they would fit into the concept of unity that he wanted his work to achieve.

Such a scrutiny would require set standards, set objectives, a theory of poetry. But behind the theorist—who, in the second part is identified, in respect to action, with the philosopher and the poet—there is the practitioner. In these few pages, the poet himself draws the limits of his ground, of his realm, stating the outcome of his experience with his craft, informing us of his poetic creed and the nature that he wished his poetry to have.

The poet, in this respect, should not be the philosopher. "Even when he works the most philosophically" he should remain the artist. He may be aware, as much as the philosopher is, of the multiple and often self-negating and contradictory aspects of things, of the dualities in life. He may be aware of the "highest philosophy" that is "the absolute worthlessness of effort and the inherent contradiction in every human utterance." This typically Cavafic pessimistic tone is bound to remind one of its equivalents in T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*, "the loud lament of the disconsolate chimera," the "raid on the inarticulate/With shabby equipment always deteriorating"—but he must transcend this worthlessness through work, through his art, rather than express it.

Cavafy never aspired to pose as a critic, nor does the document we present have the ambition to present him as one. After all, it is only an unfinished manuscript in his archives. His art was his strength and his limitation. One should not fail to notice, however, the extent to which its few statements, made in 1903 or even earlier, contain clearly the essence of what was to be the poetic theory of the second half of our century, T. S. Eliot's anti-romantic approach to art, the emphasis on objectivity, on self-effacement, on dramatic presentation, on the art of indirection, of the unsaid, of "hints and guesses," on the function of art to raise the individual experience, no matter how truthful, how faithful to reality, to the level of universality.

The second part, a vindication of the poet's claim upon the "high endeavor," as compared with and contrasted to that of the man of action, the hero, states Cavafy's conviction that art does not stand apart from life. His artistic creed stands in strong opposition to the *fin de siècle* fashionable principle of "art for art's sake." His affinities are with Browning rather than Wilde.

The theorist, the philosopher, the poet, do not live in ivory towers. They supply the ideas that the hero materializes. There are sacrifices on both sides that need to be recognized. Interesting it is that Kostis Palamas, the genius and leader of the New Athenian School of poetry, a school that delayed its recognition of the great and different Alexandrian School (whose Hellenistic and decadent pessimism was much in opposition with the rising ethnic pride and glorification of the great traditional inheritance of the Athenian School) writes somewhere in his verse that "the poet is the great patriot." Such a statement does certainly agree with Cavafy's view. The poet is the chess player, whereas the hero is the pawn in his chess game, Cavafy indicated in one of his poems of 1903 which has not survived. The great events in history, the great cultural movements of humankind, the great revolutions had their origin in the mind and word of the theorist, the philosopher and the poet. Almost a century before, Shelley had called the poets "the unacknowledged legislators of the world."

# *CONSTANTINE CAVAFY: ARS POETICA*

## FIRST PART

AFTER THE already settled Emendatory Work, a philosophical scrutiny of my poems should be made.

Flagrant inconsistencies, illogical possibilities, ridiculous exaggeration should certainly be corrected in the poems, and where the corrections cannot be made the poems should be sacrificed, retaining only any verses of such sacrificed poems as might prove useful later on in the making of new work.

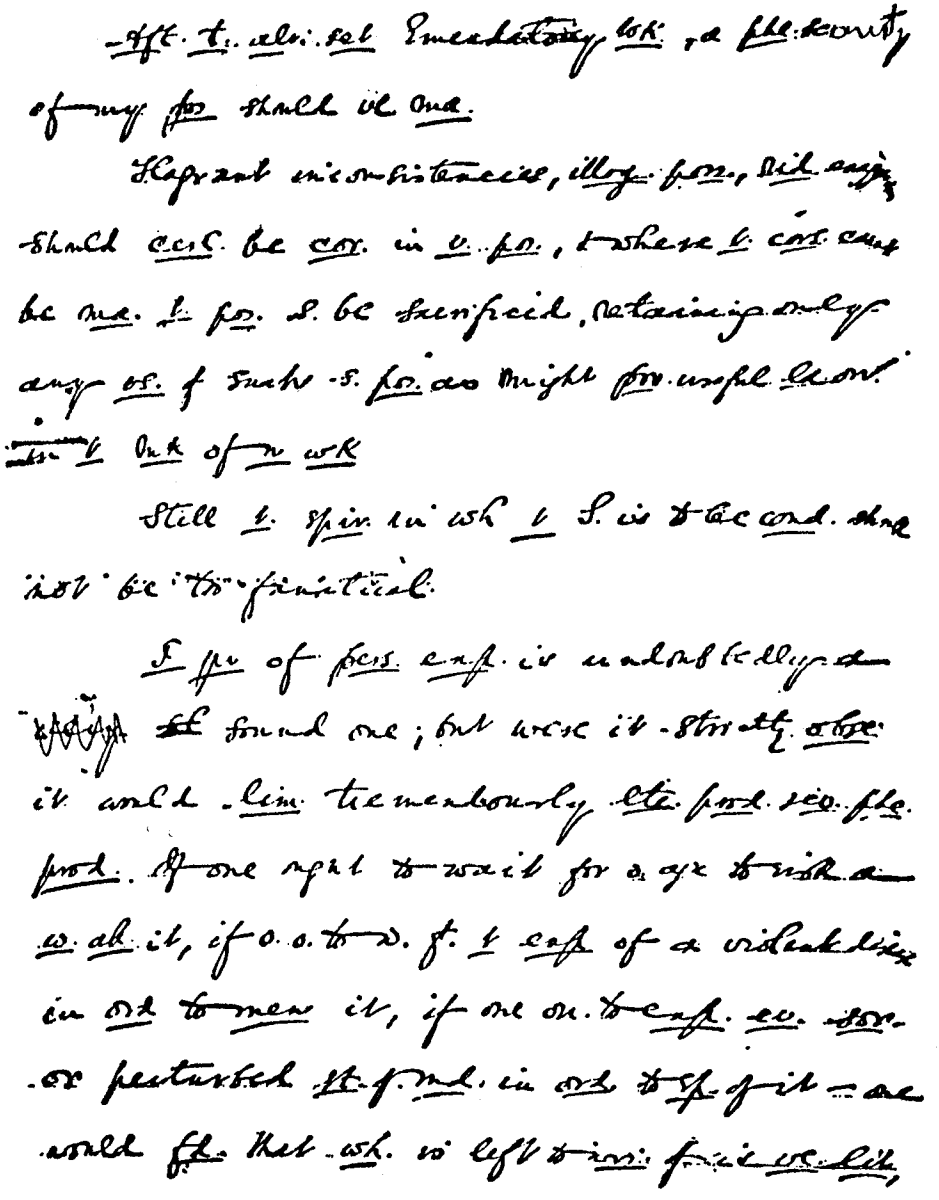
Still the spirit in which the Scrutiny is to be conducted should not be too fanatical.

The profit of personal experience is undoubtedly a sound one; but were it strictly observed it would limit tremendously literary production and even philosophical production. If one ought to wait for old age to risk a word about it, if one ought to wait for the experience of a violent disease in order to mention it, if one ought to experience every sorrow or perturbed state of mind in order to speak of it—one would find that what is left to write of is very little, and indeed many things might not be written at all obviously, as the person who experienced them might not be the person talented to analyse and express them.

Guess work, therefore, is not to be avoided by any means in a wholesale manner; but of course it must be used cautiously. Guess work indeed—when intelligently directed—loses much of its riskiness, if the user transforms it into a sort of hypothetical experience. This is easier in [the] description of a battle, of a state of society, of a scenery. By the imagination (and by the help of incidents experienced and remotely or nearly connected) the user can transport himself into the midst of the circumstances and can thus create an experience. The same remark holds good—though it presents more difficulty—in matters of feeling.

I should remark that all philosophers necessarily work largely on guess work—guess work illustrated and elaborated by careful thought and weighing of causes and effects, and by inference. I mean knowledge of other reliable experience.

Moreover, the poet in writing of states of mind can also have the sort of experience furnished by his knowledge of himself and has, therefore,



Page 1 of Cavafy's manuscript

Page 2 of Cavafy's manuscript

very reliable gauging of what he would feel were he placed in the imagined conditions.

Also care should be taken not to lose from sight that a state of feeling is true and false, possible and impossible at the same time or rather by turns. And the poet—who, even when he works the most philosophically, remains an artist—gives one side: which does not mean that he denies the obverse, or even—though perhaps this is stretching the point—that he wishes to imply that the side he treats is the truest, or the one oftener true. He merely describes a possible and an occurring state of feeling—sometimes very transient, sometimes of some duration.

Very often the poet's work has but a vague meaning; it is a suggestion: the thoughts are to be enlarged by future generations or by his immediate readers: Plato said that poets utter great meanings without realising them themselves.

I have said above that the poet always remains an artist. As an artist he should avoid—without denying—the seemingly highest—seemingly, for it is not quite proved that it is the highest—philosophy of the absolute worthlessness of effort and of the inherent contradiction in every human utterance. If he deny it: he must work. If he accept it: he must work still, though with the consciousness of his work being but finally toys—at best, toys capable of being utilised for some worthier or better purpose, or the very handling of which prepares for some worthier or better work.

Moreover, let us consider the vanity of human things, for this is a clearer way of expressing what I have called "the worthlessness of effort and the inherent contradiction in every human utterance." For few natures, for very few, is it possible—after accepting it—to act accordingly, that is refrain from every action except such as subsistence demands. The majority must act; and though producing vain things, their impulse to act and their obedience to it are not vain, because it is a following of nature, or of *their* nature. Their actions produce works, which can be divided into two categories, works of immediate utility and works of beauty. The poet does the latter. As human nature has got a craving of beauty manifested in different forms—love, order in his surroundings, scenery—he purveys to a need. Some work done in vain and the shortness of human life may declare all this vain; but seeing that we do not know the connection between the after-life and this life, perhaps even this may be contested. But the mistake lies chiefly in this individualization. The work is not vain when we leave the individual and we consider the man. Here there is no death, at least no sure death: the result may perhaps be immense; there is no shortness of life,

but an immense duration of it. So the absolute vanity disappears: at best only a comparative vanity may remain for the individual, but when the individual separates himself from his work and considers only the pleasure or the profit it has given him for a few years and then its vast importance for centuries and centuries even this comparative vanity disappears or vastly lessens.

My method of procedure for this Philosophical Scrutiny may be either by taking up the poems one by one and settling them at once—following the lists and ticking each on the list as it is finished, or effacing it if vowed to destruction; or by considering them first attentively, reporting on them, making a batch of the reports, and afterwards working at them on the basis and in the sequence of the batch: that is the method of procedure of the Emendatory Work.

It may also very well happen that the guess work or rather the intellectual insight into the feelings of others may result in the delineating of more interesting intellectual facts or conditions, than the mere relation of the personal experience of one individual. Moreover—though this is a delicate matter—is not such study of others and penetration of others part of what I call "personal experience"? Does not this penetration—successful or not—influence the individual thought and create states of mind?

Besides, one lives, one hears, and one understands; and the poems one writes, though not true to one's actual life, are true to other lives. ("Τὸ πρῶτο φῶς των", "Τείχη", "Παράθυρα", "Θερμοπύλαι")[1]—not generally of course, but specially—and the reader to whose life the poem fits admits and feels the poem: which is proved by Xenopoulos'[2] liking ("Τείχη", "Κεριὰ")[3] and Pap.'s ("Κεριὰ") and Tsocopoulos'[4] (Φωναὶ Γλυυεῖαι).[5] And when one lives, hears and searches intelligently and tries to write wisely, his work is bound, one may say, to fit some life.

Perhaps Shakespeare had never been jealous in his life, so he ought not to have written *Othello*; perhaps he was never seriously melancholy, so he ought not to have written *Hamlet*; he never murdered, so he ought not to have written *Macbeth*!!!

On Sunday (16 August 1903) I wrote some lines beginning "Σὰν ἔρχεται καμμιὰ ἡμέρα ἢ μιὰ ὥρα".[6] I was absolutely sincere at the time. In fact the lines as they now stand are not good, because they have not been worked: it was throwing on paper an impression. In the evening of the very same day I was ill, and the lines seemed to me flat. Yet they *were* sincere: they had the necessary truthfulness for art. So is every sincerity to be laid aside, on account of the short duration of the feeling which prompts its expres-

sion. But then art is at a standstill; and speech is condemned—because what is always lasting? And things cannot and should not be lasting, for man would then be "all of a piece" and stagnate in sentimental activity, in want of change.

If a thought has been really true for a day, its becoming false the next day does not deprive it of its claim to verity. It may have been only a passing or a short-lived truth, but if intense and serious it is worthy to be received, both artistically and philosophically.

25 November 1903

Here is another example. No poems were sincerer than the "2Ms,"[7] written during and immediately after the great crapulence of libations succeeding on my departure from Athens.[8] Now, say that in time Ale. Mav. comes to be indifferent to me, like Sul. (I was very much in love with h. before my departure for Athens), or Bra.[9]; will the poems—so true when they were made—become false? Certainly, certainly not. They will remain true in the past, and, though not applicable any more in my life, seeing that they may remind of a day and perhaps different impression, they will be applicable to feelings of other lives.

The same, therefore, must apply to other works—really felt at the time. If even for one day, or one hour I felt like the man within "Walls," or like the man of "Windows"[10] the poem is based on a truth, a short-lived truth, but which, for the very reason of its having once existed, may repeat itself in another life, perhaps with as short duration, perhaps with longer. If "Thermopylae"[10] fits but one life, it is true; and it may, indeed the probabilities are that it must.

## SECOND PART

Verses reported on:

Ἔτσι τελειώνει ἡ ὑψηλὴ προσπάθεια

Ἔτσι πληρώνεται ἡ μεγάλη προσπάθεια[11]

My only doubt is whether I have not qualified too much; and yet one might say that the statement "ἔτσι τελειώνει ἡ ὑψηλὴ προσπάθεια"[11] is not exaggerated. The poem deals mainly with the domain *of theory translated into action.* If a great artist or philosopher is not brought to quite the same sacrifice, it may be said, however, that he also undergoes sacrifice in another way by his never being appreciated as is his meed during his lifetime, by even after his death a great part of his struggles and his toil being underrated

or ignored, and by his making discoveries and laying foundations which, necessarily imperfect in his case, do not and cannot perhaps bring him honour or profit, but being perfected and brought to fruition by others bring those others—whose "προσπάθεια"[10] has been but small—honour and profit. But, again, the poem deals *with theory translated into action.* It deals with the pioneer, with the act, with the man—like in "Thermopylae"—of abnegation. An objection might be the way in which the word "ὑψηλή"[13] seems to specify the superiority of this "προσπάθεια"[12] which deals, as I have stated, with practical effort; but is not this being too minute? And am I not contradicting myself now? Seeing that I have stated that the theoretical life, the life of the artist and the philosopher, have also their sacrifice, bitter and unjust.

And also what if the translation into action is to be paid for in this way? Its results are good. And the glory and the merit remain to the theorist, that is he who mastered out and who planned and thought out the salutary system, the ideal demeanour, which works for good even though in its carrying it out it demands sacrifices (fruitful in final consequence and happy) in the actor; it demands to be applied by a hero.

Without the teaching, the sacrifice (from which so much good will result, so much happiness) would never take place; the hero, brave but unable to think, would be useless, no asset of profit to the world.

And is not the pawn's fate, and the sense of the two last verses, merely symbolical of the *pain exacted from every great effort for its lofty aims—sometimes in one form, sometimes in another*: sometimes greater, sometimes less: but always to be paid: in sufferings, in humiliations, in surrender. "Πάει καὶ θυσιάζεται" I say. "Θυσίαις"[14] are of different varieties.

And then the "pawn" applies the thought and does the player's action, because he can. He *is* the "pawn." He is fit. The theorist is fit for other work. He pays his pain in other fashions. He is no "pawn"; he acts as he can and as he must.

The theorist is of course the great benefactor. The millions that will be saved by the retreat of the "queen" owe their happiness to them.[15] To the hero thanks are due too; he by his sacrifice realises or rather hastens the good planned. But even without him the good planned would have been realised. Only it would take a longer time, it would have to traverse paths toilsome and troublesome. His sacrifice is honourable to him in the first degree; it is profitable to the community; but the theorist is a great and honourable benefactor still.

In fact, the theorist is rather not considered in this poem. We are prais-

ing the heroic action which carries theory into effect. Great or different, the theorist is to be considered apart.

Great were the legislators of Sparta who made out the System out of which Leonidas's sacrifice came.

/O/[16] But what about great theory translated into action and bringing reward, that is, the complete happiness and success to which a human being can aspire. The leaders of the American and the Greek rebellions, Pasteur, Garibaldi, and a few other instances.

All the objections former to that /O/ marked are I find groundless.

/O/ is the only logical one.

It may not be unsurmountable but as I had to pass to other work, and had already spent almost a month on considering the poem, I decided to leave out the puzzling two lines and to insert in their place the line ἔτσι ἡ ὡραία προσπάθεια τὸ ἀπαιτοῦσε[20] and to "renvoyer" the whole thing for consideration when the "The Scrutiny" is taken up.

## *NOTES*

1. "Their First Light," "Walls," "The Windows," "Thermopylae," all titles of Cavafy's early and well-known poems, except for the first which has not survived.

2. Greghorios Xenopoulos (1867–1951), the distinguished novelist, playwright, critic and magazine editor, was perhaps the first Athenian to give a proper recognition of Cavafy's genius in an article he published in the literary magazine *Panathenaia* in November 1903.

3. "Walls," "Candles," his well-known poems.

4. Pap. we are unable to identify. G. Tsocopoulos (1871–1923) was an Athenian humorist, essayist and critic.

5. "Sweet Voices" may be an earlier title of his poem "Voices," starting: "Voices ideal and beloved/Of those who have died . . .," in Mavrogordato's translation.

6. "When a certain day or a certain hour comes,". This line seems to have appeared somewhat modified in his poem "Che fece . . . il gran rifiuto," starting:

> To certain men when there comes a day
> They must say the great Yes or the great No . . .
> (*Mavrogordato's translation*)

7. As Mr. Perides informs us in his introduction to the text: "In the ninth and last page of the first part, Cavafy speaks about two poems he wrote at the time of his departure from Athens, that is in 1901. To the title of these poems he refers in the manuscript as "2Ms," at least as I read it. About the *s* there is no doubt. The *M*, however, is certainly not so clearly drawn. (The decipherment of an abbreviated title is much more difficult than that of a word that forms an organic part of a sentence.) My opinion is that the abbreviation stands for Μέρες (Days). My view is supported by the mention, in two parts of the text, of the word *day* which, in my opinion, is suggestive of the title. My view is further supported by the fact that in the second period of his poetic production, Cavafy wrote and published five poems with the

common title "Days." It is true that these five poems (among which, one bears the title "Days of 1901") were written much later, in the period from 1917 to 1932, and, therefore, the two "Days" of 1901 should not be related to the other five "Days." Still, all of them belong to the group of Cavafy's "hedonistic" poems.

8. Cavafy went to Athens in 1901.

9. Ale. Mav., Sul., and Bra. are obviously abbreviated names of lovers.

10. "Walls," "Windows," and "Thermopylae" further down, titles of poems already mentioned.

11. "Thus the high endeavor ends—Thus the great endeavor is rewarded." As Mr. Perides informs us, these are the only two lines we have of Cavafy's poem called "Pawn," mentioned in the text and listed in Cavafy's unpublished poems as written in July 1894.

12. Endeavor.

13. High, lofty.

14. "Goes to his Sacrifice," "Sacrifices" (n.), probably from the same poem "Pawn".

15. Mr. Perides thinks that "them" is a mistake. Or should be "him."

16. Cavafy uses this sign three times in his text, to refer us to what is stated between the first and the second.

17. "Thus the beautiful endeavor required."

# *REVIEW OF BOOKS*

ON THE GREEK STYLE: SELECTED ESSAYS IN POETRY AND HELLENISM by George Seferis, translated from the Greek by Rex Warner and Th. Frangopoulos. Little Brown and Company, Boston. 196 pp. $5.95.

In a perceptive comparison of Cavafy and Eliot, George Seferis emphasizes that "historical conscience," in Eliot's definition of the term, is a primary trait of these two masters. Cavafy called himself a "historical poet," meaning that he had a feeling for history. He chose, according to Seferis, "deception and derision, a world of dupes and swindlers, a web of trickeries, traps, ruses, machinations, fears, suspicions, faulty reckonings, mistaken expectations, vain efforts," and all these with "no saving faith, only a faith in art," in short, a world of "twilight zones" to build his historical-personal Hellenistic panorama. Cavafy was born into the Greek tradition and from that heavy inheritance he chose what he needed by affinity of temperament and current circumstance.

For Eliot, tradition was not a matter of inheritance. He had to work hard to acquire it against the odds of rootlessness in a mechanical world. He found that tradition in Europe among the French symbolists, Laforgue in particular, and among the English Elizabethan, Jacobean, and Metaphysical poets. Later on Catholicism provided him also with a tradition of redeeming faith. In him, as in Cavafy, the past supplied striking parallels to the present, and the two became contemporaneous.

*Historical conscience* is one of the major virtues of Seferis himself. Side by side with the modernity of his poetic genius, a modernity that also springs from tradition, this conscience is perhaps what makes him outstanding today. A prominent value of his work is that it reflects emotionally a deep, non-romantic awareness of the modern Greek conscience as it lives in the disappointments, frustrations and losses of the present. Yet that conscience depends on a partly painful, partly redeeming memory of the traditions of three thousand years which come up hauntingly to judge, to heighten and interpret actuality. The world of Seferis is not a world of illusion or of visionary flights but of awareness. His manner of thought and expression resembles that of Cavafy and Eliot. It is the manner of the half-said, half-spoken, and, to use Eliot's words, "a direct sensuous apprehension of thought, or a reaction of thought into feeling." In contrast to Eliot, however, Cavafy and Seferis are intellectually and emotionally closer to their worlds.

Modern Greek historical and cultural conscience, its search for lasting values and for a correct attitude toward art and life, has been Seferis's major theme in his poetry and more so in his prose as is shown in the selection of his essays which appeared in English translation under the title *On the Greek Style*. These essays, "occasional in their starting point, develop into excellent commentaries on his poetry, his artistic creed, his set of aesthetic and cultural values, besides showing his critical perception and the charm and power of his style."

Theophilos, the unlearned and unrecognized genius, the perambulant folk painter of the Greek province, whose "new eye . . . cleansed our seeing" by working in the dark and "searching along the dark passages of what is"; Angelos Sikelianos, the fellow Greek poet "with the force of Dionysus running pure in his veins, who tried to raise up a present, a contemporary life from the furthest and the most impenetrable sanctuaries of our tradition"; Makryannis, an army general and a hero in the Greek War of Independence, who, almost unlettered, "gave us a document of great significance, the story of his life" that is also the most frank, honest, unassumed, lively and penetrating picture of the political and social reality in the newly liberated nation; and Antoniou, a sea captain

and friend of Seferis—these men are some of the occasional figures, bearers-of-values in these essays.

"Dialogue on Poetry: What is Meant by Hellenism" (the other interlocutor is missing) argues that the restless, the inquisitive, the beyond the clear and the rational have been qualities of the greatest art throughout the ages. Even in the Greek classical art every significant work modifies the meaning of the older masterpieces and sets a new rule instead of following a pre-established one.

In Seferis's comparison of Cavafy and Eliot the foreign reader finds himself on somewhat familiar ground. An exemplary treatment in depth, this essay shows that Seferis is a critic of unusual skill and has an unusual familiarity with people and facts, currents and undercurrents in the European and cultural life. The essay is subtle as it shows how parallel the two poets are in their approach to the modern world. They have a similar awareness yet a different cultural temperament and equipment. Cavafy was an Alexandrian Greek and Eliot, an Anglo-American. "A Letter to a Foreign Friend" has particular interest in its account of Seferis's poetic acquaintance with Eliot since 1931.

Rex Warner and Th. Frangopoulos, the editors and translators of this volume, give an excellent rendering of the original Greek. They show that Seferis is a true poet and has been the painful and meticulous shaper of his idiom and style by drawing its elements from the vast resources of the Greek language and from the conflicting trends in it of the past hundred and fifty years.

HOMER by Andre Michalopoulos. New York: Twayne's World Authors Series. 217 pp. $3.95.

The postwar years have made several books on Homer accessible to the American reader, mostly as a result of the popularization of the classics in translation in American colleges. Apart from Victorian and new translations of the epics, there have been reprints of early studies of recognized value and new studies with claims upon scholarship and originality, as well as several repetitions, rehashings and simplifications of Homeric information and interpretation. This last category, in the form of "guides," meets a rather lucrative demand: the hasty modern student's need for quick information.

To write an original book on Homer is no easier than to write an original book on Shakespeare. In fact, it might be the hardest test even for the most knowing scholar and writer after what has been written since the middle of the nineteenth century. Recent archaeological findings and the deciphering of Linear B have certainly modified some of the earlier concepts about Homer's bronze age. One would stop with respect before the refreshing originality of Werner Yaeger, Sir Maurice Bowra, W. B. Stanford, M. I. Finley, Rhys Carpenter, Erich Auerbach, Milman Parry, Albert Lord, Simone Weil, Cedric Whitman and a few others in our century who have made Homer new again.

A recent addition to the Homeric library is Andre Michalopoulos's *Homer*. From the Preface the reader is captured by the author's honesty and modesty. An Oxonian by education and a teacher of classical civilizations for many years, Professor Michalopoulos wants his book to be "a special tribute" to his masters, A. M. Cook, C. G. Botting and Gilbert Murray. "The sole purpose of this modest book," he tells us, "is to lead those who have no knowledge of Homer to reading his epics, and also to give some assistance to laymen and young students in discovering the exquisite beauty of Homer's art. This book is not in a sense a scholarly or original work."

Indeed, in a sense, it is not. Even the main line of its approach is on what one might call the conservative side. Mr. Michalopoulos's favorite translators are Leaf, Lang, and Myers for the *Iliad*, and Butcher and Lang for the *Odyssey*. The book as a whole deserves praise for many reasons. What it professes to do, it does in an exemplary manner. The layman and the young student will find in it all they need to know about Homer, his time, his people, the bronze age, the Trojan Cycle, the epic tradition, the Homeric Question in its stages and developments. All these are fol-

lowed by most enlightening and inspired general analyses and comments on the two epics. There is some solidity about this book in that it is not lacking in deeper familiarity, and the necessary documentation and scholarship. Moreover there is in Professor Michalopoulos's approach the touch of a modern Greek who looks upon an ancient ancestor. Even more, original points are not lacking. The author points out to us the triple tragedy involved in each of the two epics. His prose style has a charming gentleness and refined warmth that conquers the reader.

Praise and appreciation is also due the Twayne Publishers for their courageous venture. This book is the first on a Greek author of a long series of volumes which are to cover every important figure in ancient and modern Greek literature.

MARVELOUS GREECE: AN APPRECIATION OF THE COUNTRY AND ITS PEOPLE by Ethel S. Beer. Walker and Company, N. Y. 272 pp. $5.95.

The traveler to Greece may count upon another valuable guide and companion. Miss Beer's book is the product of a long and close acquaintance with the country and its people, an acquaintance that started about fifty years ago and still goes on actively. In fact, Miss Beer has long been considering Athens her second home.

An inquiring person with much sensitiveness, the author is obviously as friendly and outgoing as her beloved Greeks. After telling us the personal story of how she gradually became familiar with things Greek, she gives a short but inclusive resumé of Greek history from the Homeric times to the present and gives a well-chosen relevant bibliography. She then offers a wealth of information about traveling to and through Greece, about places throughout the country, their history, myth and legend, their hotels, restaurants and other accommodations, the things to see and to enjoy, when and how. And there is always her personal experience.

This book is not scholarly or literary. Its style and approach do not compare, for instance, with Robert Liddell's *Aegean Greece*. It is practical and factual, obviously meant for the ordinary but inquisitive traveler who, rather than joining the mass tourists, would wish to find his own way, and to be informed where to go, where he is, what to look for, and what is the meaning of things around him. For this traveler *Marvelous Greece* is an excellent companion.

The knowing reader, however, might be disturbed by some Greek misspellings and inaccuracies. One finds *Agrini* (a town) for *agrimi* (mountain goat) under the picture facing p. 33 and the instrument shown is not a mandolin but a lute. One finds *Vasalika* for *Vasilika* on p. 46; Leonides for Leonidas on p. 31; *kalamakia* (little reeds) for *kalamarakia* (baby squids); and *portakalya* for *portokalya* (oranges) on p. 63; *Garafalo* for *Garofalo* on p. 67; *Psarapoulos* for *Psaropoulos* on p. 65; *Angliterre* for *Angleteere* on p. 98; *Ormofi* for *Omorfi* (beautiful) on p. 99; *Anagyrios* for *Anargyrios* on p. 101; *Daneus* for *Danaus*; and *Pelagus* for *Pelasgus* on p. 107; *Epidarus* for *Epidaurus*, etc. *Uranos* (sky) was never a god of the sea, and not all twelve Olympians were swallowed by Kronos. Some of them were not yet born. The Greek language has suffered much in American books and this book is no exception. The correction of such errors in a future reprinting would add to the worthiness of Miss Beer's work.

# *THE CONTRIBUTORS*

ANDONIS DECAVALLES, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Comparative Literature and Modern Poetry at Fairleigh Dickinson University, last summer did research for the Library of Congress and the American Association of Learned Societies. He is now preparing a book of verse in Greek and in English and a book on the poet Gryparis. Poems and articles of his appeared recently in *Spirit, Books Abroad, CEA Critic* and *Nea Hestia.*

KIMON FRIAR is one of the founders and the first editor of *The Charioteer.* He was also one of the founders and editor of *Greek Heritage,* 1963–65. He is probably best known in America and abroad for his translation of Nikos Kazantzakis's *The Odyssey: A Modern Sequel* and *The Saviours of God* (Simon & Schuster, 1958 and 1961). The Charioteer Press has recently published his translations of Miltos Sahtouris's selected poems *With Face to the Wall,* and Simon & Schuster will soon publish his *Modern Greek Poetry,* translations from the works of some of the 57 modern Greek poets, excerpts of which appear in this issue. From mid-March to the end of May, 1968, Mr. Friar will again lecture throughout the United States.

KATHERINE HORTIS was born in Athens, Greece, and grew up in New York. She has followed a business career but has maintained her native interest in Greek arts and letters.

NICHOLAS IKARIS was born in Icaria, Greece. He is a graduate of the Fine Arts Academy of Athens. He has received several important prizes in his homeland and in other countries. He has exhibited in Greek National Exhibitions, in The International Biennale of Venice, The International Medallion Exhibition of Paris, and The International Biennale of Athens. He was awarded the Gold Cross for his work in the Greek Orthodox Church of Jerusalem. The Austrian Parliament purchased his "Homage to Beethoven," titled *The Free Spirit* which is now in the Konzerthaus of Vienna. His bronze monument, *The Coal Miners,* 17 feet high, is in the Public Gardens of Dortmund, Germany. He received a special citation from President Kennedy and the N.A.S.A. for his statue dedicated to America's astronaut, John Glenn, on display in the City Hall of New York. He is Artist in Residence at Kingsborough Community College of The City University of New York.

GEORGE ODYSSEUS was born in a village near Kavalla in 1934. He obtained his B.A. in Economics with honors at the University of Thessaloniki and wrote on literary subjects for many magazines and newspapers. He obtained his Ph.D. in Economics from the University of Manchester where he taught for one year. He now lives in Athens, researching in economic problems. Though an economist, he has a particular love for poetry and has known most of the Thessaloniki poets personally since his childhood.

BELLE ROTHBERG has a Master's degree from Brooklyn College and is studying for her Ph.D. from New York University. She teaches English at Kingsborough Community College of The City University of New York.

BEBE SPANOS was born on the island of Icaria and grew up in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. She is a graduate of the University of Pittsburgh and the University of London. She has taught English at the Carnegie-Mellon University and at Rutgers University. She is Coordinator of the Honors Program at Kingsborough Community College of The City University of New York.