

Classic Poetry Series

**Giorgos Seferis**  
**- poems -**

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# Giorgos Seferis(13 March 1900 - 20 September 1971)

Giorgos or George Seferis was the pen name of Georgios Seferiádes. He was one of the most important Greek poets of the 20th century, and a Nobel laureate. He was also a career diplomat in the Greek Foreign Service, culminating in his appointment as Ambassador to the UK, a post which he held from 1957 to 1962.

## <b>Biography</b>

Seferis was born in Urla (Greek: ??????) near Smyrna in Asia Minor, Ottoman Empire (now İzmir, Turkey). His father, Stelios Seferiadis, was a lawyer, and later a professor at the University of Athens, as well as a poet and translator in his own right. He was also a staunch Venizelist and a supporter of the demotic Greek language over the formal, official language (katharevousa). Both of these attitudes influenced his son. In 1914 the family moved to Athens, where Seferis completed his secondary school education. He continued his studies in Paris from 1918 to 1925, studying law at the Sorbonne. While he was there, in September 1922, Smyrna/Izmir was taken by the Turkish Army after a two year Greek military campaign on Anatolian soil. Many Greeks, including Seferis' family, fled from Asia Minor. Seferis would not visit Smyrna again until 1950; the sense of being an exile from his childhood home would inform much of Seferis' poetry, showing itself particularly in his interest in the story of Odysseus. Seferis was also greatly influenced by Kavafis, <a href="http://www.poemhunter.com/thomas-stearns-eliot/">T.S. Eliot</a> and <a href="http://www.poemhunter.com/ezra-pound/">Ezra Pound</a>.

He returned to Athens in 1925 and was admitted to the Royal Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the following year. This was the beginning of a long and successful diplomatic career, during which he held posts in England (1931–1934) and Albania (1936–1938). He married Maria Zannou ('Maro') on April 10, 1941 on the eve of the German invasion of Greece. During the Second World War, Seferis accompanied the Free Greek Government in exile to Crete, Egypt, South Africa, and Italy, and returned to liberated Athens in 1944. He continued to serve in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and held diplomatic posts in Ankara, Turkey (1948–1950) and London (1951–1953). He was appointed minister to Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, and Iraq (1953–1956), and was Royal Greek Ambassador to the United Kingdom from 1957 to 1961, the last post before his retirement in Athens. Seferis received many honours and prizes, among them honorary doctoral degrees from the universities of Cambridge (1960), Oxford (1964), Salonika (1964), and Princeton (1965).

## <b>Cyprus</b>

Seferis first visited Cyprus in November 1953. He immediately fell in love with the island, partly because of its resemblance, in its landscape, the mixture of populations, and in its traditions, to his childhood summer home in Skala (Urla). His book of poems *Imerologio Katastromatos III* was inspired by the island, and mostly written there—bringing to an end a period of six or seven years in which Seferis had not produced any poetry. Its original title *Cyprus*, where it was ordained for me... (a quotation from Euripides' *Helen* in which Teucer states that Apollo has decreed that Cyprus shall be his home) made clear the optimistic sense of homecoming Seferis felt on discovering the island. Seferis changed the title in the 1959 edition of his poems.

Politically, Cyprus was entangled in the dispute between the UK, Greece and Turkey over its international status. Over the next few years, Seferis made use of his position in the diplomatic service to strive towards a resolution of the Cyprus dispute, investing a great deal of personal effort and emotion. This was one of the few areas in his life in which he allowed the personal and the political to mix.

## <b>The Nobel Prize</b>

In 1963, Seferis was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature "for his eminent lyrical writing, inspired by a deep feeling for the Hellenic world of culture." Seferis was the first Greek to receive the prize (followed later by Odysseas Elytis, who became a Nobel laureate in 1979). His nationality, and the role he had played in the 20th century renaissance of Greek literature and culture, were probably a large contributing factor to the award decision. But in his acceptance speech, Seferis chose to emphasise his own humanist philosophy, concluding: "When on his way to Thebes Oedipus encountered the Sphinx, his answer to its riddle was: 'Man'. That simple word destroyed the monster. We have many monsters to destroy. Let us think of the answer of Oedipus." While Seferis has sometimes been considered a nationalist poet, his 'Hellenism' had more to do with his identifying a unifying strand of humanism in the continuity of Greek culture and literature.

## <b>Statement of 1969</b>

In 1967 the repressive nationalist, right-wing Regime of the Colonels took power in Greece after a coup d'état. After two years marked by widespread censorship, political detentions and torture, Seferis took a stand against the regime. On March 28, 1969, he made a statement on the BBC World Service, with copies simultaneously distributed to every newspaper in Athens. In authoritative and

absolute terms, he stated "This anomaly must end".

Seferis did not live to see the end of the junta in 1974 as a direct result of Turkey's invasion of Cyprus, which had itself been prompted by the junta's attempt to overthrow Cyprus' President, Archbishop Makarios.

At his funeral, huge crowds followed his coffin through the streets of Athens, singing Mikis Theodorakis' setting of Seferis' poem 'Denial' (then banned); he had become a popular hero for his resistance to the regime.

<b>Other</b>

In 1936, Seferis published a translation of T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*.

His house at Pangrati district of central Athens, just next to the Panathinaiko Stadium of Athens, still stands today at Agras st.

There are commemorative blue plaques on two of his London homes – 51 Upper Brook Street, and in Sloane Avenue.

In 1999, there was a dispute over the naming of a street in İzmir Yorgos Seferis Sokagi due to continuing ill-feeling over the Greco-Turkish War in the early 1920s.

In 2004, the band Sigmatropic released "16 Haiku & Other Stories," an album dedicated to and lyrically derived from Seferis' work. Vocalists included recording artists Laetitia Sadier, Alejandro Escovedo, Cat Power, and Robert Wyatt. Seferis' famous stanza from *Mythistorama* was featured in the Opening Ceremony of the 2004 Athens Olympic Games:

<i>I woke with this marble head in my hands;  
It exhausts my elbows and I don't know where to put it down.  
It was falling into the dream as I was coming out of the dream.  
So our life became one and it will be very difficult for it to separate again.</i>

He is buried at First Cemetery of Athens.

# An Old Man On The River Bank

And yet we should consider how we go forward.  
To feel is not enough, nor to think, nor to move  
nor to put your body in danger in front of an old loophole  
when scalding oil and molten lead furrow the walls.

And yet we should consider towards what we go forward,  
not as our pain would have it, and our hungry children  
and the chasm between us and the companions calling from the opposite shore;  
nor as the bluish light whispers it in an improvised hospital,  
the pharmaceutical glimmer on the pillow of the youth operated on at noon;  
but it should be in some other way, I would say like  
the long river that emerges from the great lakes enclosed deep in Africa,  
that was once a god and then became a road and a benefactor, a judge and a  
delta;  
that is never the same, as the ancient wise men taught,  
and yet always remains the same body, the same bed, and the same Sign,  
the same orientation.

I want nothing more than to speak simply, to be granted that grace.  
Because we've loaded even our song with so much music that it's slowly sinking  
and we've decorated our art so much that its features have been eaten away by  
gold  
and it's time to say our few words because tomorrow our soul sets sail.

If pain is human we are not human beings merely to suffer pain;  
that's why I think so much these days about the great river,  
this meaning that moves forward among herbs and greenery  
and beasts that graze and drink, men who sow and harvest,  
great tombs even and small habitations of the dead.  
This current that goes its way and that is not so different from the blood of men,  
from the eyes of men when they look straight ahead without fear in their hearts,  
without the daily tremor for trivialities or even for important things;  
when they look straight ahead like the traveller who is used to gauging his way  
by the stars,  
not like us, the other day, gazing at the enclosed garden of a sleepy Arab house,  
behind the lattices the cool garden changing shape, growing larger and smaller,  
we too changing, as we gazed, the shape of our desire and our hearts,  
at noon's precipitation, we the patient dough of a world that throws us out and  
kneads us,

caught in the embroidered nets of a life that was as it should be and then  
became dust and sank into the sands  
leaving behind it only that vague dizzying sway of a tall palm tree

Giorgos Seferis

# Denial

On the secret seashore  
white like a pigeon  
we thirsted at noon;  
but the water was brackish.

On the golden sand  
we wrote her name;  
but the sea-breeze blew  
and the writing vanished.

With what spirit, what heart,  
what desire and passion  
we lived our life: a mistake!  
So we changed our life.

Giorgos Seferis

# Epiphany

The flowering sea and the mountains in the moon's waning  
the great stone close to the Barbary figs and the asphodels  
the jar that refused to go dry at the end of day  
and the closed bed by the cypress trees and your hair  
golden; the stars of the Swan and that other star, Aldebaran.

I've kept a rein on my life, kept a rein on my life, travelling  
among yellow trees in driving rain  
on silent slopes loaded with beech leaves,  
no fire on their peaks; it's getting dark.  
I've kept a rein on my life; on your left hand a line  
a scar at your knee, perhaps they exist  
on the sand of the past summer perhaps  
they remain there where the north wind blew as I hear  
an alien voice around the frozen lake.  
The faces I see do not ask questions nor does the woman  
bent as she walks giving her child the breast.  
I climb the mountains; dark ravines; the snow-covered  
plain, into the distance stretches the snow-covered plain, they ask nothing  
neither time shut up in dumb chapels nor  
hands outstretched to beg, nor the roads.  
I've kept a rein on my life whispering in a boundless silence  
I no longer know how to speak nor how to think; whispers  
like the breathing of the cypress tree that night  
like the human voice of the night sea on pebbles  
like the memory of your voice saying 'happiness'.

I close my eyes looking for the secret meeting-place of the waters  
under the ice the sea's smile, the closed wells  
groping with my veins for those veins that escape me  
there where the water-lilies end and that man  
who walks blindly across the snows of silence.  
I've kept a rein on my life, with him, looking for the water that touches you  
heavy drops on green leaves, on your face  
in the empty garden, drops in the motionless reservoir  
striking a swan dead in its white wings  
living trees and your eyes riveted.

This road has no end, has no relief, however hard you try

to recall your childhood years, those who left, those  
lost in sleep, in the graves of the sea,  
however much you ask bodies you've loved to stoop  
under the harsh branches of the plane trees there  
where a ray of the sun, naked, stood still  
and a dog leapt and your heart shuddered,  
the road has no relief; I've kept a rein on my life.

The snow

and the water frozen in the hoofmarks of the horses.

Giorgos Seferis

# Erotikos Logos

## I

Rose of fate, you looked for ways to wound us  
yet you bent like the secret about to be released  
and the command you chose to give us was beautiful  
and your smile was like a ready sword.

The ascent of your cycle livened creation  
from your thorn emerged the way's thought  
our impulse dawned naked to possess you  
the world was easy: a simple pulsation.

## II

The secrets of the sea are forgotten on the shores  
the darkness of the depths is forgotten in the surf;  
the corals of memory suddenly shine purple. . .  
O do not stir. . . listen to hear its light

motion. . . you touched the tree with the apples  
the hand reached out, the thread points the way and guides you. . .  
O dark shivering in the roots and the leaves  
if it were but you who would bring the forgotten dawn!

May lilies blossom again on the meadow of separation  
may days open mature, the embrace of the heavens,  
may those eyes alone shine in the glare  
the pure soul be outlined like the song of a flute.

Was it night that shut its eyes? Ashes remain,  
as from the string of a bow a choked hum remains,  
ash and dizziness on the black shore  
and dense fluttering imprisoned in surmise.

Rose of the wind, you knew but took us unknowing  
at a time when thought was building bridges  
so that fingers would knit and two fates pass by

and spill into the low and rested light.

### III

O dark shivering in the roots and the leaves!  
Come forth sleepless form in the gathering silence  
raise your head from your cupped hands  
so that your will be done and you tell me again

the words that touched and merged with the blood like an embrace;  
and let your desire, deep like the shade of a walnut tree, bend  
and flood us with your lavish hair  
from the down of the kiss to the leaves of the heart.

You lowered your eyes and you had the smile  
that masters of another time humbly painted.  
Forgotten reading from an ancient gospel,  
your words breathed and your voice was gentle:

'The passing of time is soft and unworldly  
and pain floats lightly in my soul  
dawn breaks in the heavens, the dream remains afloat  
and it's as if scented shrubs were passing.

'With my eyes' startling, with my body's blush  
a flock of doves awakens and descends  
their low, circling flight entangles me  
the stars are a human touch on my breast.

'I hear, as in a sea shell, the distant  
adverse and confused lament of the world  
but these are moments only, they disappear,  
and the two-branched thought of my desire reigns alone.

'It seemed I'd risen naked in a vanished recollection  
when you came, strange and familiar, my beloved  
to grant me, bending, the boundless deliverance  
I was seeking from the wind's quick sistrum. . .'

The broken sunset declined and was gone

and it seemed a delusion to ask for the gifts of the sky.  
You lowered your eyes. The moon's thorn blossomed  
and you became afraid of the mountain's shadows.

. . . In the mirror how our love diminishes  
in sleep the dreams, school of oblivion  
in the depths of time, how the heart contracts  
and vanishes in the rocking of a foreign embrace. . .

#### IV

Two serpents, beautiful, apart, tentacles of separation  
crawl and search, in the night of the trees,  
for a secret love in hidden bowers;  
sleepless they search, they neither drink nor eat.

Circling, twisting, their insatiable intent  
spins, multiplies, turns, spreads rings on the body  
which the laws of the starry dome silently govern,  
stirring its hot, irrepressible frenzy.

The forest stands as a shivering pillar for night  
and the silence is a silver cup where moments fall  
echoes distinct, whole, a careful chisel  
sustained by carved lines. . .

The statue suddenly dawns. But the bodies have vanished  
in the sea in the wind in the sun in the rain.  
So the beauties nature grants us are born  
but who knows if a soul hasn't died in the world.

The parted serpents must have circled in fantasy  
(the forest shimmers with birds, shoots, blossoms)  
their wavy searching still remains,  
like the turnings of the cycle that bring sorrow.

#### V

Where is the double-edged day that had changed everything?  
Won't there be a navigable river for us?  
Won't there be a sky to drop refreshing dew  
for the soul benumbed and nourished by the lotus?

On the stone of patience we wait for the miracle  
that opens the heavens and makes all things possible  
we wait for the angel as in the age-old drama  
at the moment when the open roses of twilight

disappear. . . Red rose of the wind and of fate,  
you remained in memory only, a heavy rhythm  
rose of the night, you passed, undulating purple  
undulation of the sea. . . The world is simple.

Giorgos Seferis

# Flowers Of The Rock

Flowers of the rock facing the green sea  
with veins that reminded me of other loves  
glowing in the slow fine rain,  
flowers of the rock, figures  
that came when no one spoke and spoke to me  
that let me touch them after the silence  
among pine-trees, oleanders, and plane-trees.

Giorgos Seferis



Lyric nightingale,  
on a night like this, by the shore of Proteus,  
the Spartan slave-girls heard you and began their lament,  
and among them — who would have believed it? — Helen!  
She whom we hunted so many years by the banks of the Scamander.  
She was there, at the desert's lip; I touched her; she spoke to me:  
'It isn't true, it isn't true,' she cried.  
'I didn't board the blue bowed ship.  
I never went to valiant Troy.'

Breasts girded high, the sun in her hair, and that stature  
shadows and smiles everywhere,  
on shoulders, thighs and knees;  
the skin alive, and her eyes  
with the large eyelids,  
she was there, on the banks of a Delta.

And at Troy?

At Troy, nothing: just a phantom image.  
That's how the gods wanted it.  
And Paris, Paris lay with a shadow as though it were a solid being;  
and for ten whole years we slaughtered ourselves for Helen.

Great suffering had desolated Greece.  
So many bodies thrown  
into the jaws of the sea, the jaws of the earth  
so many souls  
fed to the millstones like grain.  
And the rivers swelling, blood in their silt,  
all for a linen undulation, a filmy cloud,  
a butterfly's flicker, a wisp of swan's down,  
an empty tunic — all for a Helen.  
And my brother?

Nightingale nightingale nightingale,  
what is a god? What is not a god? And what is there in between them?

'The nightingales won't let you sleep in Platres.'

Tearful bird,  
on sea-kissed Cyprus  
consecrated to remind me of my country,  
I moored alone with this fable,

if it's true that it is a fable,  
if it's true that mortals will not again take up  
the old deceit of the gods;

if it's true

that in future years some other Teucer,  
or some Ajax or Priam or Hecuba,  
or someone unknown and nameless who nevertheless saw  
a Scamander overflow with corpses,  
isn't fated to hear  
messengers coming to tell him  
that so much suffering, so much life,  
went into the abyss  
all for an empty tunic, all for a Helen.

Giorgos Seferis

## Ii. Mycenae

I have seen in the night  
the sharp peak of the mountain,  
seen the plain beyond flooded  
with the light of an invisible moon,  
seen, turning my head,  
black stones huddled  
and my life taut as a chord  
beginning and end  
the final moment:  
my hands.

Sinks whoever raises the great stones;  
I've raised these stones as long as I was able  
I've loved these stones as long as I was able  
these stones, my fate.  
Wounded by my own soil  
tortured by my own shirt  
condemned by my own gods,  
these stones.

I know that they don't know, but I  
who've followed so many times  
the path from killer to victim  
from victim to punishment  
from punishment to the next murder,  
groping  
the inexhaustible purple  
that night of the return  
when the Furies began whistling  
in the meager grass  
I've seen snakes crossed with viper~  
knotted over the evil generation  
our fate.

Voices out of the stone out of sleep  
deeper here where the world darkens,  
memory of toil rooted in the rhythm  
beaten upon the earth by feet  
forgotten.

Bodies sunk into the foundations  
of the other time, naked. Eyes  
fixed, fixed on a point  
that you can't make out, much as you want to:  
the soul  
struggling to become your own soul.

Not even the silence is now yours  
here where the mill stones have stopped turning.

October 1935

Giorgos Seferis

# In The Goddess' Name I Summon You

Oil on limbs,  
maybe a rancid smell  
as on the chapel's  
oil-press here,  
as on the rough pores  
of the unturning stone.

Oil on hair  
wreathed in rope  
and maybe other scents  
unknown to us  
poor and rich  
and statuettes offering  
small breasts with their fingers.

Oil in the sun  
the leaves shuddered  
when the stranger stopped  
and the silence weighed  
between the knees.  
The coins fell:  
'In the goddess's name I summon you...'

Oil on the shoulders  
and the flexing waist  
legs grass-dappled,  
and that wound in the sun  
as the bell rang for vespers  
as I spoke in the churchyard  
with a crippled man.

Giorgos Seferis

## In The Manner Of G.S.

On Pelion among the chestnut trees the Centaur's shirt  
slipped through the leaves to fold around my body  
as I climbed the slope and the sea came after me  
climbing too like mercury in a thermometer till we found the mountain waters.  
On Santorini touching islands that were sinking  
hearing a pipe play somewhere on the pumice stone  
my hand was nailed to the gunwale by an arrow shot suddenly  
from the confines of a vanished youth.  
At Mycenae I raised the great stones and the treasures of the house of Atreus  
and slept with them at the hotel 'Belle Helene de Menelas';  
they disappeared only at dawn when Cassandra crowed,  
a cock hanging from her black throat.  
On Spetses, Poros, and Mykonos the barcaroles sickened me.

What do they want, all those who say they're in Athens or Piraeus?  
Someone comes from Salamis and asks someone else whether  
he 'originates from Omonia Square? '  
'No, I originate from Syntagma, ' replies the other, pleased;  
'I met Yianni and he treated me to an ice cream.'  
Meanwhile Greece is travelling  
and we don't know anything, we don't know we're all sailors out of work,  
we don't know how bitter the port becomes when all the ships have gone;  
we mock those who do know.

Strange people! they say they're in Attica but they're really nowhere;  
they buy sugared almonds to get married  
they carry hair tonic, have their photographs taken  
the man I saw today sitting against a background of pigeons and flowers  
let the hands of the old photographer smoothe away the  
wrinkles left on his face by all the birds in the sky.

Meanwhile Greece goes on travelling, always travelling  
and if we see 'the Aegean flower with corpses'  
it will be with those who tried to catch the big ship by swimming after it  
those who got bored waiting for the ships that cannot move  
the ELSI, the SAMOTHRAKI, the AMVRAKIKOS.  
The ships hoot now that dusk falls on Piraeus, hoot and hoot, but no capstan  
moves, no chain gleams wet in the vanishing light,  
the captain stands like a stone in white and gold.

Wherever I travel Greece wounds me,  
curtains of mountains, archipelagos, naked granite.  
They call the one ship that sails AGONY 937.

Giorgos Seferis

# In The Sea Caves

In the sea caves  
there's a thirst there's a love  
there's an ecstasy  
all hard like shells  
you can hold them in your palm.

In the sea caves  
for whole days I gazed into your eyes  
and I didn't know you nor did you know me.

Untitled poem drawn from the Book of Exercises. All translations by Edmund Keeley and Philip Sherrard

Giorgos Seferis

# Interval Of Joy

We were happy all that morning  
&#927; God how happy.  
First the stones the leaves and the flowers shone  
and then the sun  
a huge sun all thorns but so very high in the heavens.  
&#913; Nymph was gathering our cares and hanging them on the trees  
a forest of Judas trees.  
Cupids and satyrs were singing and playing  
and rosy limbs could be glimpsed amid black laurel  
the flesh of young children.  
We were happy all that morning;  
the abyss was a closed well  
&#959; n which the tender foot of a young faun stamped  
do &#947; &#959; &#965; remember its laughter: how happy we were!  
And then clouds rain and the damp earth;  
you stopped laughing when you reclined in the hut,  
and opened your large eyes and gazed  
on the archangel wielding a fiery sword

'&#921; cannot explain it, ' you said, '&#921; cannot explain it, '  
&#921; find people impossible to understand  
however much they may play with colors  
they are all black.

GEORGE SEFERIS. Translated by Kimon Friar.

Giorgos Seferis

# Just A Little More

Just a little more  
And we shall see the almond trees in blossom  
The marbles shining in the sun  
The sea, the curling waves.  
Just a little more  
Let us rise just a little higher.

Giorgos Seferis

# Letter Of Mathios Paskalis

The skyscrapers of New York will never know the coolness that comes down on Kifisia

but when I see the two cypress trees above your familiar church  
with the paintings of the damned being tortured in fire and brimstone  
then I recall the two chimneys behind the cedars I used to like so much when I was abroad.

All through March rheumatism wracked your lovely loins and in summer you went to Aidipsos.

God! what a struggle it is for life to keep going, as though it were a swollen river passing through the eye of a needle.

Heavy heat till nightfall, the stars discharging midges, I myself drinking bitter lemonades and still remaining thirsty;

Moon and movies, phantoms and the suffocating pestiferous harbour.

Verina, life has ruined us, along with the Attic skies and the intellectuals clambering up their own heads

and the landscapes reduced by drought and hunger to posing

like young men selling their souls in order to wear a monocle

like young girls — sunflowers swallowing their heads so as to become lilies.

The days go by slowly; my own days circulate among the clocks dragging the second hand in tow.

Remember how we used to twist breathless through the alleys so as not to be gutted by the headlights of cars.

The idea of the world abroad enveloped us and closed us in like a net

and we left with a sharp knife hidden within us and you said 'Harmodios and Aristogeiton'.

Verina, lower your head so that I can see you, though even if I were to see you I'd want to look beyond.

What's a man's value? What does he want and how will he justify his existence at the Second Coming?

Ah, to find myself on a derelict ship lost in the Pacific Ocean alone with the sea and the wind

alone and without a wireless or strength to fight the elements.

Giorgos Seferis

# Lost Worlds

How can you gather together  
the thousand fragments  
of each person?

What's wrong with the rudder?

The boat inscribes circles  
and there's not a single gull.

The world sinks:

hang on, it'll leave you  
alone in the sun.

You write:

the ink grew less,  
the sea increases.

The body that hoped to flower like a branch,  
to bear fruit, to become like a flute in the frost —  
imagination has thrust it into a noisy bee-hive  
so that musical time can come and torture it.

Giorgos Seferis

# Mythistorema

1

The angel —  
three years we waited for him, attention riveted,  
closely scanning  
the pines the shore the stars.  
One with the blade of the plough or the ship's keel  
we were searching to find once more the first seed  
so that the age-old drama could begin again.

We returned to our homes broken,  
limbs incapable, mouths cracked  
by the tastes of rust and brine.  
when we woke we traveled towards the north, strangers  
plunged into mist by the immaculate wings of swans that wounded us.  
On winter nights the strong wind from the east maddened us,  
in the summers we were lost in the agony of days that couldn't die.

We brought back  
these carved reliefs of a humble art.

2

Still one more well inside a cave.  
It used to be easy for us to draw up idols and ornaments  
to please those friends who still remained loyal to us.

The ropes have broken; only the grooves on the well's lip  
remind us of our past happiness:  
the fingers on the rim, as the poet put it.  
The fingers feel the coolness of the stone a little,  
Then the body's fever prevails over it  
and the cave stakes its soul and loses it  
every moment, full of silence, without a dropp of water.

## Remember the baths where you were murdered

I woke with this marble head in my hands;  
 it exhausts my elbow and I don't know where to put it down.  
 It was falling into the dream as I was coming out of the dream  
 so our life became one and it will be very difficult for it to separate again.

I look at the eyes: neither open nor closed  
 I speak to the mouth which keeps trying to speak  
 I hold the cheeks which have broken through the skin.  
 That's all I'm able to do.

My hands disappear and come towards me  
 mutilated.

## Argonauts

And a soul  
 if it is to know itself  
 must look  
 into its own soul:  
 the stranger and enemy, we've seen him in the mirror.

They were good, the companions, they didn't complain  
 about the work or the thirst or the frost,  
 they had the bearing of trees and waves  
 that accept the wind and the rain  
 accept the night and the sun  
 without changing in the midst of change.  
 They were fine, whole days  
 they sweated at the oars with lowered eyes  
 breathing in rhythm  
 and their blood reddened a submissive skin.  
 Sometimes they sang, with lowered eyes  
 as we were passing the deserted island with the Barbary figs  
 to the west, beyond the cape of the dogs



Our friends have left us

perhaps we never saw them, perhaps

we met them when sleep

still brought us close to the breathing wave

perhaps we search for them because we search for the other life,

beyond the statues.

6

M.R.

The garden with its fountains in the rain  
you will see only from behind the clouded glass  
of the low window. Your room  
will be lit only by the flames from the fireplace  
and sometimes the distant lightning will reveal  
the wrinkles on your forehead, my old Friend.

The garden with the fountains that in your hands  
was a rhythm of the other life, beyond the broken  
statues and the tragic columns  
and a dance among the oleanders  
near the new quarries —  
misty glass will have cut it off from your life.  
You won't breathe; earth and the sap of the trees  
will spring from your memory to strike  
this window struck by rain  
from the outside world.

7

South wind

Westward the sea merges with a mountain range.  
From our left the south wind blows and drives us mad,  
the kind of wind that strips bones of their flesh.  
Our house among pines and carobs.

Large windows. Large tables  
for writing you the letters we've been writing  
so many months now, dropping them  
into the space between us in order to fill it up.

Star of dawn, when you lowered your eyes  
our hours were sweeter than oil  
on a wound, more joyful than cold water  
to the palate, more peaceful than a swan's wings.  
You held our life in the palm of your hand.  
After the bitter bread of exile,  
at night if we remain in front of the white wall  
your voice approaches us like the hope of fire;  
and again this wind hones  
a razor against our nerves.

Each of us writes you the same thing  
and each falls silent in the other's presence,  
watching, each of us, the same world separately  
the light and darkness on the mountain range  
and you.  
Who will lift this sorrow from our hearts?  
Yesterday evening a heavy rain and again today  
the covered sky burdens us. Our thoughts -  
like the pine needles of yesterday's downpour  
bunched up and useless in front of our doorway —  
would build a collapsing tower.

Among these decimated villages  
on this promontory, open to the south wind  
with the mountain range in front of us hiding you,  
who will appraise for us the sentence to oblivion?  
Who will accept our offering, at this close of autumn?

8

What are they after, our souls, travelling  
on the decks of decayed ships  
crowded in with sallow women and crying babies  
unable to forget themselves either with the flying fish

or with the stars that the masts point out at their tips;  
grated by gramophone records  
committed to non-existent pilgrimages unwillingly  
murmuring broken thoughts from foreign languages.

What are they after, our souls, travelling  
on rotten brine-soaked timbers  
from harbour to harbour?

Shifting broken stones, breathing in  
the pine's coolness with greater difficulty each day,  
swimming in the waters of this sea  
and of that sea,  
without the sense of touch  
without men  
in a country that is no longer ours  
nor yours.

We knew that the islands were beautiful  
somewhere round about here where we grope,  
slightly lower down or slightly higher up,  
a tiny space.

9

The harbour is old, I can't wait any longer  
for the friend who left the island with the pine trees  
for the friend who left the island with the plane trees  
for the friend who left for the open sea.  
I stroke the rusted cannons, I stroke the oars  
so that my body may revive and decide.  
The sails give off only the smell  
of salt from the other storm.

If I chose to remain alone, what I longed for  
was solitude, not this kind of waiting,  
my soul shattered on the horizon,  
these lines, these colours, this silence.

The night's stars take me back to Odysseus,

to his anticipation of the dead among the asphodels.  
When we moored here we hoped to find among the asphodels  
the gorge that knew the wounded Adonis.

10

Our country is closed in, all mountains  
that day and night have the low sky as their roof.  
We have no rivers, we have no wells, we have no springs,  
only a few cisterns — and these empty — that echo, and that we worship.  
A stagnant hollow sound, the same as our loneliness  
the same as our love, the same as our bodies.  
We find it strange that once we were able to build  
our houses, huts and sheep-folds.  
And our marriages, the cool coronals and the fingers,  
become enigmas inexplicable to our soul.  
How were our children born, how did they grow strong?

Our country is closed in. The two black Symplegades  
close it in. When we go down  
to the harbours on Sunday to breathe freely  
we see, lit in the sunset,  
the broken planks from voyages that never ended,  
bodies that no longer know how to love.

11

Sometimes your blood froze like the moon  
in the limitless night your blood  
spread its white wings over  
the black rocks, the shapes of trees and houses,  
with a little light from our childhood years.

12

Bottle in the sea

Three rocks, a few burnt pines, a lone chapel  
and farther above  
the same landscape repeated starts again:  
three rocks in the shape of a gateway, rusted,  
a few burnt pines, black and yellow,  
and a square hut buried in whitewash;  
and still farther above, many times over,  
the same landscape recurs level after level  
to the horizon, to the twilit sky.

Here we moored the ship to splice the broken oars,  
to drink water and to sleep.  
The sea that embittered us is deep and unexplored  
and unfolds a boundless calm.  
Here among the pebbles we found a coin  
and threw dice for it.  
The youngest won it and disappeared.

We put to sea again with our broken oars.

13

Hydra

Dolphins banners and the sound of cannons.  
The sea once so bitter to your soul  
bore the many-coloured and glittering ships  
it swayed, rolled and tossed them, all blue with white wings,  
once so bitter to your soul  
now full of colours in the sun.

White sails and sunlight and wet oars  
struck with a rhythm of drums on stilled waves.

Your eyes, watching, would be beautiful,  
your arms, reaching out, would glow,  
your lips would come alive, as they used to,  
at such a miracle:  
that's what you were looking for

what were you looking for in front of ashes  
or in the rain in the fog in the wind  
even when the lights were growing dim  
and the city was sinking and on the stone pavement  
the Nazarene showed you his heart,  
what were you looking for? why don't you come? what were you looking for?

14

Three red pigeons in the light  
inscribing our fate in the light  
with colours and gestures of people  
we once loved.

15

Quid ???????? opacissimus

Sleep wrapped you in green leaves like a tree  
you breathed like a tree in the quiet light  
in the limpid spring I looked at your face:  
eyelids closed, eyelashes brushing the water.  
In the soft grass my fingers found your fingers  
I held your pulse a moment  
and felt elsewhere your heart's pain.

Under the plane tree, near the water, among laurel  
sleep moved you and scattered you  
around me, near me, without my being able to touch the whole of you —  
one as you were with your silence;  
seeing your shadow grow and diminish,  
lose itself in the other shadows, in the other  
world that let you go yet held you back.

The life that they gave us to live, we lived.  
Pity those who wait with such patience  
lost in the black laurel under the heavy plane trees  
and those, alone, who speak to cisterns and wells

and drown in the voice's circles.

Pity the companion who shared our privation and our sweat  
and plunged into the sun like a crow beyond the ruins,  
without hope of enjoying our reward.

Give us, outside sleep, serenity.

16

The name is Orestes

On the track, once more on the track, on the track,  
how many times around, how many blood-stained laps, how many black  
rows; the people who watch me,  
who watched me when, in the chariot,  
I raised my hand glorious, and they roared triumphantly.

The froth of the horses strikes me, when will the horses tire?  
The axle creaks, the axle burns, when will the axle burst into flame?  
When will the reins break, when will the hooves  
tread flush on the ground  
on the soft grass, among the poppies  
where, in the spring, you picked a daisy.  
They were lovely, your eyes, but you didn't know where to look  
nor did I know where to look, I, without a country,  
I who go on struggling here, how many times around?  
and I feel my knees give way over the axle  
over the wheels, over the wild track  
knees buckle easily when the gods so will it,  
no one can escape, what use is strength, you can't  
escape the sea that cradled you and that you search for  
at this time of trial, with the horses panting,  
with the reeds that used to sing in autumn to the Lydian mode  
the sea you cannot find no matter how you run  
no matter how you circle past the black, bored Eumenides,  
unforgiven.

17

Now that you are leaving, take the boy with you as well,  
the boy who saw the light under the plane tree,  
one day when trumpets resounded and weapons shone  
and the sweating horses  
bent to the trough to touch with wet nostrils  
the green surface of the water.

The olive trees with the wrinkles of our fathers  
the rocks with the wisdom of our fathers  
and our brother's blood alive on the earth  
were a vital joy, a rich pattern  
for the souls who knew their prayer.

Now that you are leaving, now that the day of payment  
dawns, now that no one knows  
whom he will kill and how he will die,  
take with you the boy who saw the light  
under the leaves of that plane tree  
and teach him to study the trees.

18

I regret having let a broad river slip through my fingers  
without drinking a single drop.  
Now I'm sinking into the stone.  
A small pine tree in the red soil  
is all the company I have.  
Whatever I loved vanished with the houses  
that were new last summer  
and crumbled in the winds of autumn.

19

Even if the wind blows it doesn't cool us  
and the shade is meagre under the cypress trees

and all around slopes ascending to the mountains;

they're a burden for us  
the friends who no longer know how to die.

20

In my breast the wound opens again  
when the stars descend and become kin to my body  
when silence falls under the footsteps of men.

These stones sinking into time, how far will they drag me with them?  
The sea, the sea, who will be able to drain it dry?  
I see the hands beckon each drawn to the vulture and the hawk  
bound as I am to the rock that suffering has made mine,  
I see the trees breathing the black serenity of the dead  
and then the smiles, so static, of the statues.

21

We who set out on this pilgrimage  
looked at the broken statues  
became distracted and said that life is not so easily lost  
that death has unexplored paths  
and its own particular justice;

that while we, still upright on our feet, are dying,  
affiliated in stone  
united in hardness and weakness,  
the ancient dead have escaped the circle and risen again  
and smile in a strange silence.

22

So very much having passed before our eyes  
that even our eyes saw nothing, but beyond

and behind was memory like the white sheet one night in an enclosure  
where we saw strange visions, even stranger than you,  
pass by and vanish into the motionless foliage of a pepper tree;

having known this fate of ours so well  
wandering among broken stones, three or six thousand years  
searching in collapsed buildings that might have been our homes  
trying to remember dates and heroic deeds:  
will we be able?

having been bound and scattered,  
having struggled, as they said, with non-existent difficulties  
lost, then finding again a road full of blind regiments  
sinking in marshes and in the lake of Marathon,  
will we be able to die as we should?

23

A little farther  
we will see the almond trees blossoming  
the marble gleaming in the sun  
the sea breaking into waves

a little farther,  
let us rise a little higher.

24

Here end the works of the sea, the works of love.  
Those who will some day live here where we end —  
should the blood happen to darken in their memory and overflow —  
let them not forget us, the weak souls among the asphodels,  
let them turn the heads of the victims towards Erebus:

We who had nothing will school them in serenity.

Giorgos Seferis

## Our Mind Is A Virgin Forest Of Killed Friends...

'our mind is a virgin forest of killed friends.  
And if I talk to you with fairy tales and parables  
it is because you listen to it more sweetly, and you can't talk of horror because  
it's alive

because it doesn't speak and moves  
it drips the day, it drips on sleep  
like a pain reminding of evils.

To speak of heroes to speak of heroes: Michalis  
who left with open wounds from hospital  
may have talked of heroes when, that night  
he was dragging his foot in the blacked-out city,  
was screaming feeling our pain 'in the dark  
we go, in the dark we move...'  
Heroes move in the dark.

G. Seferis, Teleftaios Stathmos  
1940-1945

Giorgos Seferis

# Our Sun

This sun was mine and yours; we shared it.  
Who's suffering behind the golden silk, who's dying?  
A woman beating her dry breasts cried out; `Cowards,  
they've taken my children and torn them to shreds, you've  
killed them  
gazing at the fire-flies at dusk with a strange look,  
lost in blind thought.'  
The blood was drying on a hand that a tree made green,  
a warrior was asleep clutching the lance that cast light  
against his side.

It was ours, this sun, we saw nothing behind the gold  
embroidery  
then the messengers came, dirty and breathless,  
stuttering unintelligible words  
twenty days and nights on the barren earth with thorns only  
twenty days and nights feeling the bellies of the horses  
bleering  
and not a moment's break to drink rain-water.  
You told them to rest first and then to speak, the light had  
dazzled you.  
They died saying `We don't have time', touching some rays  
of the sun.  
You'd forgotten that no one rests.

A woman howled `Cowards'. like a dog in the night.  
Once she would have been beautiful like you  
with the wet mouth, veins alive beneath the skin,  
with love.

This sun is ours; you kept all of it, you wouldn't follow  
me.  
And it was then I found about those things behind the  
gold and the silk:  
we don't have time. The messengers were right

Giorgos Seferis

# Santorini - The Naked Child

Bend if you can to the dark sea forgetting  
the flute's sound on naked feet  
that trod your sleep in the other, the sunken life.

Write if you can on your last shell  
the day the place the name  
and fling it into the sea so that it sinks.

We found ourselves naked on the pumice stone  
watching the rising islands  
watching the red islands sink  
into their sleep, into our sleep.  
Here we found ourselves naked, holding  
the scales that tipped toward injustice.

Instep of power, unshadowed will, considered love,  
projects that ripen in the emidday sun,  
course of fate with a young hand  
slapping the shoulder;  
in the land that was scattered, that can't resist,  
in the land that was once our land  
the islands, -rust and ash- are sinking.

Altars destroyed  
and friends forgotten  
leaves of the palm tree in mud.

Let your hands go traveling if you can  
here on time's curve with the ship  
that touched the horizon.  
When the dice struck the flagstone  
when the lance struck the breast-plate  
when the eye recognized the stranger  
and love went dry  
in punctured souls;  
when looking round you see  
feet harvested everywhere  
dead hands everywhere  
eyes darkened everywhere;

when you can't any longer choose  
even the death you wanted as your own-  
hearing a cry,  
even the wolf's cry,  
your due:  
let your hands go traveling if you can  
free yourself from unfaithful time  
and sink-  
So sinks whoever raises the great stones.

Giorgos Seferis

## Simplicity..

I want nothing more but to speak simple, to be given this favour. Because we even charged the song with so much music that it is slowly sinking.

Giorgos Seferis

## Spring A.D.

Again with spring  
she wore light colours  
and with gentle steps  
again with spring  
again in summer  
she was smiling.

Among fresh blossoms  
breast naked to the veins  
beyond the dry night  
beyond the white old men  
debating quietly  
whether it would be better  
to give up the keys  
or to pull the rope  
and hang from the noose  
to leave empty bodies  
there where souls couldn't endure  
there where the mind couldn't catch up  
and knees buckled.

With the new blossoms  
the old men failed  
and gave up on everything  
grandchildren and great-grandchildren  
the broad fields  
the green mountains  
love and life  
compassion and shelter  
rivers and sea;  
and they departed like statues  
leaving behind a silence  
that no sword could cut  
that no gallop could break  
nor the voices of the young;  
and the great loneliness came  
the great privation  
along with this spring  
and settled and spread

like the frost of dawn  
caught hold of the high branches  
slid down the trunks of trees  
and wrapped around our soul.

But she smiled  
wearing light colours  
like a blossoming almond tree  
in yellow flames  
and walked along lightly  
opening windows  
in the delighted sky  
without us the luckless ones.  
And I saw her breast naked  
the waist and the knee,  
as the inviolate martyr  
inviolate and pure  
issues from the torment  
to go to heaven,  
beyond the inexplicable  
whispering of people  
in the boundless circus  
beyond the black grimace  
the sweaty neck  
of the exasperated executioner  
striking vainly.

The loneliness now a lake  
the privation now a lake  
untouched and untraceable.

Giorgos Seferis

# The Companions In Hades

&lt;i&gt;fools, who ate the cattle of Helios Hyperion;  
but he deprived them of the day of their return. &lt;/i&gt;  
— Odyssey

Since we still had some hardtack  
how stupid of us  
to go ashore and eat  
the Sun's slow cattle,

for each was a castle  
you'd have to battle  
forty years, till you'd become  
a hero and a star!

On the earth's back we hungered,  
but when we'd eaten well  
we fell to these lower regions  
mindless and satisfied.

Giorgos Seferis

# The Jasmin

Whether it's dusk  
or dawn's first light  
the jasmin stays  
always white.

Giorgos Seferis

# The King Of Asine

All morning long we looked around the citadel\*  
starting from the shaded side, there where the sea,  
green and without luster—breast of a slain peacock—  
received us like time without an opening in it.  
Veins of rock dropped down from high above,  
twisted vines, naked, many-branched, coming alive  
at the water's touch, while the eye following them  
struggled to escape the tiresome rocking,  
losing strength continually.

On the sunny side a long empty beach  
and the light striking diamonds on the huge walls.  
No living thing, the wild doves gone  
and the king of Asine, whom we've been trying to find for  
two years now,  
unknown, forgotten by all, even by Homer,  
only one word in the Iliad and that uncertain,  
thrown here like the gold burial mask.  
You touched it, remember its sound? Hollow in the light  
like a dry jar in dug earth:  
the same sound that our oars make in the sea.  
The king of Asine a void under the mask  
everywhere with us everywhere with us, under a name:  
“? s? ? ? ? te... ? s? ? ? ? te...”  
and his children statues  
and his desires the fluttering of birds, and the wind  
in the gaps between his thoughts, and his ships  
anchored in a vanished port:  
under the mask a void.

Behind the large eyes the curved lips the curls  
carved in relief on the gold cover of our existence  
a dark spot that you see traveling like a fish  
in the dawn calm of the sea:  
a void everywhere with us.  
And the bird that flew away last winter  
with a broken wing:  
abode of life,  
and the young woman who left to play

with the dogteeth of summer  
and the soul that sought the lower world squeaking  
and the country like a large plane-leaf swept along by the  
torrent of the sun  
with the ancient monuments and the contemporary sorrow.

And the poet lingers, looking at the stones, and asks himself  
does there really exist  
among these ruined lines, edges, points, hollows, and curves  
does there really exist  
here where one meets the path of rain, wind, and ruin  
does there exist the movement of the face, shape of the  
tenderness  
of those who've shrunk so strangely in our lives,  
those who remained the shadow of waves and thoughts with  
the sea's boundlessness  
or perhaps no, nothing is left but the weight  
the nostalgia for the weight of a living existence  
there where we now remain unsubstantial, bending  
like the branches of a terrible willow-tree heaped in  
permanent despair  
while the yellow current slowly carries down rushes up-  
rooted in the mud  
image of a form that the sentence to everlasting bitterness  
has turned to stone:  
the poet a void.

Shieldbearer, the sun climbed warring,  
and from the depths of the cave a startled bat  
hit the light as an arrow hits a shield:  
“? s? ? ? ? te...? s? ? ? ? te...” Would that it were the king  
of Asine  
we've been searching for so carefully on this acropolis  
sometimes touching with our fingers his touch upon  
the stones.

Asine, summer '38—Athens. Jan. '40

Music by Costas Tsiantis

Giorgos Seferis

# The Last Day

The day was cloudy. No one could come to a decision;  
a light wind was blowing. 'Not a north-easter, the sirocco,' someone said.  
A few slender cypresses nailed to the slope, and, beyond, the sea  
grey with shining pools.

The soldiers presented arms as it began to drizzle.  
'Not a north-easter, the sirocco,' was the only decision heard.  
And yet we knew that by the following dawn  
nothing would be left to us, neither the woman drinking sleep at our side  
nor the memory that we were once men,  
nothing at all by the following dawn.

'This wind reminds me of spring,' said my friend  
as she walked beside me gazing into the distance, 'the spring  
that came suddenly in the winter by the closed-in sea.  
So unexpected. So many years have gone. How are we going to die?'

A funeral march meandered through the thin rain.

How does a man die? Strange no one's thought about it.  
And for those who thought about it, it was like a recollection from old chronicles  
from the time of the Crusades or the battle of Salamis.  
Yet death is something that happens: how does a man die?  
Yet each of us earns his death, his own death, which belongs to no one else  
and this game is life.

The light was fading from the clouded day, no one decided anything.  
The following dawn nothing would be left to us, everything surrendered, even our  
hands,  
and our women slaves at the springheads and our children in the quarries.  
My friend, walking beside me, was singing a disjointed song:  
'In spring, in summer, slaves . . .'  
One recalled old teachers who'd left us orphans.  
A couple passed, talking:  
'I'm sick of the dusk, let's go home,  
let's go home and turn on the light.'

Giorgos Seferis

# The Leaf Of The Poplar

It trembled so, the wind set it sailing  
it trembled so, how could it not yield to the wind  
far beyond  
the sea  
far beyond  
an island in the sun  
and hand gripping oars  
dying the last stroke at the sighting of port  
tired eyes closing  
like sea anemones

It trembled so much  
I sought it so much  
in the shade of the eucalyptus  
Spring to Autumn  
bare in the close woods  
my God I sought it

Giorgos Seferis

# Thrush

Ephemeral issue of a vicious daemon and a harsh fate,  
why do you force me to speak of things that it would be better for you not to  
know.

SILENUS TO MIDAS\*

I

The house near the sea\*

The houses I had they took away from me. The times  
happened to be unpropitious: war, destruction, exile;  
sometimes the hunter hits the migratory birds,  
sometimes he doesn't hit them. Hunting  
was good in my time, many felt the pellet;  
the rest circle aimlessly or go mad in the shelters.

Don't talk to me about the nightingale or the lark  
or the little wagtail  
inscribing figures with his tail in the light;  
I don't know much about houses  
I know they have their own nature, nothing else.  
New at first, like babies  
who play in gardens with the tassels of the sun.  
they embroider colored shutters and shining doors  
over the day.  
When the architect's finished, they change,  
they frown or smile or even grow stubborn  
with those who stayed behind, with those who went away  
with others who'd come back if they could  
or others who disappeared, now that the world's become  
an endless hotel.

I don't know much about houses,  
I remember their joy and their sorrow  
sometimes, when I stop to think;  
again  
sometimes, near the sea, in naked rooms

with a single iron bed and nothing of my own,  
watching the evening spider, I imagine  
that someone is getting ready to come, that they dress  
him up\*  
in white and black robes, with many-colored jewels,  
and around him venerable ladies,  
gray hair and dark lace shawls, talk softly,  
that he is getting ready to come and say goodbye to me;  
or that a woman—eyelashes quivering, slim-waisted,  
returning from southern ports,  
Smyrna Rhodes Syracuse Alexandria,  
from cities closed like hot shutters,  
with perfume of golden fruit and herbs—  
climbs the stairs without seeing  
those who've fallen asleep under the stairs.

Houses, you know, grow stubborn easily when you strip  
them bare.

## II

### Sensual Elpenor

I saw him yesterday standing by the door  
below my window; it was about  
seven o'clock; there was a woman with him.  
He had the look of Elpenor just before he fell  
and smashed himself, yet he wasn't drunk.  
He was speaking fast, and she  
was gazing absently toward the gramophones;  
now and then she cut him short to say a word  
and then would glance impatiently  
toward where they were frying fish: like a cat.  
He muttered with a cigarette butt between his lips:  
—'Listen. There's this too. In the moonlight  
the statues sometimes bend like reeds  
in the midst of ripe fruit—the statues;  
and the flame becomes a cool oleander,  
the flame that burns you, I mean.'

—'It's just the light... shadows of the night.'

—'Maybe the night that split open, a blue pomegranate,  
a dark breast, and filled you with stars,  
cleaving time.

And yet the statues  
bend sometimes, dividing desire in two,  
like a peach; and the flame  
becomes a kiss on the limbs, a sobbing,  
and then a cool leaf carried off by the wind;  
they bend; they become light with a human weight.  
You don't forget it.'

—The statues are in the museum.'

—No, they pursue you, why can't you see it?  
I mean with their broken limbs,  
with their shape from another time, a shape you don't  
recognize  
yet know.  
It's as though  
in the last days of your youth you loved  
a woman who was still beautiful, and you were always afraid,  
as you held her naked at noon,  
of the memory aroused by your embrace;  
were afraid the kiss might betray you  
to other beds now of the past  
which nevertheless could haunt you  
so easily, so easily, and bring to life  
images in the mirror, bodies once alive:  
their sensuality.

It's as though  
returning home from some foreign country you happen  
to open  
an old trunk that's been locked up a long time  
and find the tatters of clothes you used to wear  
on happy occasions, at festivals with many-colored lights,  
mirrored, now becoming dim,  
and all that remains is the perfume of the absence  
of a young form.

Really, those statues are not  
the fragments. You yourself are the relic;

they haunt you with a strange virginity  
at home, at the office, at receptions for the celebrated,  
in the unconfessed terror of sleep;  
they speak of things you wish didn't exist  
or would happen years after your death,  
and that's difficult because...'

—'The statues are in the museum.  
Good night.'

—'...because the statues are no longer  
fragments. We are. The statues bend lightly... Good  
night.'

At this point they separated. He took  
the road leading uphill toward the North  
and she moved on toward the light-flooded beach  
where the waves are drowned in the noise from the radio:

The radio

—'Sails puffed out by the wind  
are all that stay in the mind.  
Perfume of silence and pine  
will soon be an anodyne  
now that the sailor's set sail,  
flycatcher, catfish, and wagtail.  
O woman whose touch is dumb,  
hear the wind's requiem.

'Drained is the golden keg  
the sun's become a rag  
round a middle-aged woman's neck—  
who coughs and coughs without break;  
for the summer that's gone she sighs,  
for the gold on her shoulders, her thighs.  
O woman, O sightless thing,  
Hear the blindman sing.

'Close the shutters: the day recedes;  
make flutes from yesteryear's reeds  
and don't open, knock how they may:

they shout but have nothing to say.  
Take cyclamen, pine-needles, the lily,  
anemones out of the sea;  
O woman whose wits are lost,  
Listen, the water's ghost...

—'Athens. The public has heard  
the news with alarm; it is feared  
a crisis is near. The prime  
minister declared: 'There is no more time...'  
Take cyclamen... needles of pine...  
the lily... needles of pine...  
O woman...  
—... is overwhelmingly stronger  
The war...'

SOULMONGER\*

III

The wreck 'Thrush'

'This wood that cooled my forehead  
at times when noon burned my veins  
will flower in other hands. Take it, I'm giving it to you;  
look, it's wood from a lemon-tree...'  
I heard the voice  
as I was gazing at the sea trying to make out  
a ship they'd sunk there years ago;  
it was called 'Thrush, ' a small wreck; the masts,  
broken, swayed at odd angles deep underwater, like  
tentacles,  
or the memory of dreams, marking the hull:  
vague mouth of some huge dead sea-monster  
extinguished in the water. Calm spread all around.

And gradually, in turn, other voices followed, \*  
whispers thin and thirsty  
emerging from the other side of the sun, the dark side;

you might say they longed for a dropp of blood to drink; \*  
familiar voices, but I couldn't distinguish one from the  
other.

And then the voice of the old man reached me; I felt it  
quietly falling into the heart of day,  
as though motionless:

'And if you condemn me to drink poison, I thank you.  
Your law will be my law; how can I go  
wandering from one foreign country to another, a rolling  
stone.

I prefer death.

Who'll come out best only God knows.'

Countries of the sun yet you can't face the sun.

Countries of men yet you can't face man.

The light

As the year go by  
the judges who condemn you grow in number;  
as the years go by and you converse with fewer voices,  
you see the sun with different eyes:  
you know that those who stayed behind were deceiving you  
the delirium of flesh, the lovely dance  
that ends in nakedness.

It's as though, turning at night into an empty highway,  
you suddenly see the eyes of an animal shine,  
eyes already gone; so you feel your own eyes:  
you gaze at the sun, then you're lost in darkness.

The doric chiton

that swayed like the mountains when your fingers touched it  
is a marble figure in the light, but its head is in darkness.

And those who abandoned the stadium to take up arms  
struck the obstinate marathon runner  
and he saw the track sail in blood,  
the world empty like the moon,  
the gardens of victory wither:

you see them in the sun, behind the sun.

And the boys who dived from the bow-sprits  
go like spindles twisting still,  
naked bodies plunging into black light  
with a coin between the teeth, swimming still,

while the sun with golden needles sews  
sails and wet wood and colors of the sea;  
even now they're going down obliquely,  
the white lekythoi,  
toward the pebbles on the sea floor.

Light, angelic and black,  
laughter of waves on the sea's highways  
tear-stained laughter,  
the old suppliant sees you  
as he moves to cross the invisible fields—\*  
light mirrored in his blood,  
the blood that gave birth to Eteocles and Polynices.  
Day, angelic and black;  
the brackish taste of woman that poisons the prisoner  
emerges from the wave a cool branch adorned with drops.  
Sing little Antigone, sing, O sing...  
I'm not speaking to you about things past, I'm speaking  
about love;  
decorate your hair with the sun's thorns,  
dark girl;  
the heart of the Scorpion has set, \*  
the tyrant in man has fled,  
and all the daughters of the sea, Nereids, Graeae, \*  
hurry toward the shimmering of the rising goddess:  
whoever has never loved will love, \*  
in the light:  
and you find yourself  
in a large house with many windows open  
running from room to room, not knowing from where to  
look out first, \*  
because the pine-trees will vanish, and the mirrored moun-  
tains, and the chirping of birds  
the sea will drain dry, shattered glass, from north and south  
your eyes will empty of daylight  
the way the cicadas suddenly, all together, fall silent.

Giorgos Seferis