

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, [T.S. Eliot](http://www.poemhunter.com/thomas-stearns-eliot/) and [Ezra Pound](http://www.poemhunter.com/ezra-pound/).

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.

Other

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 Mythistorema 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 pharmaceutic 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

Helen

<i>Teucer: . . . in sea-girt Cyprus, where it was decreed
by Apollow that I should live, giving the city
the name of Salamis in memory of my island home.

.....
Helen: I never went to Troy; it was a phantom.

.....
Servant: What? You mean it was only for a cloud
that we struggled so much? </i>

— Euripides, Helen

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

Shy nightingale, in the breathing of the leaves,
you who bestow the forest's musical coolness
on the sundered bodies, on the souls
of those who know they will not return.
Blind voice, you who grope in the darkness of memory
for footsteps and gestures — I wouldn't dare say kisses —
and the bitter raving of the frenzied slave-woman.

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

Platres: where is Platres? And this island: who knows it?
I've lived my life hearing names I've never heard before:
new countries, new idiocies of men
or of the gods;

 my fate, which wavers
between the last sword of some Ajax
and another Salamis,
brought me here, to this shore.

The moon

rose from the sea like Aphrodite,
covered the Archer's stars, now moves to find
the heart of Scorpio, and alters everything.
Truth, where's the truth?
I too was an archer in the war;
my fate: that of a man who missed his target.

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 grassQ
I've seen snakes crossed with viper~
knotted over the evil generation
our fate.

Voice 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
Ο 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.
Α 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
ο n which the tender foot of a young faun stamped
do γ ο υ 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

'Ι cannot explain it,' you said, 'Ι cannot explain it,'
Ι 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 drop 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

that bark.

If it is to know itself, they said
it must look into its own soul, they said
and the oar's struck the sea's gold
in the sunset.

We went past many capes many islands the sea
leading to another sea, gulls and seals.

Sometimes disconsolate women wept
lamenting their lost children
and others frantic sought Alexander the Great
and glories buried in the depths of Asia.

We moored on shores full of night-scenes,
the birds singing, with waters that left on the hands
the memory of a great happiness.

But the voyages did not end.

Their souls became one with the oars and the oarlocks
with the solemn face of the prow
with the rudder's wake
with the water that shattered their image.

The companions died one by one,
with lowered eyes. Their oars
mark the place where they sleep on the shore.

No one remembers them. Justice

5

We didn't know them
 deep down it was hope that said
we'd known them since early childhood.
We saw them perhaps twice and then they took to the ships:
cargoes of coal, cargoes of grain, and our friends
lost beyond the ocean forever.
Dawn finds us beside the tired lamp
drawing on paper, awkwardly, painfully,
ships mermaids or sea shells;
at dusk we go down to the river
because it shows us the way to the sea;
and we spend the nights in cellars that smell of tar.

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?

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 our 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 th 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 wtih 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

<i>fools, who ate the cattle of Helios Hyperion;
but he deprived them of the day of their return. </i>
— 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 Phodes 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 status 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 drop 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