

THE
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POEMS
OF
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*Translated
by Jeffrey Carson
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and notes
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Translators' Note

This is the first complete collection of poetry by Odysseus Elytis in any language, including Greek. Full presentation benefits great poetry. Since there is no Muse of translation, we have summoned Gumption and Humility to help keep Elytis's sensibility alive in English.

We began putting Elytis into English over twenty years ago, even before he suggested it. He liked the fact that we are a poet and a musician working with similar materials, that we live in the Aegean (on Paros) and so are intimate with the physical as well as the emotional basis of his imagery, and that we began this endeavor for the love of it, with no thought of publication.

Elytis always encouraged us to be free and interpretive and to go after the "feel." His subtle play of mind in language and his melodic exaltation make him much more difficult to translate, cadence by cadence, than his two great predecessors, Cavafy and Seferis; but all his translators have found that, because of the poetry's emotional ordering and clustering of images, it usually comes over best when translated literally. We too are literal, though where the situation required we sought equivalences. We abandoned efforts to reproduce elaborate meters in such poems as *The Monogram* and "Mystic Versicles," which would have been as distorting in Elytis as in Pindar. The odes of *The Axion Esti*, however, depend so much on metrical contrast with the rest of the work, that we felt obliged to find appropriate closed measures. Form is part of a poet's signature, and honest translators deviate reluctantly. Pound advised going for the form first, as Elytis himself does when he translates songs. So when Elytis rhymes a song, so do we. We have sought not to oversimplify his extremely complex style for the sake of ease, nor to fill out his sparse, musical punctuation, nor to disguise the Greek accent.

One example: our *glaucous* is an exact transliteration; it means the color of Athena's owl-eyes—blue-gray, sea blue-green. Another example: we keep some plurals more awkward in English than Greek, like “happinesses.”

Except for the recent *West of Sorrow*, all our translations have had the opportunity to ripen for years between reworkings. The felicities of previous translator-critics, two of whom are personal friends, were freely drawn from.

This volume includes every poem Elytis published in books. At his preference, *The Sovereign Sun*, a libretto, and *The Rhos of Eros*, song lyrics, though translated, are omitted. The Introduction is partly intended as a brief reader's guide; the Chronology, at the back, provides a framework for Elytis's life. The notes are copious, but it should be remembered that Elytis himself never annotated, so English readers will often have more information than Greek readers. The notes gloss information that educated Greeks might know or look up and that foreigners don't and can't; much else is included.

“Open Papers” is Elytis's arrangement of his 1979 *Selection*, key passages from his huge prose collection of that name; in its compressed thought and lyricism, it has poetic force. The only straight prose included is his Nobel speech.

We wish to acknowledge the encouragement and assistance generously given by Peter Burian, Elizabeth Carson, James Clark, and Stanley Lombardo. Dorothy Gregory generously provided detailed and learned criticism that much improved our work. James Williams the Longobardite's wide knowledge of Greek helped immensely with interpretations and with the notes, and his lyric ear improved many pieces; the loveliest poem in *The Little Seafarer* is mostly his translation. Much is owed to the continuing support and advice of Richard Lethen, who first brought our work to Elytis's attention. Our largest debt is to the Master himself, who kept on writing beautiful poems for us.

Introduction

Odysseus Elytis is possibly the most praised poet of the second half of the twentieth century; asked to name our Rilke, our Yeats, our Eliot, poets and critics more and more turn to him. Lawrence Durrell has written, "His poems are spells, and they conjure up that eternal Greek world which has haunted and continues to haunt the European consciousness with its hints of a perfection that remains always a possibility. The Greek poet aims his heart and his gift directly at the sublime—for nothing else will do."¹ When he won the Nobel Prize in literature in 1979, the committee praised his work as "grounded in the Greek tradition and depicting with sensuous strength and intellectual clearheadedness modern man's struggle for freedom and creativeness." Not only is Elytis a great poet, he is, it seems, the great poet we need.

THE SECOND HELLAS

In the intensity of Greek sunlight, too bright for commentary, poetry is not essentially about anything. Reading deeply, you are the poet living in his soul's second Hellas. This is a terrain of sensible madness, whose lineaments conduce to poetry, whose poets create works like nobody else's. Pindar, Propertius, Hölderlin, Wordsworth, Montale, Eliot, Rilke, and Odysseus Elytis are all residents. (Equally great poets such as Archilochus, Ovid, Donne, Baudelaire, and Yeats are not.) However much the former may touch upon politics, ethics, ideas, or society, their poems breathe a different air. Unattached to commentary, linear clarity, philosophy (all of which they may sometimes employ), they, like

1. "The Poetry of Elytis," *Books Abroad* (August 1975): 660.

Geometric Ionian colonizers, receive oracles, undertake hazardous sea journeys, found colonies, lay out poleis with temples to old and new gods, dig wells, plant crops. They do not “make it new” but make it from the beginning. However personal, such poets are not confessional, in that they are not interested in calling attention to themselves. They create a place where it is possible to perceive the unbearable joy and terror of the universe and survive; such perception is, exactly, tragedy. As a new citizen of this land, Elytis, born Odysseus Alepoudhelis on November 2, 1911, created his name from words for freedom, hope, and Greece. If Greece was to be for him the signature of eternal values, a second Hellas, so would it be his signature.

Expressionist malformations are useless to poets of direct presentation. They do not seek to make sense of the world, their poems *are* the sense of the world. That is why Elytis considered his poetry nonrationalist and limpid. He did not want to borrow Ovid’s name for the nymph of the deep well; an archaic poet, he wanted to evoke its waters and call her into being. Only then does he name her, in a “myth-making . . . *without* invoking any mythical figures.”² The myth is the entire opus.

**EROS AND THANATOS: ORIENTATIONS, SUN THE FIRST, SONG
HEROIC AND MOURNING FOR THE LOST SECOND LIEUTENANT
OF THE ALBANIAN CAMPAIGN**

“Eros, Poetry, Eros and Poetry inseparably, ought to provide the example.”³ When in 1935 the twenty-four-year-old Elytis published his earliest poems, the authentic configurations of his *tópos* came into being with them. These poems of nature and metamorphosis—the “First Poems” section in *Orientations*—resemble no other Greek poems, yet they are immediately perceived as quintessentially Greek, in that they seek symmetry and shape, are imagistic, insistently rhythmical, obsessed with language, and brimming with praise of creation. They are an intimation of a Platonic world of the possible, as if Blake’s “Marriage of Heaven and Hell” were sculpted for dry sunlight and not etched for damp shade.

Elytis’s first published line, in “Of the Aegean,” is “Eros.” According

2. “Odysseus Elytis on His Poetry: From an Interview with Ivar Ivask,” translated from the French by Astrid and Ivar Ivask, in *Books Abroad* (August 1975): 639 (hereafter referred to as Interview).

3. From Elytis’s “Chronicle of a Decade,” in *Open Papers*, pp. 248–49 (hereafter referred to as “Chronicle”).

to Hesiod, with Homer, the earliest known Greek poet, Eros is the first active force, who conquered the souls of men and gods; all the beauty and the anguish originate with him. According to Elytis's beloved Sappho, Eros is the child of Sky, and loves to ascend. Elytis's second line is "The archipelago," and it is the Aegean world that provides Elytis with his images and suggests his gnomic, Heraclitean abstractions. This maiden strophe closes with an image of a sea-voyaging sailor singing to the wind and waves: it is Elytis proclaiming his life's course, a course he was still proclaiming in his most recent book, published for his eighty-fourth birthday. He is sailing to "the beloved," the girl who is Poetry, who is Kore, who embodies eros, as in "Epigram" in "Second Nature," where the erotic kiss makes her "a woman." These three things—the manifestations of eros, the vision of Kore, and the hazardous sea journey to a diaphanous Paradise where ecstasy and reality are commingled and transformed—are the dominant features in what he has called "Elytisisle." The most persistent presence in Elytis's cosmos is the lovely nymph of place or idea—a conception already radiant in Homer. She can be the almost abstract Arete in "Sleep of the Valiant," or the richly human Maria of *Maria Nephele*. "Ideas are born at the same time as their verbal expression,"⁴ he said. Greek naturally transforms ideas into girls, as oak trees into Dryades.

Elytis, the youngest of six children, was born in Crete of a well-to-do family from Lesbos (like Sappho, Alcaeus, and Krinagoras) where he continued to spend much time. He attended school and lived most of his adult life in Athens. Dorian Crete, with its living tradition of oral poetry and spirit of fierce independence; Aeolian Lesbos, with its groves, bays, memories of Sappho, and the Anatolian mountains stark across the bay; and Ionian Athens, with its intellectual traditions and connection to Europe: these three enclose Elytis's Aegean, out of whose spiritual marble and mysterious clarity he constructed his Temple to Poetry. For a Greek with open eyes, the Parthenon is the easiest of buildings to comprehend. And near it stood in sunlight the ancient statues of kore, the essence of museful femininity.

Elytis's generation revived Greek poetry, which, innovative in the nineteenth century, had lapsed into a gloomy romantic backwater. In 1931 George Seferis's *Strophe* jogged it into modernism. Though Elytis knew and deeply admired Seferis, he found Seferis's spiritual desolation alien. The young Elytis, a law student in Athens, looked to the new movements in France (where he lived from 1948 to 1952 and 1969 to 1971,

4. Interview, p. 637.

in close association with poets and artists such as Char, Camus, Picasso, Ungaretti) for “available oxygen,”⁵ and he found it in surrealism and the Mediterranean’s ideal shapes. In an Athens bookshop in 1928 Elytis first read Eluard, who was writing poems of shape and of eros; it was this flexible surrealism that Elytis found useful, rather than that of Breton, whom he nevertheless always honored. But Elytis’s surrealism in *Orientalisms* (published 1939) is hardly recognizable as such; his clustering of images is closer to Rimbaud’s. His love of unity and sunlit clarity keeps his work Hellenic, and he has compared surrealists to his cherished pre-Socratics. Surrealism did, however, free his associative powers and trust in his poetic intuition and shocked him into “a method of apprehending the world through the senses.”⁶ The last chapter of poems in *Orientalisms*, “In Service of Summer,” was immediately recognized as containing several of Greece’s great lyric poems; “The Mad Pomegranate Tree” (in which a girl turns into a pomegranate tree “who opens her wings on the breast of things”) and “Marina of the Rocks” (in which she is a fierce sea nymph “blue to the bone”) are two of them. With publication of *Orientalisms*, Elytis’s world was in place; his later books were to widen and deepen, and inevitably darken, his responses as his intuitions coalesced into his poetics. Even in his somberest moods, however, he never doubted his poetic provenience. From Homer to Elytis, the basis of Greek’s best poetry—indeed of sculpture and architecture also—has remained the identification of ideal beauty with moral good and truth.

Orientalisms contains odes, elegies, epigrams, dithyrambs, night-pieces, and prose poems: the opening out of a young poet. Obvious forms are eschewed for new ones, in the manner of Sappho, Archilochus, or even the Provençal eroticists. The lyricism in his next book, *Sun the First* (published 1943), is just as intense but intentionally less splendid. We sense the poet consciously maturing his art, refining his technique, rejecting what is tangential to his sensibility, tightening his control, making his erotic lyricism more direct. The sailor-poet, now the “Child with Skinned Knee” in a sailor suit,⁷ takes the Aegean’s gifts—sun, water, flowers, boats, country chapels, all the “naked landscape”—into his sensibility and is expressed by them in a glittering but uncluttered diction that has frequently attracted composers. And in “Sailor

5. Ibid., p. 631.

6. Ibid.

7. Elytis’s privately published “July Word” (from *The Elegies of Jutting Rock*) is illustrated by childhood photographs, including several of himself in a sailor suit.

Boy of the Orchard" the erotic inspiration for this dangerous world is made explicit when "the Virgin Annunciate enters naked." Elytis is not a Christian, but he is imbued with the words of the Orthodox tradition, and he adapts "Christianity's idea of sanctification . . . to the world of the senses."⁸ The Sun, whose mysterium is noon, is lord; in his "hard Sophoclean light" (Pound's phrase), intensity must be borne, and sin must be unlearned, as in "Body of Summer": "O naked body of summer burnt / . . . / Basil's breath above the curly pubis." The seven-poem "Variations" sequence that closes the book (Pythagorean seven is the magic number throughout Elytis, as in Ptolemy, as in the Revelation of John), follows the eros-girl from the red of sunrise through the violet of sunset, passing through the green of newgrowth, the yellow of sunlight, and the blues of sea and sky. In the fourth poem, the central one, she accepts her theophany as the "Orange Girl," and agrees to be shown "naked to his thirty-two winds!"

The "red rose" of *Sun the First*'s epigraph is the poet's emblem for an interfused beauty, a beauty laid over daily events like an invisible net. Greece's terrible sufferings in World War II play no part, though they dominated the poet's quotidian life. In 1940–41 Greece joined the Allies, and her small army went to repel Mussolini's invading Italians in Albania. During this campaign, in which Elytis served with distinction as a second lieutenant until he nearly died of typhoid fever, the Greek army performed with heroism and self-sacrifice, and at first their successes were astonishing. Bitter occupation ensued. This experience, not needed for *Sun the First*, provided the material for his next book-length poem, *Song Heroic and Mourning for the Lost Second Lieutenant of the Albanian Campaign* (published 1945).

The religion, art, philosophy, and literature of pre-Classical Greece much influenced Elytis (those of the later Classical period and the image of Greece bequeathed us by the Renaissance did not). In early religion, a hero is a man who, having bravely confronted the ambient terror of the universe, is transformed into a being semidivine. Heroes like Jason, Heracles, Bellerophon, and Perseus do not seek risk; it is thrust on them by an inscrutable Fate, by gods acting in patterns men cannot discern. Heroic lives and deaths are often tragic (Elytis compares the lieutenant with Achilles). But had *King Lear* been written by Sophocles, it would have concluded, like *Oedipus in Colonus*, with the establishment of a heroon. It is this process of transformation that *Song Heroic* accomplishes. Drawing on themes from and suggesting the meter of

8. Interview, p. 632.

traditional ballads, from Christianity (Jesus too is a hero) and from ancient hero cults, Elytis's threnody becomes ecstatic laudation. Such words as *desolation, horror, evil, shadow, famine, and fear* accompany the lieutenant's last agony and death in battle, when "the eternal sun thus suddenly abandoned the world!" (IV). He was a *kouros*, an *ephebe* who "competed in the stone-throw" (VI); he was the cajoling lover from "Variations on a Sunbeam," who here is "Embracing bitter-orange girls at night" because "Eros was so big in his guts" (VI). In death he is a hero, ascending to "the Easter of the sky" to the chime of "Crystal bells" (XII); he is a part of our mythology, at whose altar we the pious must lay our wreathes forever, to purify our passions, because "life begins here!" (XIV). Elytis wrote, "I shall never forget the groans of those wounded. . . . They made me swear an oath in the name of the Resurrection of that brave Hellenic Hero, who became now for me the Second Lieutenant of the Albanian Campaign, that I would advance into battle with this talisman of my lyrical idea."⁹ Henceforward, the immense effort of vision required to transmute the tragic human evil Elytis experienced in the war is always a counterweight to the pure song of Aegean loveliness.

THE GREAT AND SMALL WORLD: *THE AXION ESTI*, SIX AND ONE REMORSES FOR THE SKY

In the next few years Elytis published several fragments, later rejected, that try to join the Aegean and Albanian notes in a single chord. Pursuing Mediterranean values, he translated Lorca. Though requiring creative solitude (but not erotic solitude), he was active in Greek and international cultural life. He was director of programming and broadcasting for Athens' National Broadcasting Institute, literary critic for a popular daily newspaper, Greek representative to the Second International Gathering of Modern Painters, member of the International Union of Art Critics, member of the Group of Twelve that gives out Greece's literary awards, and so forth. Before his first sojourn in France (Elytis read much foreign literature in French), he finally found his mature impetus¹⁰ and form, and he gradually began writing *The Axion Esti*.

9. Letter to Kimon Friar, quoted in his *The Sovereign Sun*, Temple University Press, 1974, p. 17 (hereafter referred to as Friar).

10. "Suddenly he was struck by an insight that had for him the apocalyptic power of a miracle: he perceived the organic relation between nature and language; he realized that things are born as the soul, responding to them, baptizes them in sound, which also means that language intrinsically conveys the ethos of a

The Axion Esti (published in 1959 after long silence) is the most ambitious poem in modern Greek, and probably the most complex sequence of our century. With it Elytis became indubitably a major poet. The burning Aegean lyricism of his first two books is here, and so is the confrontation and transformation of death and evil of the third. What is new are the historical and moral awareness, the range, the synthetic power, and the stereoscopic sway of Greek. Like *The Wasteland* or *The Cantos*, it is a new species of creation. The two great Greek poets of this century before Elytis, Cavafy and Seferis, tended to keep to one way of writing—somber and chaste in Seferis; historically disillusioned and lexically heightened in Cavafy. Elytis used both these modes. But he also worked in Pound-like lyrically fragmented free verse, Eliot-like cultural allusiveness and muffled autobiography, Thomas-like richness, and Stevens-like abstraction; there are also sections in long-disused, formidably elaborate Byzantine forms, in quatrains of sprung rhythm, and in song form. Within a matrix of demotic Greek, words from Homer, from Sappho, from the Orthodox church service, and from Cretan peasants glint like mica. Rhyme, alliteration, rhythmical prose narrative, folk and learned references, private allusions, wordplay—all are mixed together with an astonishing, organic freshness, as if each word were a unique sea-faceted pebble held up to the relentless light. It would be possible, and instructive, to write as many annotations as there are lines, and yet the lines all sing, are all fresh.

Though *The Axion Esti*'s elaboration is as complex as the *Iliad*'s, its overall design is as simple as the *Iliad*'s. All this passionate variety is bound together by a structure as obsessive in its working out as that of Joyce's *Ulysses*, to keep the proliferation of imagery and language from overwhelming the poem's epic unity. The title (which means "worthy it is"), though not modern Greek, is familiar to all Greeks from the Byzantine liturgy.

The poem's structure is tripartite: In the seven hymns of "The Genesis," Hesiod's Eros creates the world and imbues the poet with his divine power of creation and of praise;¹¹ the poet speaks with a personal

particular landscape." Dorothy Gregory, "Odysseus Elytis," in *European Writers*, ed. George Stade, vol. 13, Scribners, 1990, pp. 2964–65 (hereafter referred to as Gregory).

11. "The *Axion Esti* is, in fact, an account of Eros's doings: his shaping the world anew; his battle with hatred, enmity, misunderstanding and their darkness; his victory, justification and praise." Andonis Decavalles, "Eros: His Power, Forms and Transformations in the Poetry of Odysseus Elytis," in *Books Abroad* (August 1975): 667 (hereafter referred to as Decavalles).

("I") voice and with an objective ("he") voice; each hymn is "a stage of the Creation, of the Ages of Man, of the hours from dawn to midday; the section ends with nighttime, because the day's progress is abruptly interrupted by the appearance of Danger, incarnated by the Others and coinciding with the poet's maturity."¹² In three sections of psalms, odes, and readings in "The Passion," the poet suffers its agonies, confronts and overcomes internal and external evil, and affirms his tradition. He starts with "Behold here am I / created for young Korai and Aegean islands," and he learns after so much suffering that "the price paid" was worthwhile. The concluding section, "The Gloria," is a triple victory chant of ecstatic praise earned by the struggle.

The first movement of "The Gloria" closes with a formal glorification of the girl-nymph, echoing the Byzantine Acathist Hymn to the Virgin: "Hail girl Burning and hail girl Verdant / . . . / Hail Girl prophetic and daedalic." The second movement reaches its first climax in a ritual praise of flowers, and this leads naturally to a lovely litany of girls (the Greek for girl, *koritsi*, is a diminutive of *kore*):

The girls the bluegrass of utopia
the girls the Pleiades led astray
the girls Vessels of Mysteries
filled to the brim yet bottomless

Acrid in darkness yet miraculous
painted in light and yet all black
turned on themselves like lighthouse beams
sun-devouring and moon-strolling

*Ersi, Myrto, Marina
Helen, Roxanne, Photeine
Anna, Alexandra, Cynthia*

The hatching of whispers in the conchs
a girl lost like a dream: Arignota
a distant light that says: sleep
perplexed kisses like a crowd of trees

The bit of blouse the wind wears out
the grassy down along the shin

12. *The Axion Esti*, translated by Edmund Keely and George Savidis, University of Pittsburgh Press, 1974, p. 151.

and the deep violet salt of the vulva
and the cold water of the Full Moon

These lines both deify the girls ("Vessels of Mysteries") and humanize them ("bit of blouse"); they call on the traditional Minoan symbols (full moon, shells), give a strong sense of their physical presence ("grassy down along the shin," "violet salt of the vulva"), and recall Sappho's band of girls ("Arignota"). They are Proust's "jeunes filles en fleur" in a seascape frieze, a *thiasos* of nymphs generated by the poet's humble wonderment. The girl personifies the poetic idea whom Mediterraneans and most poets find a sacred presence. From the litany of girls' names, three are of especial importance: Marina, Myrto, and Helen; three Korai, Charities, Nymphs. They are in the service of Aphrodite, who is divine love, since a goddess; who is sensual love, since a woman.

The motifs and techniques of *The Axion Esti* radiate through all Elytis, although he went on to write books as elaborate and poems even more lyrically intense. When, in 1964, the composer Mikis Theodorakis set it to music, it became so popular that today every Greek can sing some of its words; such favor is unknown to poets in Western countries.

In *The Axion Esti*, Elytis succeeded in identifying himself with Greece, and Greece with the world. Whitmanesque self-projection is the method; personal experience and thought are the engine that powers it. While composing the epic, he was also writing the seven poems of *Six and One Remorses for the Sky* (published 1960), in a completely different style: paragraphs whose each phrase is a hard rhythmical unit marked by a caesura. As always, the poems make a sequence or journey to a "new awareness"¹³ that starts with the poet keeping watch for the moment of transformation. Granted a vision by Kore, he then can speak the magical words she gives him, words "that demagnetize the infinite!" The sequence could also be considered as a single flash, a quantum leap out of time, during which the poet dispassionately performs "The Autopsy" (one of his greatest poems, written 1957) on himself, in a kind of Adonis ritual for new birth, to overcome Evil and promote Eros, for only

13. Decavalles, p. 671: "The poet's remorses are for a sky, the transcendent summit of his Eros, which had lost its earlier innocence through the poet's and the world's war and postwar experience. These poems are inner questions and efforts to pass from a common and personal sense of guilt to a new and liberated awareness, to draw from experience a new knowledge and hope and so help a new sky—now more emphatically an inner one—attain a new purity on a higher and more conscious spiritual level."

in self-knowledge (*autopsy* means “to see with one’s own eyes”) will we “have early fruit this year.”

Each of the poems enacts this epiphanic moment. In “Origin of Landscape” a swallow skims over the poet’s head, and then, out of time, his kore appears. He undertakes a spiritual Aegean passage into the “boundless blue” and depths of human imperfection, learns what purity is, and, like a hero who has returned with knowledge of death, walks “without Gods.” As the swallow completes its swoop, he is granted the vision: “Noon.” In “The Other Noah,” the eternal moment begins with the flash of horizons hurled into whitewash (*whitewash* refers to the dazzling purity in the Aegean), and this allows Eros—here “lust”—to assume his “supreme moment,” so that the “Woman” can send the angelic bird to warble “Trills of Paradise.” All great poets have a single story, and this is Elytis’s.

In the sequence’s last poem, “Seven Days for Eternity,” he uses the Christian word “transfiguration” for Kore and his mind-born muses, but the sense is supra-Christian (Elytis, like Yeats and Rilke, includes Christianity in a metaphysics that also accommodates the pagan). He proceeds day by limpid day to a kind of enlightenment. On the last day, Saturday, he overcomes death; the penultimate day is given over to the girls:

FRIDAY—“The Transfiguration” of women I have loved
without hope: Echo: Ma-ri-naaa! Hel-ennn! With each toll
of the bell, lilac in my arms. Then strange light, and two dis-
similar doves that drew me up high to a great ivy-adorned
house.

Lilac in Greek is named for Easter, and doves are archetypal images for Aphrodite, Mary, and the Holy Ghost. Helen (the beautiful woman, Helen of Troy) and Marina (wild sea nymph, Shakespeare’s storm girl, Eliot’s wave-lapped vision of new life) appear throughout Elytis, and so does Myrto (from “Sunday,” and often called “myrtle”): they are all kora. *Kore* means “statue of a girl,” “maiden,” “Persephone,” and in today’s everyday usage, “daughter.”

SOLAR METAPHYSICS: THE LIGHT-TREE AND THE FOURTEENTH BEAUTY, THE MONOGRAM, STEPCHILDREN

During the 1960s, Elytis, by then well known and still active in cultural affairs, traveled widely in America and Russia (both by government invitation), in Europe, and in Greece. He translated plays and poems and,

when the junta grabbed power in 1967, returned to the making of collages and gouaches, some of which later adorned his books. While in France, he also wrote hard. (A perfectionist, Elytis always revised scrupulously, and published only when a sequence was seasoned, genuine, and properly shaped.) In 1971 the great new work appeared, *The Light-Tree and the Fourteenth Beauty*.

In theme and outward configuration the twenty-one sequenced poems of *The Light-Tree* seem a development of the *Remorses*; they too start with birds bringing the poet new possibilities that are shown to him as kore; they too conclude with the gift of the silver poem. And within this limpid moment, small ones burst into consciousness, like bubbles from a deep well. But the feeling is a lot more varied, the rhythms freer, the interrelationships more complex than in *Remorses*. Elytis said that the basis of *The Light-Tree* is his theory of "solar metaphysics" and a "Lyricism of Architectural Invention,"¹⁴ so that the quality of diaphaneity is dominant throughout. "What I mean by limpidity is that behind a given thing something different can be seen and behind that still something else, and so on and so on. . . . The limpidity which exists in nature from the physical point of view is transposed into poetry."¹⁵

The identification of Platonic Idea with Eros occurs many times. In "Palm Sunday," Christ's entry into Jerusalem is the poet's into Paradise, carrying the frond the bird gave him. In "The Kore the Northwind Brought," he waits in despair while nature prepares him for the kore's appearance; then, as the moment commences with a wild olive-tree's sussuration, and with the strength of his experience of her, an "idea" can "become immortal" and he can light the candle in the whitewashed country chapel. (The Aegean islands sparkle with many white chapels, often near the sea or on some inaccessible crag, dedicated to a certain saint. They are roughly built by the local people, who frequently use bits of antique marble in the walls. These chapels are among Elytis's favorite images.) In the short "Delos," the poet, perhaps after a walk through the sunbaked ruins, dives into the clear sea near Apollo's barren island; and the ideal realm opens like a sea anemone, opening "the heart of the sun." He returns with Eros's spiritual secret, "I love." In Aegean water, one's skin seems to glow, and sunrays plunge visibly straight down. The six-

14. Interview, p. 639. In "Chronicle" (p. 322), Elytis describes his attempt to indite an essay titled "Pour un lyrisme d'inventions architecturales et de métaphysique solaire" for Camus and Char's periodical *Empedocles*.

15. Ibid., p. 642.

line poem "August Event" concludes with a compressed image for Elytis's chief idea: "And the girl's bird took a crumb of the sea and ascended." Elytis's term for such moments is *instantaneity*, by which he meant "an event which happens in a split second but which can be made to include much more."¹⁶

Probably the most popular poem in *The Light-Tree* is "Little Green Sea," a pure lyric almost in the manner of *Sun the First*, but more thoughtful. Here Elytis names Kore "Thalassa" or Sea, rather than the Latin "Marina." She is a girl not quite on the verge of adult comprehension ("Little green sea thirteen years old"), whom he would like to educate "in Ionia," that is, in those eastern Aegean cities which saw the birth of Classical Greek civilization. He wishes her to help him overcome the evils of fate so men can become noble, can "hold the air like statues." Elytis also wants the repository of Ionian wisdom to include Christian love ("the reflection on the ceiling / From the Kyrie eleison"). As often in religious poetry, Donne's and Herbert's for example, the poet can unite with her wisdom through sexual intercourse, which must be secret because the quotidian world normally mistrusts such an embrace, despite its innocence. The wisdom itself comes in fragments: "Bits of stone the words of the Gods," which are also the fragments of the fierce Ionian philosopher Heraclitus, who preached eternal mutability. Heraclitus, mentioned often in Elytis, "held that the human soul . . . was the centre of all the energies of the cosmos,"¹⁷ and that mere reason could not penetrate the depths of logos without poetic intuition.

Elytis's enduring motif of the journey dominates the sequence's two longest poems, "The Odyssey" and "The Light-Tree." In "The Odyssey" the boy in the sailor suit from *Sun the First*, here explicitly the poet, imagines his second-story room a ship, skippered by his father, interjecting maritime orders. On the voyage he discovers the world's abundance, which supplies many prizes for the poet, especially, "A girl." As the voyage broadens, he is granted the full sexual vision of woman.

"The Odyssey" is under the influence of his father, "The Light-Tree" of his mother, introduced in "Palm Sunday." They are divided by the short poem "The Archetype," in which the child's vision of the Woman is understood, and translated via imagery into eternity. The "Light-Tree," the book's fourteenth poem, is a vision the boy sees from his window of a transfiguring sunbeam. In the first of the poem's four sections,

16. Ibid., p. 641.

17. Werner Jaeger, *Paideia, The Ideals of Greek Culture*, Oxford University Press, 1939; vol. 1, p. 179.

the poet receives glimpses of Platonic perfection, but the bird too quickly vanishes into the sun. In the third, the feminine journey within contrasted with masculine seafaring in "The Odyssey" leads to the anguished knowledge of eros. In the last section, the mature poet attempts to recapture the light-tree's fresh inspiration, which our society disapproves of and cheapens. The short poem that follows, "Palintrope," in an elaborate cyclical meter, bucks him up ("Courage: death this is"), in preparation for Mt. Tabor's transfiguration. In "The Garden of the Scorched Hand"—like "Delos" a sea-dive poem—the sea's garden cools his desperation and, while he is upside down, rights the world. The sea garden vanishes, but the scorched hand he extended remains forever scarred to preclude forgetfulness.

The next poem, "What Cannot Be," keeps the longing at a high pitch, wrenching salvation from despair. But the poem after that, "So Long as Abided the Star," achieves the release. The star is exactly that which concludes "Archetype," wherein Helen (called "Woman") is transformed into Aphrodite's erotic dove of peace and then into Hesperus, Aphrodite as the Evening Star. When Elytis repeats the first couplet for his conclusion, it is crucially altered. The remaining poems are all able, though always after desperate struggle, to recapture the vision (the lunar "fourteenth beauty"), that culminates in "a silver poem."

Despite Greece's military government, which probably suggested many despairing notes in the poems (in 1972 the resolutely unpolitical poet refused Greece's lucrative literature award), the early '70s were productive years for Elytis. In addition to *The Light-Tree*, in 1971 he published a libretto, *The Sovereign Sun*, and in 1972 a book of his song lyrics, *The Rhos of Eros*, and a long love poem, *The Monogram*.

The Monogram is that difficult thing, a pure love lyric, whose verbal loveliness makes translators grind their teeth with anguish. In Elytis, love for Woman (Kore conscious of Eros) often appears as memory; seemingly lost, she must be created within. The need for internal recreation explains *The Monogram's* extremely elaborate, mostly concealed structure, which severely disciplines his musical and passionate loneliness. The poem contains seven parts, each of seven lines or multiples thereof arranged symmetrically. The meter requires diagramming to be apprehended, though the plentiful rhyme has no scheme.

The erotic and aetherial beloved has been lost, and the poet relocates her in Paradise, where loneliness becomes poetry. *The Monogram's* legend, "I shall mourn always—hear me?—for you alone, in Paradise," is woven throughout the poem. "Mourn" means a mourning song, mourning in part for the world's obdurate denial of such love ("It's too

early yet in this world”), and *Paradise* is Elytis’s Dantesque word for the beautiful Platonic reality concealed among the lineaments of perceptible reality (“In Paradise I’ve marked an island out”). Elytis’s Platonism is mostly derived from the *Phaedo*, the *Symposium*, and the *Phaedrus*, in which Eros is a daemon, one of those demiurges who move the elements. In Plato, physical beauty is the lure to spiritual beauty; in Elytis, the opposite is also true.

In 1974, along with much prose, Elytis published an important book of poems, *Stepchildren*, comprising longer self-contained poems and poems that never found a place in his earlier books: two series of seven poems. Each poem is dated, the earliest 1939 and the latest 1972. It contains some of his greatest poems, from the delicate little lyric “Mozart: Romance” (1960), to the throbbing night-pieces “To the Moon of Mytilene” (1953) and “The Leaf Seer” (1965), to a complex restatement of his personal Aegean *tópos* “Elytonesos” (1971). The two big poems are “Death and Resurrection of Constantine Paleologus” (1968) and “Villa Natacha” (1969).

“Death and Resurrection” is in some ways a reworking of the motifs of *Song Heroic*. The last emperor of Byzantium, Constantine Paleologus, is the heroic defender of Greek civilization against the invading Ottoman Turks in 1453; his ecstatic transformation, like the second lieutenant’s, lifts the poem above despair. Elytis called such ascendancy “meteorism . . . a tendency to mount up into the sky, to rise toward the heights. . . . Constantine Paleologus falls, but he always rises again.”¹⁸ The poem is not historical; rather, the emperor stands for the poetic sensibility, its failures in mundane reality, its triumphs in eternal reality: “Noon from night and no one at his side Only his faithful words.” The invisible world, unlike the mire and slaughter around him, blesses him: “Virgin maidens their bosoms glowing a summer dawn brought him fresh palm fronds and branches of myrtle uprooted from the depths.” Myrto’s myrtle is evergreen.

Elytis, punctilious in his avoidance of politics in a country where political dissension has proved so destructive, loathed the junta, and felt, like other poets, that free poetry could not be published, or even written, in Greece. He left for France, where he wrote “Villa Natacha” at the estate of his fellow Lesbian, the art collector and publisher Tériade. The poem’s first part begins with the simple statement, “I have something to say.” In the next stanza, he names the unfamiliar flora in Téri-

18. Interview, p. 641.

ade's famous garden while smoking "my first free cigarette." The "I say" then becomes prophetic of "a revolution" into beauty. In part Two, Mediterranean correspondences recall the deep meanings of Lesbos to him, and this leads to another "I say," prophesying the overcoming of evil in the name of innocence, "wearing a plain white shirt." The third part laments "Man, unintentionally evil," and the concluding "I say" predicts, somewhat ruefully, the Platonic Paradise: "even the Invisible is present."

The metrical intricacy and difficult lyrical compression of "Mystic Versicles," ignored by translators and critics but highly valued by Elytis, starts like *The Axion Esti* with a Genesis wherein the Adamic poet awakes to a world which will not be fully created till it is verified by him. The poet seeks his poem even "in the din of the waves," but he is forced to judge himself for "The times I was unjust," as a ritual of purification. As trial he undergoes aphasic meaninglessness. *The Light-Tree's* bird suggests eternity, and so the stars (eternity) rain letters—the elements of poetry—on him: "Letters here and there but not one word." Finally he has a vision of everlastingness as a goat that chews "the leaves of the centuries," and so can "speak the miracle." The idea of a monk dedicated to poetry is frequent in Elytis (e.g., "The Moon of Mytilene" and *The Axion Esti's* Ode 11) and the simplicity of his familial relations and industriousness before the blank page make it truthful.

TWO LONG MASTERPIECES: MARIA NEPHELE, THE LITTLE SEAFARER

In the 1970s Elytis became better known outside of Greece, as translations of his poems began to appear in many languages. This growth of fame culminated in 1979 when he won the Nobel Prize in literature and, to his creative discomfort, became for the Greeks an emblem of their cultural identity. He graciously gave his time, and all the while quietly kept writing.

A year before he received the Nobel Prize, a new work, *Maria Nephele* was published. More than fifteen years in the writing, it was as ambitious as *The Axion Esti* but completely different. Arranged in three sections of twice seven poems, with an introductory and closing poem and two intermediary songs, it employs a bewildering variety of styles, bristling with colloquial rhythms, urban imagery, ironies, jokes, parodies, neologisms, doggerel, quotations from five languages, as well as intense lyricism. Elytis's technical range expanded continually, as each new work's right style was discovered. Although *Maria Nephele* finds brilliant new settings for his favorite images (kore, eros, waterdrop,

aethers, Paradise, cyan-blue sky, winds, mountain, flowers, sleep, Aegean islands, sea, beach pebbles, girls, myrtle), a plethora of new images combines with them in startling ways. Numerous references jostle Athens' mass media consumer culture against high culture. Some of the often phantasmagorical, even eschatological imagery comes from St. John's Revelation and some from *Through the Looking Glass*. Maria Nephelē's youthfulness brought Elytis a new generation of readers, and once again he redefined Greek poetry, directing it to the experimental, the contemporary, the daring, like a more skilled Mayakovsky with an education and love of tradition.

Half the poems are spoken by Maria, and half by the Antiphonist (in church a chanter of responses), who is the poet. Printed *en face*, the poems are not a dialogue but parallel monologues; Heraclitean apothegms are appended to each poem. The book, Elytis said, is based on a friendship with "a modern radical of our age," whose words are "the other half of me."¹⁹ The name is rich: *Maria* refers to the Virgin, and, as the first poem makes explicit, also recalls the sea kore Marina. *Nephelē* is the ancient word for cloud, a name for a semblance of Hera, and the name of King Athamas's queen, to whom Hermes gave the ram with the Golden Fleece. In Aristophanes' *Clouds* the "Nephelae" represent sophistic modern trends and bad poetry. Also, clouds signal grief—the kore of "The Mad Pomegranate Tree" battles them—and Maria is grieving for the state of the world, its evil, alienation, frustration, meaninglessness. War, Greece's ferocious politics, and bourgeois greediness all afflict her, and the accusation of the poem's first epigraph is hers. Though these equally oppress the Antiphonist, he avows they are only reality's visible half; the Platonic second epigraph, from *Orientalisms*, is his. The form emphasizes these oppositions' dialectic. But because Maria believes in the body's beauty and in spiritual honesty, she does not dismiss his affirmations. "My conclusion in this poem," Elytis wrote, "is that we search basically for the same things but along different routes."²⁰ The longing for the good world in a bad world is a tragic emotion, thus the allusions to the cursed House of Atreus, as in the *Odyssey*.

Maria announces her dilemma and fierce determination in the opening couplets of "The Presence"; then the Antiphonist enters her bright sad milieu because of his attraction to her. He too suffers from disappointment, but not from anomie. As "The Presence" continues, mostly in prose, we are told of a trip they made together to an Aegean

19. *Ibid.*, p. 640.

20. *Ibid.*

island, and of a moment of intense awareness when they gazed at the marble relief of a kore with a bird and cryptic letters ("we were looking at each other through the stone"); the image, they both recognize, is her inner uncorrupted self, attainable now only in dream. The Antiphonist's responses are more balanced, but hers more sensitive. And when he summons images of ascension, she returns them to earth immediately. They both see themselves as "self-exiles."

The first section of antiphonal poems, in which she guides him through her milieu, commences with their different kinds of desperation. She, more nervous, trusts in her body ("and I'll dance naked for you"); he trusts in Poetry ("Poetry O my Holy Lady"). But the next pair of poems makes plain that she loves him, despite her irony, for poetry's sake, and he says the essence of poetry's power of ascension is Eros; they both see money as the dark power. But instead of St. John the Divine's Patmos, her island is the Mykonos of degenerate tourism, from whose pollution she imagines a purifying ritual. When she tries, in "Disquisition on Beauty," to speak of Beauty, contempt overcomes her. But the Antiphonist finds a Marvellian image for it, the waterdrop: "Everything a drop of beauty / trembling on the eyelashes." In the pair of poems on Helen of Troy, Maria sees war as a condition of existence ("Each time with its Trojan War"), while the Antiphonist can praise "Each time with its Helen." In the "Song of Maria Nephele," which concludes the first section, Maria affirms her sexuality as a way to become angelic "above the precipice."

The poet's sea journey is not available to Maria. The second section's first pair of poems ironically describes our pleasant bourgeois miasma, in which all spiritual values have faded. And, in fact, Maria is uninterested in the past. But the succeeding poems keep praising sensuality and keep seeking alternate versions of the world, or ways of viewing this world that might cleanse it. The section's concluding "Song of the Poet" marks, as Maria predicted, his failure to convert society with the blessing of eros and his retreat into an inner region: "I chased the Intangible / . . . because my kind's Original."

The last section begins with Maria's morning poem of despair ("Bonjour Tristesse") and the Antiphonist's determined—and funny—effort to avert despair ("Morning Exercises"). In the "Electra Bar," she herself is Euripides' "shorn and ugly" heroine, and Clytemnestra is real; he escapes to poetry's paradise "amid the aethers" ("Parthenogenesis"). The titles of the last dyad directly oppose their approaches, her "Stalin" against his "The Hungarian Uprising," her despair versus his hope. The prophetic closing poem, taking full account of Maria's version, affirms

the poet's belief that she shall be realized as the marble kore from "The Presence," "with a docile bird in your palm." She has found her position between Demeter and Kore and can reign in "grandeur of sunrise and sunset."

Elytis's projects overlapped in the writing. From 1970 to 1974 he worked on a sequence of lyrics and another related sequence of limpid prose paragraphs, but because he felt that they were supports of a larger structure, he held them back until that structure was complete. In fact, *The Little Seafarer* was not published until 1985—exactly fifty years after his first appearance in print.

Symmetry and architectural design are crucial to the enduring value of ancient Greek literature, especially to adventure stories such as the *Odyssey* or digressive ones such as Herodotus's *Histories*; and they are crucial to the *Seafarer*, which depends more on structure than any of his previous works. The masterworker poet, Apollonian in his control, is able to use structure synthetically, like a Cycladic figurine, rather than organically like an Arp nude. Of all his books, this is his most intellectually shaped, and most resembles a Classical temple, all its members distinct and in place and yet fabricated consciously for Aegean light, as a point of focus and organization in a wide-spreading and sacral natural environment of sea, mountain, and sky. Its design invites the meteoric god to take up residence and us to climb its approaches with open hearts. Even its "typography reveals a hidden architecture."²¹

In some ways *The Little Seafarer* greatly amplifies the poet's maiden voyage into art and experience in his "Odyssey," except that now the voyage is not that of a breathless child but of a captain burning the midnight oil, pen in hand, logbook open. It reaches back to the sea voyage of his first poem, "Of the Aegean." The voyage is through the Greek Mediterranean, European culture, and their attendant values. It is both the gravest of Elytis's books and the most suffused with sea light. The longed-for sea change has become so problematical for him that the poem's Promethean effort is required, and the conclusion is ambiguous, for "left over is injustice" (in "Exit" as well as "Entrance"). Prospero may be restored, but Antonio awaits another chance.

The seafarer journeys toward a Platonic transcendence, only partially achieved, through experience, meditation, suffering, and longing. The voyage commences with "Entrance," a poem of expectation and plans for a journey to overcome disillusion. He believes that "the golden wind of life" is near. But how do you get to it when injustice knocks

21. Letter from Odysseus Elytis to Jeffrey Carson, 1985.

things awry? The quoted phrase comes from Dionysios Solomos, the nineteenth-century poet whom Elytis repeatedly called his master and who established modern Greek as a vehicle for poetry's highest flights; Solomos is, as it were, ship's pilot. "Entrance" is a statement of intentions and warnings, which the rest of the poem fulfills.

But what is the reality of his landings' littoral? The four "Spotlights," seven scenes each in brief, nasty prose, rub our noses in the murder and betrayal, the "injustice," of Greece's long history. The Greek word for justice is *dike*; in Hesiod, the name of a goddess who reports to Zeus men's wrongdoings, *dike* came to mean harmony with nature and the cosmos. So if "injustice" is "left over," truth and beauty are endangered.

Each "Spotlight" is followed by seven sections of prose pieces, "To Anoint the Repast." All twenty-eight of these describe his personal spiritual quest for radical innocence, to make his soul transparent. In I, he finds "in the eyes of a young calf" an "innocence" that turns men inside out, obviating injustice. But this is tentative, and in II he tries to recreate a purified Greece to his liking, and travels through it in III and IV, and endows it with the Hellenic heritage in V. But in VI and VII the enchanted moment passes, and he bravely sets to work with what remains, bitterness or sadness.

Immediately following is the first of three sets of seven poems called "With Both Light and Death," which move from hope to elegy, and counterpoint "To Anoint the Repast." The *Seafarer's* only sequence in verse, it contains poems of unsurpassed lyricism, with his Aegean imagery at its most plangent and with the poignancy of nostalgia mixed with visionary exhilaration. In the opening lyric, he reaches "the second Greece of the upper world," like Socrates in the *Phaedo*, by looking through death. There (in poem 2), he coins a word, *Algreus*, out of precious essences, and (in 3) finds the motives for action. In this new Greece (4), which is not just for Greeks, Maria Nephele's "revolution" will take effect, and the recollection of childhood innocence will purify even "the starry spaces full of angers." Now at innocence's "starting point," he constructs the first of the Seafarer's many lists of precious things (5). The vision of kouros ("youth kneeling in the transparent deep") and kore (her hair sparkling like "a comet") he holds for poem 6, and in the seventh his "thought" alone sustains this virgin world, where Solomos's "freedom" is triumphant and Easter is ascendant. That thought can do the work of mystical contemplation is an idea that becomes more and more important in his later poetry.

The three sections called "What One Loves"—the phrase is from Sappho, whose *loves* has in Greek the same root as *eros*—list at length

what the poet takes with him on his voyage: cultural and personal memories, epiphanies, the holy Greek language, "only what's necessary." As Shelley said in his "Defence of Poetry," "a single word even may be a spark of unextinguishable poetry." For Elytis as for Sappho, Greek words are deeds.

The second group from "To Anoint the Repast" starts with the poet reducing his needs to a minimum, after which he meditates on the need for thought to preserve *dike* in the cosmos and develop the appropriate "body of laws" (XIII). These balance joy and sorrow so that, in Plato's "higher mathematics" (XIV), "only truth remains in the end."

Generally, "To Anoint the Repast" describes the process, and "With Both Light and Death" adduces realizations: in 8, fragments as if from a torn papyrus of Sappho; in 11, an inscription to Kore as if on an ancient stele; in 12, islanders' names for the Virgin; in 14, a post-Byzantine distich to her. The prose paragraphs of the "Repast" present an image and discuss an abstraction, but Elytis's abstractions are as Aegean as his imagery. In XV, for example, childhood memories are followed by praise for the Greek language, and in XVI the need for tenderness ("feelings formed by light") is followed by a girl's appearing at an island chapel to reach "to all the flammabilities in our sighs." XVII is a prayer and promise to the Kore of Thera, and the poet promises to sanctify her with words as the Minoan wall painters did with paint.

The concluding set of "With Both Light and Death" shows Elytis at his most lyrically intense, since after all it is poetic inspiration he believed in most. If you are faithful to it, he says in 15, a Platonic sky will become "annexed to your own Greek dominion," and in 16 he prays to St. Sozon in "the Greek of sorrow." 17 is perhaps his most highly wrought invocation of Kore; in a difficult archaic style based on that of Greece's greatest fiction writer, Alexandros Papadiamantis, he says what she means to him, who has had to become like a monk to serve her faithfully:

Thou as a goatherd's hermitage hast lighted
Our soul in the pit Kore.

In the last of the series, 21, he prophesies as to the ultimate meaning of his death, when "the other Golden Horn will open" and it will be "Day first for us in the second homeland of the upper world."²² Because the

22. Cf. "Chronicle," p. 320: "an immortality given by another kind of writing, the second and third Greek languages."

existent and created are equivalent, sky and sea mutually reflecting, the poet, dogged realist, can celebrate.

The concluding group of "To Anoint the Repast" is a rethinking, in his later meditative style, of his great themes, which provided the ethical basis of his art: meteorism (XXII), limpidity of the immortal soul in sunlight and the waterdrop (XXIII), instantaneity (XXIV), Greek and the "transliteration" of the senses (XXV), the Aegean of sensuality and virginity (XXVI), the Paradise of natural innocence (XXVII), and (in the last) the rebirth in that Paradise of "our true self, our right, our freedom, our second and real ethical sun." "Exit" closes the book, for the first time in Elytis, on a note of unresolved anguish. But his later books have more to say.

A DIFFERENT VERSION: *THREE POEMS UNDER A FLAG*
OF CONVENIENCE, DIARY OF AN INVISIBLE APRIL,
THE ELEGIES OF JUTTING ROCK

After receiving his Nobel Prize, Elytis regularly published books of prose and translations (the latter include Brecht, Eluard, Jouve, Kri-nagoras, Lorca, Lautréamont, Mayakovsky, The Revelation of John, Rimbaud, Sappho, Ungaretti). His 1984 rendition and reordering of Sappho is especially important. Elytis was very proud that good poetry has been written in Greek from before 700 B.C., as his exalted Nobel speech makes plain. The Greek language continues to use related, age-old words for feeling, for sensation, for perception, and for aesthetic; Plato could learn modern Greek in two weeks.

In the years after 1979 he also published four books of exhilarating verse. Jung suggests that the artist in old age must reverse the expansions of youth and focus on what is most meaningful and permanent. The aged Rembrandt's sitters radiate a dim halo of inner, unnatural light, and Titian's later backgrounds smolder with sanguine brushstrokes. The old Yeats climbs, in his last works, toward a joyful simplicity based on reality's archetypes, and the euphonious Stevens grows harsher in his imagination's recasting of memory and desire. Beethoven's mysterious late quartets plumb imagination and introspection as a deliverance from the tragedy of experience, and Bach wrote fugues in his last year that to this day no one is sure how to execute. With the concentration and ardent assurance of his last four books, written in his seventies and eighties, Elytis joins this group.

Elytis broke his post-Nobel silence in 1982 with *Three Poems under a Flag of Convenience*. The book's three sequences, "The Garden Sees," "The Almond of the World," and "Ad Libitum," are at first exacting,

though their spiky lyricism is evident right off. The diction, colloquial in the manner of American poetry, flares repeatedly into loftiness. The references are many, and the disjunctions sometimes as jarring as in Pound's beautiful last book, *Drafts and Fragments*. What Elytis called "double syntax," in which the sparseness of punctuation allows a line to connect both to the preceding and proceeding line, compels a cyclic movement and slows the generally rapid movement. The personal note is unmuffled, as is the poet's anguish in the face of time's deteriorations and "human unsuccess" (Auden's phrase): "It's been a long time I haven't said a word / as if events ignored me / or even the reverse" ("Ad Libitum" 3); the sunstruck moments are remembered as often as directly experienced.

Each of the three poems has seven sections, and each section laments the predicament of humanity, touches upon personal despair, and points to the possibility of vision, often through his archetypal Aegean images. His belief in the Platonic domain is affirmed in the first section of "The Garden Sees": "Perfection lies completed / and lets a rivulet roll up to here." But how? "Ah if I could only know / real freedom . . . / If I could see / the sky behind the tyrant," he laments in section 6. The old Aeschylus, Elytis reminds us, teaches us that suffering leads to wisdom, if not to happiness. The cry of Aeschylus can portend a "new earth / on the water." Then, our unreal history is overcome by a vision of Kore, who has irradiated Elytis's lines from the first:

alone
a
Kore
polished like a shell
descends bearing the wind
in a basket.

She appears four times in "The Garden Sees," the last time right before the conclusion. The poem's affirmation is that, because of her, "your hand copies the Inconceivable." If Elytis's remorse over civilization and his inner rue had deepened, so had his belief in the possibility of transformation, and this partly explains why his later work is so strangely moving. Each of the titles is a refrain. In "The Almond of the World," in section 1 the refrain is sexual; in 2 it is Platonic; in 3 it is the fruit "of paradise"; and so forth. In section 5, Elytis, with a touch of humor, faces the briefness and insubstantiality of human life, no longer than "one cigarette / which lasts until we expire / for two or three minutes of life." Consistent with his lifelong poetic creed, Elytis does not anathematize life,

with "its really superb moments," because however brief and helpless, it is still possible, before his cigarette's brief glow of life turns to ashes, "to be upright men / on a terrace above the sea."

In "The Almond of the World" he compares himself to Oedipus, who achieves, the very old Sophocles tells us, mystical union with God and Earth in the grove of Colonus. In "Ad Libitum" 5, the poet journeys to Homer's Hades, a descent all epic heroes, indeed all of us, must negotiate if, finally, we are to speak of Helen, or be able to receive inspiration through Thera's frescoes or Ravenna's mosaics. (Yeats called their gold "God's holy fire.") In section 7, Elytis compares his predicament directly with that of Odysseus: "the other Odysseus / upon a raft / centuries now / I cry out in Greek and no one answers me." (Odysseus is a common name in Greece.) Though *Three Poems* ends with a postscript professing ignorance and frustration, we are assured that "there is a different version." This is the imagination we bring to our reading of him and of life.

Biography tells little about Elytis. When in Athens, he usually woke up late, met with friends in various confectionary shops in the afternoon, wrote for much of the night. Summers he spent on Lesbos or other islands. For half a century he lived in the same small apartment in Athens, where an adequate family legacy enabled him to devote his time to writing. But his words reveal that his inner adventures were tumultuous, almost too vivid, and that poetry provided a way to order them. The poet chants his good news and then radically converts himself through his intensities of meter, diction, metaphor, structure. These make up the poet's true biography, and they are almost unbearably intimate.

This seems to be the case with the next book he wrote (in 1981), *Diary of an Invisible April*, which was published just over a year before *The Little Seafarer*. Although by then Elytis's readers had become accustomed to the unaccustomed, the *Diary* pulled them up short, for it was a nightbook, a dreambook, in which his early surrealism reemerged completely transformed. The hallucinatory imagery moves swiftly through short prose pieces and poems—forty-nine entries enclosed between two rhymed couplets—in a style radically straightforward: no complex meters or resplendent rhythms, few rare words, no syntactical intricacies, scant Apollonian sunlight. They sound as if written with exigent alacrity, to catch the concatenation of vivid imagery before it vanishes like dew in spring's dawn sunlight. Undoubtedly personal, there is still nothing confessional; the Greek word for diary also means calendar.

In Greece, April is a time of myriads of wildflowers, warm days, chilly nights, sudden downpours, capricious winds, and the religious exaltation of Easter after the bitterness of Lent. Elytis describes this ambiguous ostentation in “Mayday” (“Friday, 1 M”). Eliot worried that April was cruel, and Elytis shows why—such an onrush could be perilous if not ordered, or if repressed. As he writes in *Maria Nephele*, “The drop of blood each April / free and for all” and “spring depends on us” (“The Trojan War”). Elytis’s spring here attempts to transmute the conflict between the world’s confusions and the hope for paradise, between the depredations of age and an inner unwrinkled self, into an awareness of hope. Thus, the opening line declares it wants to “paint that which demonically pains you, but also adorn it”; and the next gives an image for this, a “Virgin’s silvering” like the precious silver coverings of icons, which is nightmist on the psyche’s apparitional marshes.

Captured in *Diary*, among the family memories, childhood impressions, atavistic historical displacements, sinister glowerings, and “heavenly adventures” (“Holy Monday, 20”) that thrill and please him as often as they frighten him, are reworkings of Elytis’s chief ideas, which offer clarified points of rest in the tumult. One is “The End of Alexander” (“Sunday, 5 b”), which in six lines recapitulates the hero’s death, at his side the sea, “all azure ripples,” as “the Lady” (Kore as Persephone) enters. Another is the “Little Song” (“Easter Sunday, 26 b”) in which he prays that Kore take the citron of the Greek poetic tradition and pass it on, since his heart is heavy:

Windform kore sea come-of-age
take the citron that Kalvos gave me
yours the golden fragrance

Andreas Kalvos was a great early-nineteenth-century poet whose elegies, in a language of rare words and forms mixed with demotic language, Elytis especially admired. The citron comes from Kalvos’s beautiful ode “The Philopatri” and symbolizes his island’s maidens, Aphrodite, and his nostalgia. It is as natural for Greek poets to seek models for their formal procedures in landscape as for them to create a fresh diction, as do Pindar, Kalvos, Papadiamantis, and Elytis. That is why he loved the Minoan frescoes.

The last entry, “Thursday, 7 M,” in which “I became thousands of years old, and already I use Minoan script with such ease that the world wonders and believes in the miracle,” claims a kind of lonely poetic resolution, in which “Fortunately they haven’t managed to read me.” The

closing couplet sounds notes of contradiction and suspension: "We'll see about you."

In a long poetic prose piece, Elytis, describing his paradise, invokes the kore Poetry and "birds which even amid the truth of death insist on warbling in Greek and on saying "eros, eros, eros."²³ Elytis's first great poem, "Anniversary" in *Orientalisms*, which Seferis praised to the insecure young poet, is a meditation on death. Eros and thanatos continued as the theme in his 1991 book, *The Elegies of Jutting Rock*, published in Athens for his eightieth birthday. The book, however, is not "about" death. Rather, he peers through death to eternal values as he peered through pelagic waters and crisp aethers. Thus, the title *Elegies* is apt, since an elegy is "a lyric, usually formal in tone and diction, suggested by either the death of an actual person or by the poet's contemplation of the tragic aspects of life. In either case, the emotion, originally expressed as a lament, finds consolation in the contemplation of some permanent principle."²⁴ The form, it would seem, attracted Elytis as it did the elegists Mimnermus, Propertius, Saint-John Perse, and Rilke.

Elytis's models were the elegies of Friedrich Hölderlin, which deal with the impossible ideal and golden youth. The look of Hölderlin's lines and his techniques of construction deliberately recall Pindar, always one of Elytis's exemplars. (Like Elytis, Pindar thought perceptually, not conceptually, and, with one exception, no two of his elaborate meters are identical). In the third elegy, "Cupid and Psyche," Elytis remembers how Hölderlin transformed his love for a real girl into Poetry (called "Diotima"), and like Hölderlin, he affirms that "within the Futile and the Nothing" exists "that unascertained something": this is the thesis of all fourteen of the elegies.

The book's first line announces the sea voyage to the "stone Korai holding flowers." The boat will arrive empty, as flesh becomes something else in, as Yeats says, "the artifice of eternity." And then in his "soul's small cyan the Jutting Rock will start to emerge / From the blackness" and the winged girls will appear. Elytis is doing nothing else than trying more concretely than ever to get into words the ultimate diaphaneity he has always attested. The difficulties of the book are not in the writing but in the subject. That is why Elytis developed, yet again, a new style, completely different from the *Diary*.

In the second and third elegies, childhood memories and eros ("the

23. Odysseus Elytis, "First of All," *Open Papers*, p. 38

24. *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, Princeton University Press, 1965, p. 215.

words 'I love you' still / Distinct!') help him on his way to "Things Beyond and Future things." In the fourth, Elytis recalls the case of Novalis, who went mad trying to unite earthly and divine love, to thwart the dangers of the journey. And in the fifth he seeks to let the poet who has most steadily influenced him, Dionysios Solomos, inspire his soul's retranslocation of itself into the "second soul" of his language.

In the winter of 1989, Greek newspapers and television were full of reports on Elytis's serious bout of anemia. The poet turned his hospital stay to probing use in the sixth elegy, "La Pallida Morte." Through death and resurrection imagery the poet renews his faith in his quest and his art. In "Past Midnight" this poetry-fortified soul can "see life rising in wave / After wave" and in "Friday When It Always Rains" he thus remembers the Platonic essences, "the gold ore in your mind's mud." Recovering bodily health, the soul is greeted by life as it will be by death, with "the turbid woman called Serenity / Descending with a tray of trembling freesias."

What Yeats called Byzantium and Pound Ecbatana, Elytis calls "Lost Commagene," in daily life unattainable. And in the "Dream" of "The Presentation of the Death-Touched" he calls it a "celestial archipelago." Similarly, "July Word" recalls how in childhood things seemed virginal and infinite. "July Word" somewhat resembles Henry Vaughan's simpler "The Retreat," wherein the virginal soul can know "Bright shoots of Everlastingness." The Aegean *tópos* of his childhood still dazzles his "psyche," or soul, but whereas in youth he could apprehend it "by swimming," now he does so "by studying." The "Body of Summer" from *Sun the First* still receives the metaphorical sun where he holds the cicada, who sings, says Archilochus, irrepressibly as the poet and who is Zeus in the Galaxies' eternal summers.

In "Verb the Dark" Elytis creates his own active verb as the key that gives spiritual admission to earthly sustenance, to "Korai who sometimes appeared / From within my breast." Once inside, "our third nature can become manifest," though perhaps only after death. The concluding elegy, "The Last of Saturdays," allows an ascension into the pellucid seadepths and sunlight of the other side. Socrates was warned by invisible powers to prepare for the ascension by writing poems. The last line of *The Elegies* is "Death the sun without sunsets." As Elytis said, "there is a different version, waiting to be built on Homer's beaches."

WINGS OF POESY: WEST OF SORROW

Although Elytis was often ill in his last years, he remained cheerful and productive, assisted by his companion, the poet Ioulita Iliopoulou.

They spent the summer of 1995 in the harbor town of Porto Rafti, where he completed a series of seven new poems, called *West of Sorrow*, and published later that year along with a collection of prose pieces and collages. Where *The Elegies* explored the membrane between life and death, and were tragic, the new book, in a development of *The Elegies*' strange otherworldliness, finds that membrane permeable to Keats's "wings of Poesy"; even west of the sun's setting, all his splendid world of Aegean perceptions and memories is available to him.

Elytis's poems are frequently demanding, and these are deliberately more so than any others he has written. He wrote, "They are poems more dense and for this reason more difficult, but closer to my ideal."²⁵ The poems have very little punctuation and sometimes ambiguous grammar. Though speaking from a place opaque to us, they flicker mysteriously with familiar imagery, as poetry's beating wings stir up essences from Greece, from memory, from eros, from the place beyond where death has no meaning.

In *The Elegies*, he sought to overcome sorrow; in this new group he has done so, and glows like the just-set sun west of the horizon; poetry's refraction brings us the glow of the unknowable. Perhaps Elytis, in a final development of his solar metaphysics, was thinking of these lines by Stesichorus (ca. 600 B.C.):

Helios, Hyperion's boy, was coming down
into the golden bowl to traverse Ocean
and reach holy dark night's depths

These poems conflate the dreams of a lifetime.

In the early afternoon of March 18th, on a cold, overcast, drizzly day, Odysseus Elytis died of a stroke. He was 84 years old, and still writing. Ioulita Iliopoulou closed his eyes. The poetry that had seemed inexhaustible stopped. Shocked, Greece immediately went into mourning. People were sadder than they had expected, without quite knowing why. Somehow Greece felt like a smaller place, less brightly lit, without her great poet to re-create her. Indisputably great poets are rare at any time, and in the late twentieth century he seemed like a miracle, one who enhanced our sense of meaning, of possibility, of language. His death makes us aware of this, and that is why we are shocked.

In the past fifty years, no American or British poet has quite had his standing. Without trying at all for this, Elytis spoke directly from and to

25. Letter from Odysseus Elytis to Jeffrey Carson, 1995.

his countrymen; perhaps only Yeats and Pasternak can be compared with him in this. Elytis poured forth a fount of imagery from a spring deeper than anyone hoped could still be active in Greece. And when Elytis wrote "Greece," he meant the whole world. In some uncollected lines he contributed in 1995 to an Italian periodical dedicated to him, he wrote,

Worldly things are sad. And also those outside.
God has a lack of the living and has enclosed us
In a little monastery
As if in a chicken coop lest we
Leave him. But
We do leave.

Now that he has left, "What remains / Is Poetry alone," as the last poem in *West of Sorrow* truly confirms.

The Collected Poems of Odysseus Elytis

ORIENTATIONS

Départ dans l'affection et le bruit neufs.

RIMBAUD, "Départ," *Illuminations*

First Poems

Of the Aegean

I

Eros

The archipelago

And the prow of its foams

And the gulls of its dreams

On its highest mast the sailor waves

A song

Eros

Its song

And the horizons of its voyage

And the echo of its nostalgia

On her wettest rock the betrothed awaits

A ship

Eros

Its ship

And the nonchalance of its summer winds

And the jib of its hope

On its lightest undulation an island cradles

The coming.

II

The playing waters

In shady passages

Speak the dawn with their kisses

Which begins

Horizon—

And the wild doves vibrate

A sound in their cave

Blue waking in the fount

Of day

Sun—

The northwester gives the sail

To the sea

Caresses of hair

To the carefreeness of its dream

Dew—

Wave in the light
Again gives birth to the eyes
Where Life sails toward
Far-seeing
Life—

III

Sea surf kiss on its caressed sand—Eros
The gull gives the horizon
Its blue liberty
Waves go come
Foaming answering in the ears of shells

Who took the blond sunburnt girl?
The sea breeze with its transparent blowing
Tilts the sail of dream
Far out
Eros murmurs its promise—Sea surf.

Climate of Absence

I

All the clouds confessed to the earth
A grief of my own took their place

And when in my hair the unrepentant hand
Grew melancholy

I was bound in a knot of sadness.

II

The hour forgot itself as evening came on
Without memory
With its speechless tree
Facing the sea
It forgot itself as evening came on
Without flutter
With its immobile face
Facing the sea
As evening came on
Without eros
With its unyielding mouth
Facing the sea

And I—amid the Serenity I enticed.

III

Afternoon
And its imperial isolation
And the affection of its winds
And its daring splendor
Nothing coming
Nothing going

All foreheads naked

And for feeling a crystal.

Second Nature

I

A smile! Its princess desired
To be born below the dynasty of roses!

II

Time is a quick shadow of birds
My eyes wide open amid its images

Around the all green success of leaves
Butterflies live great adventures

While innocence
Takes off her last lie

Sweet adventure Sweet
Life.

III

Epigram

Before I had eyes you were light
Before Eros love
And when the kiss took you
A woman.

Seven Nocturnal Heptastichs

I

Dreams and dreams came
To the birthday of jasmine
Nights and nights to the white
Sleeplessness of swans

The dew is born in leaves
As clear feeling
In the boundless sky.

II

Propitious starlight brought the silence
And behind the silence an intruding melody
Mistress
Enchantress of former sounds

Now the weakening shadow remains
And its cracked confidence
And its incurable vertigo—there.

III

All the cypresses point to midnight
All the fingers
Silence

Outside the dream's open window
The confession
Slowly unwinds
And like a glance it swerves toward the stars!

IV

A shoulder naked
As truth
Pays its precision
To this edge of evening
Shining all alone
Beneath the mystic half-moon
Of my nostalgia.

V

Unguarded night was seized by memories

Mauve

Red

Yellow

Her open arms were filled by sleep

Her relaxed hair by wind

Her eyes by silence.

VI

Inscrutable night bitterness without end

Sleepless eyelid

Pain burns before sobbing

Loss bends before being weighed

Ambush condemned to death

When the syllogism from the futile meander

In the apron of fate is shattered.

VII

The diadem of the moon on the brow of night

When the shadows share the surface

Of vision

And pain measured by the practiced ear

Involuntarily collapses

Inside the idea made useless by melancholy

Bugle-taps.

Windows toward the Fifth Season

I

Do you know the hair that wrote the wind? The glances that paralleled the time? The silence that felt itself?

But you are a nocturnal invention that takes pleasure in rainy confidences. That takes pleasure in the three-masted opening of the sea. You are an unachievable case that reigns when it shipwrecks. You are a gaudy catastrophe. . . .

Ah! I want the elements that know how to grasp to come. The middle of my meditation will delight their curving disposition. When expanding rings ascend then the sudden sky will take on the color of my penultimate sin.

While the last sin will still be enchanted by these solitary words!

II

The sound of feet ends at the edge of hearing. A strained tempest pours into the youthful breast that squanders its inexplicable radiance.

Desire has a very high stature and in its palms burns absence.

Desire gives birth to the road on which it wants to walk. It leaves. . . .

And toward it a people of hands ignites admiration's fireprey.

III

How lovely! She has taken the form of the thought that feels her when she feels it consecrated to her. . . .

IV

My summer abandonments have hidden themselves in my ageless vineyards. An undulation of dream drew back and left them there and asked nothing. In their deaf nets a swarm of bees turned its buzzing around. Mouths resembled colors and fled the flowers. The waters of early morning stopped their speech nocturnal and untouched.

It's as if nothing were known anymore.

And yet there is a feeling behind this ignored little mountain. . . . It has neither tears nor conscience.

It does not leave it does not return.

V

An invisible net restrains the sound that put many truths to sleep. Doubt slips amid the oranges of its late afternoon. A mouth blows carefree. Its festival makes desired surfaces shine. A man can even believe in himself. He can feel the presence of pleasure even in the pupils of his eyes.

Of his eyes that flow down the back of love. And they find their virginal lewdness within the diaphanous coolness of my most nocturnal verdancy.

VI

A roe deer runs the mountain crest. That you know nothing is why space is so clear. And if you ever learn, then the rain that will flood you will be sad.

Flee O roe deer! Flee O desire when nearly redeemed flee O life like a mountain crest.

VII

Tales nurtured the sprouting of the age that raises the bitter orange trees and lemon trees up to the amazement of my eyes. What would happiness have been with its unachieved body if it had got tangled in the flirtations of these verdant confidences? Two arms are waiting. The whole earth leans on their elbows. All poetry on their expectation. Behind the hill is the footpath incised by the fresh footfall of that diaphanous kore. She had fled the morning of my eyes (as my eyelids had fulfilled the request of their sun) she had hidden behind the shadow of my desire—and when a volition went to make her its own she vanished blown by affectionate winds whose protection was luminous. The footpath loved the hill and the hill now knows the secret well.

Come then remote disappearance! The embraces of gardens yearn for nothing more. In the touch of your palms the fruits will rejoice that now hang purposeless. In the transparent support of your stature the trees will find the lengthy fulfillment of their whispered isolation. In your first carefreeness the grasses will increase like hopes. Your presence will cool the coolness.

Then you will open within me fans of feelings. Tears of conscience precious stones returns and absences. And while the sky runs beneath the bridges of our interlocked arms while the most precious calyxes match our cheeks we shall give the shape of eros missing from these visions
Then we shall give

To the liturgy of the most difficult dreams a sure restoration!

Orientations

Orion

1

The world reconciled itself to bitterness
Shooting-star lies left the lips
Night freed
From noise and care
Is transformed in us
And its new silence shines with revelation

We find our head in God's hands.

2

A prayer transfigures its heights
Time changes course
And leads us stripped of earthly concern
To other meanings

Where is the pulse of earth
The blood in the memory of our faces
The selfsame journey?

3

Descendants of perishable tears
Rowers of futile lakes
We left earth's skin
We fingered our words
In the trees' whispering
For the last time

Now stars neighbor our forehead!

4

Image oh! immutable
Illumination
You dress every hovering concept
Which brings our hope near
Equanimity

There the query that separates itself from us

You are everywhere You share
Our dark harps
Immaterial sheath.

5
Our eyes left but our souls went ahead
At their meeting in the heavens
A pure moment shone
Agonized trembling
An exact reflection of our innards

Higher up
Serenity is enthroned
In united solitude of her stars

Because we rid her of our bodies
Because we exhausted her with our hopes
Because we brought her our Idea as votive

She gives birth again to feelings.

6
Silence was analyzed in us
Her archangel touched our innermost beings
He rolled our memory into an uninhabited chaos
When we were granted an unbelievable riverbank

A riverbank of lightweight shadows
Once dreamy from tears
Golden marks looked at us
So much that we were detached from our weight
As we were detached from sin!

7
Imaginary glow
Cyan space
Soul's catharsis!
It is as if earthly noise went missing

As if memory's malice stopped
Our clear new dream
Throbs
An invisible hand pulls us by the hand

Where the innocent sky becomes Serenity
Where the Soul is judged immutable.

Anniversary

*. . . even the weariest river
winds somewhere safe to sea!**

I brought my life this far
To this spot that struggles
Always near the sea
Youth upon the rocks, breast
To breast against the wind
Where is a man to go
Who is nothing but a man
Calculating with dew his green
Moments, with water the visions
Of his hearing, with wings his remorse
Ah Life
Of a child who becomes a man
Always near the sea when the sun
Teaches him to breathe whither
A seagull's shadow is effaced.

I brought my life this far
White measuring ink-black sum
A few trees and a few
Wet pebbles
Light fingers to caress a brow
What brow
Anticipations wept all night and are no more
There is no one
Would that a free footstep be heard
That a rested voice arise
That sterns splash the jetty writing
A name more glaucous in their horizon
A few years a few waves
Sensitive rowing
In the bays surrounding love.

* The epigraph is from Swinburne's "The Garden of Proserpine." Perhaps Elytis's first great poem, this is an Apollonian meditation on death.

I brought my life this far
Bitter groove in the sand that will be effaced
—Whoever saw two eyes touch his silence
And mingled with their sunshine enclosing a thousand worlds
May he remind other suns of his blood
Nearer the light
There is a smile that fills the flame—
But here in the unknowing landscape that gets lost
In a sea open and pitiless
Success moults
Whirlwinds of feathers
And of moments that were bound to soil
Hard soil beneath impatient
Soles, earth made for vertigo
Or a dead volcano.

I brought my life this far
A stone dedicated to the watery element
Farther than the islands
Lower than the waves
Neighboring the anchors
—When keels pass by passionately cutting through
A new obstacle and conquer it
And hope with all its dolphins dawns
Sun's profit in the human heart—
The nets of doubt draw in
A form of salt
Indifferent white
Hewn with effort
Which turns toward the sea the voids of its eyes
And supports infinity.

Dionysos

1

With torches burning all night long on orgiastic slopes of blond girls
dancers at the symposium

And with azure stalactites that grew in folk tales of hyenas

Together with verdant villas that open up to their laughter and do not find
morning

But all their nightfishing lights madden them sending out their apparitions
intact

Along with water jugs of matins that walk together shade-lit with amber

And with veils of uncombed hopes that stare at themselves in the chang-
ing caresses of horizons

Hours that loved our hours come

Like windmills' white insouciance hours that loved our hours come

With ritual steps in lithe March welcomings hours that loved our hours
come!

2

Whathalos of idylls! Leave here O roe deer leave the desire of the waterfall

That breaks all its sound gunning the foreheads of eventide's virgins

Float O rainbows in the crystals and the skies that sent amber boats this
way

It is a magic fire that opens fans of mountain slopes in our thunderstruck
journeys

It is a mane pricked by youth's lucky downslope of glens

Burnishing our pointed glances where all the chitons of ecstasy flame up

When memories detonate and hyacinths emerge from their little windows

Cornflowers and myostatis with little hibiscuses filled with grace when
they concentrated

On the flowing prairies that bewitch panpipes of drunken desires

On the great longbows of the great triumphant winner of an ephebe's
forests.

3

Carry torches O twin sleds in the anonymous tension of the atmosphere

Narrate the sea O fast schooners of desire with waveroar and wind

Lave yourself O cheeks of nymphs with all of spring while breathing it

An eternity will blow this way!

A shattered shout reunites in all fountains and all wells

The shout of life all helixes through the coolness up to its echo that trumpets

The brave gathering of spotless hands on the stonewalls of stars
Of our hands that from heartlight shaped their imaginary gambols. . . .
Oh! When the hours dress us in their own ecstatic shudder and the
 excited burning
Of bodies that obtain their blood as they stoop all night over the chimaera's
 roots is raised by such a hymn!

4

Like fresh-poured apparitions that shine the many-faceted fortune of their
 hunts in the clearing
And let their dithyrambic hair get tangled in the latanias of glowing stoas
Like rare fruits that celebrate the fuzz of the most verdant triumph
Sparkling in women's hands who beautified limpidity
Like myths that broke the gates of their mute palaces bellowing a new truth
The hours that loved our hours come
With lips of spring and birds' chords emerging from their vigor
That hours that loved our hours come incising a smooth curve in the
 void. . . .
And all their aether is a poem that broadens and opens out
When the prow of sleep enters a life that covets another life
When bays start a secret pulse and from their every beat a girl emerges
 singing myrtle
Singing ah! in the tulles of colored winds ah! chosen beings . . .

5

Fireblond whipping! Blinding featherdown whirling in the threshing
 floors
And the wind ravages it with haystacks hidden by the sun's duel
When it sets off explosions on the blond heads of their first
Adventures—when the stepping of desires flames up quaking the angry
 bridges
And all toil drips in diamonds
And all toil falls from the glory of the day that knew the insatiable unfold-
 ing of youth. . . .
Blood in this act! Blood in our acts—blood in the burning textures of the
 earthly world!
Because we threw an armful of bark with carved names onto the sand that
 always hopes
Because we loosened all the reins conquering the southwind's fresh valleys

Because we fluttered the eyelids of all our emotions in the pandemonium
of buzz and color
We believed in our Steps—we lived our Steps—we called our Steps wor-
thy!

6

Doves' toil the backs of day lean into their sun's fair weather
The incomparable birds shiver all over on the worshipped peaches
The light they enbosomed raises them to the hearts of an existence that
changes
All the zephyr's courses where feelings are in flames
Where all breasts hold tight their images invincible prizes of a pure life
And the great expectation is a seed that rends the soil so it can find spring
A spreading of power deep and up to the stars' distant gazing
Oh the naked bodies carved in time's pediment—cycles of hours
That found our hours and wrestled body to body until Eros gleamed forth
Eros who takes us and gives us back as if we were children in Earth's apron!

7

Tomorrow too is morning—yet today we shall gallop toward the sun's lairs
With golden brigantines we'll find danger beyond the cape of good
seashimmer
Toward sword-gleaming friendships of promises that set up kiosks in the
midst of joy
Raising their flames like lightweight bodies of goodness
We shall surprise the brave slings of an ocean voyage's impulsion
Striking our hands till Earth hears and opens all the petals of her mys-
teries
Tomorrow too is morning—yet today we shall offer our hours as kindling
to the determined advance
And let the wounds of sorrow go to another dusk—and be silent in another
lacustrine mirror
Let the swans of sensitivity hide in the flora of a whispered oasis
The ploughings of gallantry are for battle songs of greenery bent with wind
and word!

Clepsydras of the Unknown

*Le temp est si clair que
je tremble qu'il ne finisse. . . .*

ANDRÉ BRETON

*To Andreas Embeirikos**

*Andreas Embeirikos (1901–75), a Greek surrealist poet, was a good friend of and early influence on Elytis, who wrote a short book on him, *Report to Andreas Embeirikos*. This poem, teeming with erotic imagery, “prophesies a union of opposites, a constant, insistent Heraclitean/neo-Platonic expectation” (Decavalles, p. 664).

Clepsydras of the Unknown

1

The sun gets angry, its enchained shadow hunts the sea
A small house, two small houses, a cupped hand opened by dew
 anoints everything

Flames and flames go about waking the shut doors of laughter
It is time for seas to become acquainted with dangers
What do you want asks the sunbeam and what do you want asks
 hope lowering her white blouse
But the wind used up the heat, two eyes think
And do not know where to end up their future is so dense

A day will come when cork will imitate anchors and will steal the
 taste of the deep

A day will come when their double self will unite
Higher or lower than the peaks that Hesperus' song of evening
Cracked, it doesn't mean anything, the meaning is elsewhere

A girl, two girls, lean on their jasmine and vanish
A stream remains to narrate them but the nights stooped to drink
 right there
Big doves and big feelings cover their silence

It seems that this passion of theirs is irreparable
And no one knows whether pain comes to undress with them
The traps are rare, stars signal their witchcraft to lovers
Everything leaps up, rallies round—apparently immortality
 came

Which hands seek holding tight to their fate that changed its body
 into a strong
Wind—apparently immortality came.

2

Proud grass, the friend lost his friend, everything rests there
A tough voice inhabited this prairie
A sunken lizard was drawn to the surface
Where were you when the throat of such a day was cut
Where were you, leaves with leaves, the world walks slowly
The fruits burst on the threshold of a sob
No one responds

O drunken path that searched and searched for tenderness
On the fingers of toil and breaking dawns frightened you
Risking their light a wrapped forest beneath silence.

Not even rolled dice go at inspiration like this
Nor do squeezed-dry noises exhaust spirit like this
Multicolored smokestacks give off their elusive melancholy
In the arches that tremble, tremble the birds devote themselves to
the counting of their dreams
Rowing is heard in the ashes that left behind marks of youth
And no one knows where this breast opens
And no one knows when it began to live
Voices feel decapitated in their curly agonies
That pierce the earth like fiery branches of an underwater city

O Serenity untied, fluid presence in the pupils of eyes
In the grappling hooks of sleep in the honeybees of memory's
lands!

3

Farther off much farther the meek tablecloth—the meeting
Good morning little river, I am alone, we are both alone
The crystals are fragrant, now all we lack is a ship
Or a scarf in order to diagnose the end
And I received so many envelopes filled with clouds and storms
That I long for a mouth to say to me: sky, and so we sail together
to the delta of hopes. . . .

Thus we shall get out of our mind, ivy enlarged the walls of
afternoon
The words were baptized with sand at the keels and were dyed
pitch-black ready
To sail should Eros tell them—the words

O river little river, sun's good-morning anthology of countryside
Tell me where wind is admired where birdsong pours forth
Which riverbank does the song like, today I am young
I am good right up to the sources of my laughter, I shoot off
chimaeras like arrows
Illegible fans, snow-white notebooks made for angels

And from every indifference a torn wish is drawn along
And I pick it up—today I am young, that's enough for me

This makes my blood redder, red swallows, red writing
Many women will come to share it until they become
transparent
Many vanities will come to share them
The blithe din seems endless, sparks touch suspended foreheads
And bit by bit the whole secret comes true, sweetly becomes day
Living body, being, man.

4

What metal is it that chills the eyes what lost youth is it
That gathers the mercy of a few moments in an emotionless
thread—what is it
Trees fell silent, stones resembled stones, horsemen rode off
They seek the bolts of another gate but what gate is this
In what heartbeat might it be found, hopes close the windows,
pain reaches its evening
Who is here, no one is here—soil echoes in soil

And yet life must find a currency

Since it is not eros, since it is not eros
What is eros—life is counted in the pulse, joy in hopeless gestures
Mills on the peaks whitened their journeys
Life is counted in throbs, the loosened belt of evening is
throbbing
Charms glow far off, a dinghy disappears happy
No wave holds malice in its breast
Men are like, are likened to the cries of lighthouses
They leave for somewhere else and find themselves at sea
Which sea
Is it the one that does not remember its white moments but chews
its words again
Sorrows that became sheets and wave in the wind to dry and wave
again in the wind for gulls
To be next to them, at their side, what sorrows are these
What tame toil, what broken unity, what lament
O wounded joy, a moment's capacity that disturbs aeons!

The fold of wind that rustles its blue dovecote is near—the
 succulent fold
 That weighs excited swings in its fuzz
 When pointed laughter breaks the shells of dawn to announce
 sunrise
 And all earth's face shines with daisies
 No, our last word is not today, the world does not end
 Today our hope does not melt away, it fills the nests of sound with
 green grain

Gay mouths kissed girls, they hung sensual pleasure in the
 cherries
 Great trees drip sun they are innocent and think like shadows that
 run
 After something beautiful—today the projected vision is
 beautiful

Cool noon left behind like a boat that sailed filled with passion
 Loaded with songs and signals trembling like mountaincrests
 Far off are the marble villas of naked women
 Each one of them was once a waterdrop
 Each is now light
 They put on their dress the way music puts its garland on the hills
 And in their sleep they live circling ivy

Far off are the fumes of flowers the horizontal lakes of narcissi
 Joyful helmsmen steer boats of charms there
 They lean on one side—their other side is a verdant place of
 revels
 Tiny bees and tiny clepsydras narrate and weave the human
 species
 Into a huge space light pours
 It fills with visions sculptures and idols of gleaming
 It is the eyes that dominate—their earth is simple and paramount
 Deposits of goodness one after another, like florins cut into sun
 Into lips, into teeth, one after another the sins
 Of life, peeled goods.

6

Sublime nocturnal weaving
Surfsound of lilies that lays bare the ears and is diffused
On the shoulders of life I feel the leap that hurries to seize the work
Youth that wants another chance of eternity
And heedless throws its head before the favor of winds

There is a breast in which everything fits, music that takes over,
mouth that opens
To another mouth—red game pruned by vertigo
One more kiss and I'll tell you why I so bloodied my silences
One more kilometer and I'll show you why I came to such a vista
Where sobbing is transported seeking other stars
Searching with perishable gestures for the sand that spasms of
love left a mess

Wings were given to seconds
The world leaves, another comes, in its palm it reads roses and
festivals
The world leaves, I am in one of its waves, I trust wholly in its
impetus
Foreheads glow, fingers investigate the sleep they believe in
But what rumbling, what cave is this that calls to purity
Gulls' horizontal moment above passion, happy boat,
unexpected starting point

I shall go to the white gates of noon beating the blue resurrection
hymns with voices
And all the cold islands will ignite their hair so to stroll
On erotic seas with innocent flames and pebbles
I shall send a message of the prow's surest moment to naked
summers
The prow that gaily cuts through watery hopes of simple good
men.

7

The sky rests in ignorance
Man rests on the gunwale of sleep
A lucky captive of a flame acquitted while writing its initials in
the darkness
Spread in another privileged world of shut eyelids

Desire fits its images
Nearer the lock
Of a great secret that unsuspected
Stirs toward redemption, life existing in another life
Blood dripping from my eyes, to the actions of its heroes (discreet
star)
And the toil of my hands trembles, it rises to the colors of
oblivion's escutcheon
I see the laughter that wrote its fate
I see the hand that gave its shiver
And I am wrapped in clouds that a shovelful of clear sky dissolves.

Trustful light you refill my grove, I am ready for your invitation
We are two, and down below is the seashore again with the gulls'
most familiar shrieks
Wherever I point my prow, I end up mooring here, darkness owes
me to the light
Earth to the sea, rough seas to tranquil

Hanging from the fringes of a dawn that purified nocturnal pasts
I taste new sounds, feats of coolness that believed in trees
A verdant presence proceeds to its roots and acquires the day
Like a heart that finally finds its place
Like a woman who finally feels her youth
And gives inexhaustible pleasure by opening the worlds of her
eyes

Blond day, reward of sun and Eros.

Sporades

Aegean island group; *sporades* means “scattered ones.”

Helen

With the first drop of rain summer was killed
The words that gave birth to starlight got drenched
All the words whose unique destination was You!
Whither shall we stretch our hands now time no more considers
us

Whither shall we rest our eyes now the distant lines have
foundered in the clouds

Now your eyelids have closed on our landscapes
And we—as if the fog entered us—are
Alone all alone surrounded by your dead images.

Forehead to the windowpane we keep sleepless watch over new
grief

It is not death shall cast us down since You exist
Since elsewhere a wind exists wholly to live you
To dress you from close by as our hope dresses you from afar
Since elsewhere greenest prairies exist
Beyond your laughter as far as the sun
Telling it in confidence that we shall meet again
No it is not death we shall confront
But just a tiny drop of autumn rain
A turbid emotion
The smell of damp earth within our souls that continually grow
more distant

And if your hand is not in our hand
And if our blood is not in your dreams' veins
Nor light in the spotless sky
And invisible the music inside us O melancholy
Wayfares of what still holds us to the earth!
It is the wet wind the autumnal hour the separation
The elbow's bitter leaning in memory
That comes out when night would part us from light
Behind the square window that looks out on sorrow
That sees nothing

Because it has already become invisible music a flame in the
fireplace a chime of the great clock on the wall
Because it has already become
A poem a verse then another verse a hum parallel to rain tears and
words
Words not like others but even these with their unique
destination: You!

Sleeping Girl

The voice is carved in trembling wind and in its secretive trees
you breathe

Every page of your sleep is blond and as you move your fingers a
fire scatters

In you with traces taken from the sun! And the world of images
blows propitious

And tomorrow shows her naked breast marked by an im-
mutable star

That darkens the gaze the way it will exhaust a firmament

Oh do not resist your eyelids any more

Oh do not stir in bushes of sleep any more

You know what supplication of the fingers ignites the olive oil
guarding the gates of dawn

You know what cool revelation grassed-over memory rustles in
expectation

Where the world hopes. Where a man wants merely to be a man

Alone and without any Fate!

Convolution

In grief's purple fringes
In agony's statues
In moist silences
There is a face
So cut from tears
So inconceivable
So warm in the hand that waves to it
A different face
An apparition with torches that rips desolation
Night riding her mountaincrests
With stars whose childhood
Shot them from slings like signals
Stars that offer life's godspeed
On pity's upslopes.

There is
A tender arc that owes to pain
The adventure of its flood of light
A lens that unites sins
Like supine viscera that fortune threw
There

A wall good from the shade that charms it
Veers before it reaches the weeping
Later the statures of disaster arrive
Trees whose only furnishing is their fingers
Whose only belief is their uprooted speech
It is good for those who lived not to speak
The others hold wailings in the hands
Running yonder like unbaptized wings

They lived
A well opens fears after its every hope
Why does that wire tremble
What gaze brings food to this bird
What do we want
There is

An extinguished face in every stage curtain of oblivion.

Eve

You give yourself with a wave to silence
That deserts my inhabited hope

A little forest next to the fire
A wager of nocturnal winds
A stepping of a shadow on the chimaera's riverbank
A room
A room of simple men
A secret
Washed and hung out in an attracting gaze

In your gaze or in the height of its sun
My whole life becomes a word
The whole world becomes soil and water
And all the flames of my fingers
Violate the lips of day
And cut your head
On the lips of day

Your head confronting the solitude of dream.

Clear Skies

*The fragrant lips
of day kiss
the reposing forehead
of the world.*

ANDREAS KALVOS*

I

A name cool as if it had grown in the ocean
Or as if it lived with an azure spring on its breasts
Brings the world close. And it is the day
In which the intimate East
Began that forgot the tears
And showed in the spaces of its eyes
Earthly fragments of happiness.

II

Thoroughbred sky
Fingers that the rivulet passing
Through sleep took

On verdant laurel leaves
Day lies naked.

III

Glittering sensation received by the eyes
Matter raised from the earth
Level of the upper wind
O joyous voyage

Each moment a sail changing color
And no one
Stays the same
In changeless space.

* The epigraph is from Kalvos's "The Ocean" (Ode X, 41–44). Andreas Kalvos (1792–1869) wrote two books of ten odes each, severely patterned and in a rich, idiosyncratic diction much admired by Elytis.

IV

Toil of summer turns gold and the just
Hypostasis of sun. Look ears of wheat
Naked faces
Burnt in emotion!

And the prairie waves Eros
Waves the secret world

Clear hymn of life.

V

The girls who trod the sun's
Few growing words
Laughed! And what is this movement
In white lilacs
In leaves that ignorant covered
The shadows' evil actions
The secret nuptial waterdrops

Newlywed dreams! Time does not renounce them
And in its fluff they find their image.

VI

The roofs of birds lessen in our eyes
Light and light again the battling soul
The world's proud clangor far away
Weapon and vigor

And truth a handful of clear
Water before the thirst
In the infinite.

VII

This grape for which the soul thirsted
Filled with persevering wind
The service of summer
In the pines and waves
A love white and glaucous

With naked hours
That hold existence by the fingers
Wavering
Leafless
Free
As light
In wide intimate chambers.

VIII
Horsemanship in the clouds
A room where a beloved girl undressed
A bouquet of days after rainfall
The sun
I
Who delved so many nights to startle it
Giving a push to undoubted
Happiness

Yes the vernal extract
Leaves me the heart
Leaves me the enchantment
So I am always felt elsewhere while aging here

Oh! bent fragrance
Bough cold child of water
Good pathway.

IX
Swans stir the hour's welling names
Hours embroider my hands onto dawn
Like bows that leap to every passing chimaera
And they play the way I play
And slide

The hopes are coming.

X
Breasting the current
Fish that seeks transparency in another climate
Hand that believes nothing

I am not today as yesterday
Weather vanes taught me to feel
I dissolve the nights I turn joys inside out
I scatter forgetfulness by opening a dovecote
Leaving by the sky's back door
Without a word in my gaze
Like a child who hides a carnation
In his hair.

XI

With no glass in this dew weeping
From joy with no muskmallows in spring
Pampered girl trusting her foliage
In all my shade of breath today
Tomorrow
Supine laughter
In a shawl that lost its four edges
Scattered solitude.

XII

The lark speaks
To the rivulet sunning itself
Like a diurnal epithet
He doesn't know how he came
To live in an endless
Strolling
How he drank so many morning moments
And cuts through eternity
With his shining.

XIII

Ungoverned life
Raft with hands that stay out all night
Touching the clouds
Like sails
Like miracles
Of gulls who raised their virginity that high
And illumine hopes with little human hearts

O youth
Sun's fulfillment
Moment of blood
That makes death useless.

XIV
Birds in enthusiasm's
Thousand colors
Lightweight summers
Roofs just barely
Touching the sky

We shall empty the water jug
We shall become glaucous
Donors of the sea.

XV
Adolescence of day first fount of joy
The ancient myrtle shakes its flag
The bosom of larks will open to the light
And a song will hang in air
Sowing golden barleyseeds of fire
To the five winds

Freeing earth's beauty.

XVI
Yes apple trees are blossoming
With a breath of music in the leaves
Tear-drenched fruit forms gently
Hover
In the unspeaking water of the sun's baptismal font

Yes we shall embellish the earth
We shall squeeze the day
We shall shout
To the breast of our true mother.

XVII

Thus speaks a small blue-blooded girl
Who dew on her lips emerged from the shell

Blond friend of the sea.

XVIII

A day hopes for a distant devotion
And holds her children the trees tight to her breast
And looks at the future crop
Leaves fruits flowers multibranched dreams

She'll have rains and winds to nourish them
She'll have valleys to ease them
And to feel compassion for them—a profound heart.

XIX

The willow tree's flesh the primordial fire of youth
The unexploited speech of earth's fragrance
The root the spark the lightning the cloud

The endless digging with joy and sweat
In the mines of the heart
In the bloody guts of grief
The passing through the straits of memory
Ever farther and farther away
Where the desert extinguishes its form.

XX

Music settled
Into the depths of violets
Earth dampened by an ancient
Seven-hued reverie

The heartbeat is faintly
Heard from afar
And its innocent griefs
Chrysanthemum waterjets.

XXI

Such a coincidence

The rose and the fountain of day

The innate passion and the apotheosis

Each is a kindling of joy

Each is a hand of hail-to-thee

A big whitewashed dawn

In the first dream's splashdown

Voluble shimmer

Exodus

Into the open-air freedom of lilies.

The Concert of Hyacinths*

I

Stand a little closer to the silence, and gather the hair of this night who dreams her body is naked. She has many horizons, many compasses, and a fate that tirelessly invalidates all her fifty-two cards every time. Afterward she begins again with something else—with your hand, to which she gives pearls so it may find a desire, an islet of sleep.

Stand a little closer to the silence and embrace the huge anchor that rules in the deep. In a while it will be among the clouds. And you will not understand, but will weep, weep for me to kiss you, and when I go to open a rent in the lie, to open a small blue skylight in intoxication, you will bite me. Young, jealous shadow of my soul, genetrix of a music under moonlight

Stand a little closer to me.

II

Here—in desires' early whispering, you felt for the first time the painful happiness of living! Big uncertain birds tore the virginities of your worlds. On a spread-out sheet the swans saw their future songs and from every fold of night they set out tossing their dreams in the waters, identifying their existence with the existence of embraces they anticipated.

But what were they seeking, these steps that did not efface their forests but stood in the glaucous socket of the sky and of your eyes? What starry sin approached the beats of your despair?

Neither the lake, nor its sensitivity, nor the flammable ghost of two hands in agreement had the luck to confront such a rosy turmoil.

III

Embryo of a more luminous success—day carved with effort on the traces of the unknown.

You pay the tear, and it gets away from the sun.

And you who chew your hours like oleander become the omen of a tender voyage into immortality.

IV

Five swallows—five words whose destination is you. Each gleam focuses on you. Before you become simple as grass you leave your shape on the rock that aches flutter-

* Thrice seven prose-poems spoken by the lover to his beloved.

ing its flames inward. Before you become a taste of solitude you wrap thyme in memories.

And I, I always arrive straight at absence. One sound makes the brook, and what I say, what I love remains untouched in its shadows. Innocences and pebbles in the depth of a translucency. Sensation of crystal.

V

As you go by and take the fuzz of your years you are named princess. Water gleams in a small hand. The whole world mingles its days and in the midst of its intoxication plants a bunch of hyacinths. From tomorrow you will be the official guest of my hidden pages.

VI

Amid these surviving trees your sky-bright face. The embrace that will simply relocate its freshness. The world that will remain inscribed there.

Oh the closed words that remained inside the tree bark of hopes, inside the shoots of new-cut boughs of an ambitious day—the closed words that embittered their effigy and then the Prides came to be.

VII

Emotion. The leaves tremble living together and living apart on the poplars that share out wind. Previous to your eyes is this wind that helps free these memories, these pebbles—chimaeras! The hour is fluid and you are fixed on it, thorny. I think about those who never accepted lifeboats. Who love the light under their eyelids, who as sleep reaches its zenith sleeplessly study their open hands.

And I want to close the circles opened by your own fingers, to fit the sky to them so that their final word may never be another.

Speak to me; but speak to me of tears.

VIII

In the depth of music the same things follow you transubstantiated. Everywhere life imitates itself. And holding phosphorous in your palm you go about motionless in the fibers of a huge fate. And drenched by the Ninth¹ your hair curves memories and passes the notes to the morning twilight's last pediment.

Careful! The voice you used to forget now blossoms in your breast. This coral that ignites all by itself, is the votive to which you never consented. And the great fire that

1. "Ninth": probably Beethoven's.

would have destroyed you is this airy vertigo that binds you with the hues of agony to the last gasp of the violets.

In the depth of music we travel together. . . .

IX

I did nothing else. I took you as you took unused nature and celebrated it twenty-four times in forests and seas. I took you in the same shiver that inverted the words and left them beyond like open and irreplaceable shells. I took you as a companion in lightning, in awe, in instinct. Thus every time I change day tightening my heart to the nadir, you leave and vanish conquering your presence, creating a Divine solitude and a turbulent inexplicable happiness.

I did nothing else other than what I found and imitated in You!

X

Once again amid the cherry trees your rare lips. Once again amid the plant-swings your ancient dreams. Once more in your ancient dreams the songs that light up and vanish. In those that light up and vanish the warm secrets of the world. The secrets of the world.

XI

High in the tree of white journeys with your matutinal body slaked by the north-wester you unfold the sea who naked takes and gives its life to gleaming seaweed. Space glows and far away a white vapor thickens in its heart scattering a thousand tears. So it's you who forget Eros in the shallow water, in the underwater places of hope. It's you who forget flames in noons. It's you who in every multicolored word violate the vowels collecting their honey in the seedjar!

When the leaf of day turns and suddenly you are a blond a suntanned girl before this marble hand that will be guardian to the centuries at least remember that child who all alone in the sea's rage aspired to articulate the insuperable beauty of your beauty. And throw a stone at the sea's omphalos, a diamond into the justice of the sun.

XII

Take the hyacinths' light with you and baptize it in the fount of day. Thus near your name the legend will shiver and my hand conquering the flood will come out with the first doves. Who will welcome this rustling, who will be worthy of it, who is this who will first utter you the way the great sun utters a sprig!

Waves cleanse the world. Everyone seeks its mouth. Where are you I cry and the sea the mountains the trees are not there.

XIII

Tell me of the cloud-taken hour that possessed you when thunder preceded my heart. Tell me of the hand that advanced my own hand into your sorrow's foreign land. Tell me of space and light and darkness—the intrusive undulation of a tender and private September.

And scatter the rainbow, wreath me.

XIV

To return to the pumice island with a forgotten troparion that brings the bells to life giving domes of matins to your most far-off memories. To shake the little orchards out of you heart and then be treated again by their own sorrow. To feel nothing above the austere cliffs yet your form suddenly to resemble their hymn. To be taken higher and higher by uneven stone stairs where your heart beats outside the gate of the new world. To gather laurel and marble for the white architecture of your fate.

And to be as when you were born, the center of the world.

XV

The magnetic needle is in danger. Whatever way it turns it is bedazzled by the flame-throwing face of the cordial east. Throw away the hyacinths, run across grape harvests of foam toward the auspicious six-winged¹ announcement!

The breath of the future steams out animate gifts.

XVI

Hide in your forehead the star you sought to find in mourning. And with this star go on to feel pain above humanity's pain. Let the people of others become lower. You always know more. And because of this you are worthy and when you raise your flag a bitter color falls upon the faces of things that resemble the titanic world.

XVII

You learned nothing from what was born and what died in desires. You earned the confidence of a life that did not tame you and you continue the dream. What things can say and which ones can disdain you!

When you flash in the sun that slides waterdrops and immortal hyacinths and silences on you, I name you the only reality. When you escape darkness and come again with the east, wellspring, bud, sunbeam, I name you the only reality. When you leave

1. "six-winged": the seraphim have six wings.

those who are assimilated into nonexistence and reoffer yourself as a human, I wake from the beginning within your change. . . .

Play no more. Cast the ace of fire. Open the human geography.

XVIII

Dark shimmer—lullaby of the eyelids over the mythic spread of the world.

It's been some time since silence flung her breast against the wind, some time since the wind named her innards one by one.

Now nature, running like a child, is taken by the hand, her eyes startled by a blue tributary riverlet, by the illumined foliage, by a new cloud in the form of a clear sky. And I—poking the walnut tree's heart, finger-sifting the seashore sand, fathoming boundless space—I lost the markings that would have given birth to you. So where are you when the southwind dries up the soul and the Pleiades signal the night to free the infinite, where are you!

XIX

This bud of fire will open when you baptize your poppy with a different name.

And from then, wherever you are born again, wherever you are mirrored, wherever you smash your likeness, my passion will be in its April, opening with the same painful ease its seven pensive flames.

XX

So much light that even the naked line is immortalized. The water sealed off the bays. The single tree draughted space.

Now all that's left is for you to come oh! chiseled by the winds' experience and take the statue's place. All that's left is for you to come and turn your eyes toward the sea that will be no other than your living continual eternal whispering.

All that's left is for you to end up in the horizons.

XXI

You have a deadly earth that you leaf through endlessly and do not sleep. So many hills you say, so many seas, so many flowers. And your one heart becomes plural idealizing their quintessence. And wherever you advance space opens, and whatever word you send to infinity embraces me. Guess, toil, feel:

On the other side I am the same.

In Service of Summer

Ode to Santorini

You emerged from a thunderpeal's entrails
Shuddering amid repentant clouds
Bitter stone, proved, proud
You sought the sun for the first-martyred witness
To confront perilous splendor together
To head out to sea with a cross-bearing echo

Sea-wakened, proud
You lifted up your stone breast
Speckled with the southwind's inspiration,
For pain to inscribe its very heart there
For hope to inscribe its very heart there
With fire with lava with smoke
With words that convert the infinite
You gave birth to the voice of day
You set up the bells on high
In the green and rose stretches of aether
Bells rung by the exalted mind
Glorifying the birds in mid-August light

Beside waveroar, beside anguish of seafoam
Through the eucharists of sleep
When night roamed the deserts of stars
Searching for the testimony of dawn,
You felt the joy of birth
You leapt first into the world
Born to the purple, sea-risen
You sent to the far horizons
The blessings that grew in the sea's night-vigils
To caress the hair of dawn's fifth hour.

Queen of Aegean pulses and wings
With the words to convert the infinite
With fire with lava with smoke
You found the great lines of your destiny

Now before you justice opens out
Black mountains float in the glow
Desires prepare their craters

In the heart's tormented land,
And from hope's struggle a new earth prepares itself
To step there with eagles and banners
One morning filled with iridescence
The race that vivifies dreams
The race that sings in the sun's embrace.

O kore of exceeding anima
Naked sea-risen
Open the splendid gates of man
That the landscape be fragrant with health
That feeling with open wings aflutter
Sprout with a thousand colors
And freedom blow from everywhere

Amid the wind's preachings flash out
The new and perpetual beauty
When the sun of the third hour rises
All glaucous to play the pipe organ of Creation.

Famous Night . . .

. . . In the flowerbed, near the musical complaint of your hand's curve. Near your diaphanous breasts, the uncovered forests filled with violets and broom and open palms of moon, as far as the sea, the sea you caress, the sea that takes me and going off leaves me with a thousand seashells.

I taste your good moment visible and beautiful! I say that you communicate so well with men, that you raise them to the level of your heart so that one can no longer pray to what belongs to himself, to what emerges like a tear at the root of every herb at the tip of each reached branch. I say that you communicate so well with the springtime of things that your fingers match their fate. You are visible and beautiful and at your side I am whole! I want boundless paths at the crossroads of birds and right men, the gathering of stars that shall reign together. And I want to catch something, even your smallest glowworm that jumps unsuspecting into the skin of plains, so I can write with certain fire that nothing is transient in the world from the moment we chose, this moment that we want to exist above and beyond the golden opposition, above and beyond the calamity of death's frost, in each wind's direction that marks our heart with love, in the sky's superb prickling that night and day is shaped by the stars' goodness.

Marina of the Rocks

You have a taste of tempest on your lips—But where did you rove
Daylong with the hard reverie of stone and sea
Eagle-bearing wind stripped the hills
Stripped your desire to the bone
And the pupils of your eyes took the Chimaera's staff
Scoring memory with foam!
Where is the familiar slope of little September
On the red earth where you played gazing down toward
The deep bushes of the other girls
The corners where your friends left armfuls of marine mint

—But where did you rove
Nightlong with the hard reverie of stone and sea
I told you to measure its luminous days in the unclothed water
To enjoy on your back the dawn of things
Or else to wander on yellow plains
With a clover of light on your breasts heroine of iamb.

You have a taste of tempest on your lips
And a dress red as blood
Deep in the gold of summer
And the aroma of hyacinths—But where did you rove

Descending toward the shores the pebbled bays
A cold salt sea grass was there
But deeper a human feeling that bled
And you opened your arms in surprise saying its name
Ascending lightly to the depths' limpidity
Where your own starfish glittered.

Listen, the word is the prudence of our last days
And time is a passionate sculptor of men
And the sun stands over it a beast of hope
And you nearer it hold tight a love
With a bitter taste of tempest on your lips.

It's not for you blue to the bone to count on another summer
For rivers to change course

And take you back to their mother
For you to kiss again other cherry trees
Or go riding on the northwester

Fixed on rocks without yesterday or tomorrow
Fixed on dangers of rocks with the streaming hair of the storm
You'll bid farewell to your enigma.

Age of Glaucous Memory

Olive groves and vineyards up to the sea
And farther off red fishing boats up to memory
August's golden husks in a noon sleep
With shells or seaweed. And that ship
Just launched, green, that in the baywater's peace still reads
God Will Provide

The years went by as leaves or pebbles
I remember those kids, the sailors who left
Dyeing their sails like their heart
They sang the horizon's four corners
They had northwinds painted in their chests.

What was I seeking when you arrived dyed by the sunrise
With the sea's age in your eyes
And with the sun's health in your body—what was I seeking
Deep in sea caves in spacious dreams
Where the wind unknown and glaucous
Foamed its feelings, engraving its sea emblem on my chest

With sand on my fingers I closed my fingers
With sand in my eyes I clenched my fingers
It was pain—
I remember it was April when I first felt your human weight
Your human body clay and sin
As on our first day on earth
It was the amaryllis festival—But I remember you were in pain
It was a deep bite on the lips
A deep fingerscratch on the skin where time is forever engraved
I left you then

And a buzzing breeze lifted the white houses
The white emotions freshly washed up
To the sky that shone with a smile.

Now I'll have beside me a jug of immortal water¹
I'll have a form of the wind's freedom shaking
And those hands of yours where Eros shall be tormented
And that shell of yours wherein the Aegean shall echo.

1. "immortal water": A common phrase in folk songs; one who drinks it (especially the waters of the river Styx) will become immortal.

Adagio

Come so together we can claim from sleep the indolent pillow that floats on the adjacent moon. So we can fill the sand with seaweed and stars, our two undisturbed heads gliding with a lulling motion. Because we shall have very much lived the glitter from tears and we shall love the right tranquility.

If angels are not the angels with prodigal violins fanning the nights with flickering lights and souls' bells! Flutes wind-leading airy recumbent desires. Tormented kisses or kisses pearls on aquatic oars. And deeper in the lighted gooseberries, gently the pianos of the blond voice, medusae to keep the journey gravigrade. Shores with few and pensive trees.

O come so we can establish dreams together, so we can see tranquility. There will be nothing in the desolate sky other than the heart that distress makes wet, other than the heart that charm makes wet, other than the heart that belongs to our desolate sky.

Come to my shoulder and dream because you are a beautiful woman. Oh you are a beautiful woman. Oh you are beautiful. Beautiful.

Blissful Donna

To the star of A.

Take some pollen from consolation's sparkle
A place that flashes into the infinite
Higher even than your highest hope
Blissful Donna! And from the world of lightbeams' edge
Roll the waves with dissolved emerald
For the zephyr of the music of the south

Waves for the zephyr of the music that takes
Night's virginity far away
With journeys to boundless caves
With girls who love the embraces of lilies
And melodize the depth of sky
And long for empty aether's chill wind

Take a place that flashes into the infinite
A blue pupil of an unaccounted eye
With stamens of wish at your level
Blissful Donna! And from a consubstantial heart
Go and see the depth of years
Strewn with pebbles of quiet seas.

Melancholy of the Aegean

What coherence of soul in the halcyons of afternoon!
What quietude in the voices of the distant seaboard!
The cuckoo in the trees' kerchief
And the mystic moment of the fishermen's supper
And the sea that plays on its harmonica
The distant pining of the beautiful
Woman who bared her breasts
When memory entered into the nests
And lilacs sprinkled the west with fire!

With the caïque¹ and the Virgin's² sails
The lovers of the lilies' foreign land
Left with godspeed of the winds
But how did night murmur sleep here
With purling hair on gleaming necks
Or on the great white seashores
And how did dust from the dreams of girls
Fragrant with basil and mint
Scatter and stream on high
With Orion's golden sword!

At the triple crossroads where the ancient witch stood
Kindling the winds with dry thyme
Supple shadows lightly stepped
With a jug in hand filled with charmed water
They stepped easily as if entering paradise
And from the crickets' prayer that foamed the fields
Lovely girls with skin of moon arose
To dance on the midnight threshing floor. . . .

O signs you who descend into the depths
Of water that holds a mirror
Seven small lilies shimmering

When Orion's sword returns
It will find poor bread under the lantern

1. "caïque": a light skiff.

2. "Virgin": a common name for boats in Greece.

But soul in the embers of the stars
It will find great hands branching into infinity
Desolate seaweed late children of the shore
Years green gems

O green gem—what stormseer saw
You stop the light at the birth of day
The light at the birth of the world's two eyes!

Wind of the Virgin

In a handsread of sea you tasted the bitter pebbles
At two in the morning sauntering on desolate August
You saw the moon's light walking with you
A lost step. Or if the heart was not in its place
It was earth's memory with the beautiful woman
The wish that yearned in basil's bosom
For the wind of the Virgin to blow at it!

Hour of night! And the northwind drenched with tears
Just as the heart shuddered in the clenching of earth
Naked beneath the constellations of its silent trees

You tasted the bitter pebbles in the depths of dream
When the clouds untied the sails
And without the sin's crying "uncle" the weather
Was incised in your first viscera. Before initial fire
You can still see the beauty of sand
Where you played your vow and where you had the wish
Hundred-leaved, open to the wind of the Virgin!

Depth

We began a word in which the sky cannot fit but which oppresses the ease of wind as it bursts forth against the seashore struck by expectation's brine or against cold wharves where for centuries the disinherited shadow of forgetfulness paces. Sworn country! Ancient birds filled with clouds, now toward the west that incises swamps of ennui on our breast, now toward the immature heart that stubbornly seeks to enter nature . . .

We still remember the rags of a magnanimous fire, the experiments of a paper kite that perplexed our fingers high in the air or at the beginning of a road where we stopped to seek a woman filled with responses filled with shadows of affection suited to our bold heads. We still remember the purity that we had thought so enigmatic, washed in a dawn that we loved because we didn't know that even deeper inside us we prepared other bigger dreams that were to hold tight in their embrace more soil, more blood, more water, more fire, more Eros!

Image of Boeotia

Here where a desolate glance blows the stones and agave
Here where time's footsteps sound deep
Where great clouds open into golden cherubim
Above the metope of the sky
Tell me where eternity began
Tell me what is the sign you ache for
And what the lot of the helminth

O earth of Boeotia shined by the wind

What has become of the orchestra of naked hands
 beneath the palaces
Of the mercy that rose like sacred smoke
Where are the gates with ancient singing birds
And the clang that dawned the terror of peoples
When the sun was entering as triumph
When fate writhed on the lance of the heart
And fratricidal warblings took fire
What has become of the immortal March libations
Of Greek lines in the water of verdancy

Foreheads and elbows were wounded
Time rolled pink from so much sky
Men advanced
Filled with pain and dream

Acrid image! Ennobled by the wind
Of a summer storm that leaves fireblond
Traces on the lines of hills and eagles
In the lines of your palm's destiny

What can you regard and what can you wear
Dressed in the music of grasses and how can you proceed
Through heather and through sage
To the arrow's final point

On this red earth of Boeotia
In the desolate marching song of boulders
You'll kindle golden sheaves of fire
You'll uproot the evil fruitfulness of memory
You'll leave a bitter soul in the wild mint!

Birth of Day

When day stretches from its stem and opens all the colors
on the earth

When because of a voice the stalagmite breaks into a
mouth

When the sun swims like a river in an unharvested plain
And a sail a shepherd boy of summer winds runs far
Your dress is always an island's dress it is a mill that turns
the years backwards

The years that you lived and that I find again hurting their
painted image in my breast

One apricot tree leans toward the other and the soil falls
from the embrace of the awakened water

The wasp opens its wings in the mullein's body

Then it suddenly flies away and buzzing vanishes,

And from waterdrop to leaf and leaf to statue time is
more and more transformed as it moves

Time takes the things that recall you and more and more
makes them akin in my love

The same desire is rewoven

The whole trunk of the tree of the sun of the good heart is
aflame.

Thus I still see you in the beam of eternal day

Listening to the shore's heartbeat

The birth did not change even one of your joys

Rising you left a great bride of foam

You tossed your head cleaned by morning beauty

The sky's clarity widened your eyes

There was no enigma that was not effaced that did not
become smoke in a wind god's mouth

You changed the seasons with your hands

Setting snow and rain, flowers, seas

And day separated from your body, ascended, opened, a
great wish on the heliotropes

What does the cicada know now of the history you left
behind what does the cricket know

The village bell that opens into wind

The caterpillar, the crocus, the sea urchin, the water's little
alpha

Myriads of mouths cry and call you
Come then so we can live the colors from the beginning
So we can discover the naked island's gifts
Pink and azure domes will resurrect the feeling
Brave as a breast the feeling ready to fly again
Come then so we can spread out the light
And sleep the azure light on the stone steps of August

You know, every journey opens up to doves
The whole world dips into sea and shore
We'll catch the cloud we'll get out from the calamity of
time

From the other side of misfortune
We'll play our sun with our fingers
In the countryside of the open heart
We shall see the world being reborn.

The Whole World

I promised the rainbow a better earth a season full of soil fresh with immaculate chamomile at the bare feet that in green haste cense the waterpeak's longing as the partridges beating the deep heart of euphony dazzle the roads. With pure white birds I filled the wind that will go to the morning inauguration of the sea!

And here we are both ready, holding hands, our apron a child's, now pink now green, our shoots unwithering.

When we blow the veil opens the broad quivering of sand to beautiful years yet to come full of lullabies and naiad bodies dripping seaweed with many diamonds of songs that will return untouched to the sky's depth. From that point toil will begin and happiness will enter the crystals that we awaited with no more mountaincrests with no more islands with no more stories of the kind that suit our breasts or the whole world's breasts because the whole world can speak of its happiness with a purple voice because the whole world loves the things that love it and it runs through the boundless verdancy of its soul the way a waterfall runs through mountains, the hymn runs through the golden hair of the gallant men of Justice.

Beautiful Girl in the Garden

You woke the waterdrop of day
Upon the start of the trees' song
Oh how lovely you are
With your joyful hair unbound
And with the fountain open in which you came
For me to hear you passing by and living!

Oh how lovely you are
Running with a larkgirl's fluff
Around the musk rose that blows at you
The way a sigh blows featherdown
With a great sun in your hair
And with a honeybee in your dance's glow

Oh how lovely you are
With the new soil that you ache for
From root to shadows' summit
Among the eucalyptus nets
With half the sky in your eyes
And half in the eyes you love

Oh how lovely you are
As you wake the mill of the winds
And lean your nest to the left
That so much love not go for lost
That not one shadow make complaint
To the Greek butterfly girl you lit

Aloft with your morning-star's gladness
Filled with the east's greenery
Filled with the first-heard birds
Oh how lovely you are
Tossing the waterdrop of day
Upon the start of the trees' song!

The Mad Pomegranate Tree

*Morning high spirits as questions
à perdre haleine*

In these bright white courtyards where the southwind
blows
Whistling through vaulted arches, tell me is it the mad
pomegranate tree
Who leaps in light scattering her fruitful laugh
With wind's stubbornness and whispering, tell me is it the
mad pomegranate tree
Who quivers the dawn with foliage newborn
Opening all her colors aloft with a shiver of triumph?

When in awakening fields naked girls
Harvest clover with blond hands
Roaming the ends of their sleep, tell me is it the mad
pomegranate tree
Who unsuspecting places lights in their verdant baskets
Who overflows their names with birdsong, tell me
Is it the mad pomegranate tree who fights the world's
cloudy skies?

On the day that jealously adorns herself with seven kinds
of feathers
Girding the eternal sun with thousands of blinding
Prisms, tell me is it the mad pomegranate tree
Who running seizes a mane with a hundred lashes
Never sad and never grumbling, tell me is it the mad
pomegranate tree
Who shouts the new hope now dawning?

Tell me, is it the mad pomegranate tree who greets the
expanse
Fluttering a leaf handkerchief of cool fire
A sea about to give birth to a thousand ships
With waves that a thousand times move and go
To unscented shores, tell me is it the mad pomegranate
tree
Who creaks the rigging aloft in pellucid aether?

Very high with the glaucous skycluster that lights and
celebrates
Proud, full of danger, tell me is it the mad pomegranate
tree
Who mid-world breaks the demon's storms with light
Who spreads from end to end the saffron bib of day
Richly embroidered with sown songs, tell me is it the mad
pomegranate tree
Who hastily unhooks the silks of day?

In petticoats of April first and cicadas of August fifteenth
Tell me, she who plays, she who rages, she who seduces
Casting off from threat its evil black glooms
Pouring intoxicating birds on the sun's bosom
Tell me, she who opens her wings on the breast of things
On the breast of our deep dreams, is it the mad
pomegranate tree?

SUN THE FIRST

Thus often when I am speaking of the sun a huge crimson rose gets tangled in my tongue. But it is not possible for me to be silent.

I

I no more know the night death's fearful anonymity
In an inlet of my soul moors a fleet of stars.
So that you, sentinel Hesperus, may shine
Beside the skyblue breeze of an island
Dreaming of me announcing dawn from its high cliffs,
My two eyes sail you in an embrace with the star
Of my true heart: I no more know the night.

I no more know the names of a world that denies me
Clearly I read the shells the leaves the stars
Enmity is superfluous to me on the sky's roads
Unless it is the dream that looks at me again
As in tears I cross the sea of immortality
O Hesperus, beneath the curve of your golden fire
The night that's only night I no more know.

It's a long time since the last rain was heard
Above the ants and lizards
Now the sky burns boundless
Fruits paint their mouths
Earth's pores slowly open
And by water dripping in syllables
A huge plant looks the sun in the eye!

Who lies on the upper beaches
Supine puffing on smoke-silver olive leaves
Cicadas warm themselves in his ears
Ants are working on his chest
Lizards slide through his armpits' grass
And through the seaweed of his feet a wave falls softly
Sent by the little siren who sang:

O naked body of summer burnt
Eaten away by oil and salt
Body of rock and shiver of the heart
Great windsweep of the chaste tree's hair
Basil's breath above the curly pubis
Filled with little stars and pine needles
Body deep vessel of day!

Soft rains come and headlong hail
The shores pass lashed by a snowstorm's claws
That darkens far off with furious waves
The hills plunge into thick udders of clouds
Yet behind all these you smile carefree
And find again your immortal hour
As the sun finds you again on the beaches
As the sky finds you within your naked health.

*"One poem of mine is called 'Body of Summer.' It is the idea of summer which is personified by the body of a young man" (Interview, p. 639).

III

O shining day, cockle of the voice that shaped me
To walk naked on my daily Sundays
Amid the welcoming of seashores,
Blow your very first wind
Spread out a lawn of affection
Through which the sun can roll his head
And kindle poppies with his lips
Poppies that proud men will harvest
So that no mark be on their bare chests
Other than the blood of defiance which erasing sorrow
Reached to freedom's memory.

I spoke eros the rose's health the beam
That by itself directly finds the heart
Greece who paces surely on the sea
Greece who takes me on a voyage always
To naked snow-resplendent mountains.

I give my hand to justice
Limpid fountain highmost spring
My sky is immutable and deep
What I love¹ is born incessantly
What I love is at its beginning always.

1. "What I love": from a phrase of Sappho later quoted in *The Little Seafarer*.

IV

Drinking Corinthian sun
Reading the old marbles
Striding through vineyard seas
Aiming the harpoon
At a votive fish that slips away
I found the leaves the sun's psalm learns by heart
The living shore desire rejoices
To open.

I drink water I cut fruit
I thrust my hand in the wind's foliage
Lemon trees irrigate the summer pollen
Green birds tear my dreams
I leave with a glance
A wide glance where the world again becomes
Beautiful from the beginning by the measures of the heart.

V

What bud yet unloved threatens the honeybee
The wind finds company in undulating leaves
The shoreline bobs up and down
The mulberry trees open their sails in the grasses' foam
The last voyage resembles the very first.

Oh may stones break may angry iron bend
May foam reach the heart dizzying flaring eyes
May memory become a fadeless sprig of mint
And may celebratory winds rush from its root
May we lean our foreheads there
May glittering things remain close by
In longing's first spaciousness
May every tongue speak day's goodness
And earth's pulse gently beats in the veins.

VI

They struck day at a good point
The water woke in the ground
A cold newborn voice
That from afar joins with the neighborhood of moss.

With a sunflower's caress the orchard
Does not fear getting into the abyss
Lovers go hand in hand
When the sun's bells strike.

Health echo mare
Horseshoe and slope's feather
Cloud and grass unharvested
Glaucous fathoms of wind.

Young birds slanting
Go to ring spring in the clouds
And what joy never named
Now thirsts for the world's happiness.

O thirst of the world a male uniform suits you
You will go find your female watercourse
Overturning a starry meadow
That the anemones have fled.

VII

Down in the daisy's small threshing floor
The maiden bees have struck up a crazy dance
The sun sweats the water trembles
Fire's sesame slowly falls
Grainstalks bend the swart sky.

With bronzed lips naked bodies
Scorched by fervor's tinderbox
Hey! hey! Drivers pass jolting by
Their horses sink in the downslope's olive oil
Their horses dream
Of a cool city with marble water troughs
A clover cloud ready to pour
On hills of slender trees that scald their ears
On great fields' tambourines that set their dung a-dancing.

Beyond in golden tares tomboys doze
Their sleep smells of conflagration
The sun throbs in their teeth
Nutmeg sweetly drips from their armpits
And a haze drunk with heavy strokes staggers
Through azalea through alyssum and through muskwillow!

VIII

I lived the beloved name
In the shade of the grandmother olive tree
In the roar of the lifelong sea.

Those who stoned me live no longer
With their stones I built a fountain
Verdant girls come to its threshold
Their lips are descended from the dawn
Their hair unwinds deeply in the future.

Swallows come infants of the wind
They drink and fly that life go on
The bogey of dream becomes a dream
Grief rounds the good cape
No voice gets wasted in the sky's bosom.

O unwithering sea tell me what you are whispering
Early on I am in your morning mouth
On the peak where your love appears
I see night's volition pour forth the stars
Day's volition lop off the tops of earth.

In the fields of life I sow a thousand champion
A thousand children amid the honest wind
Beautiful strong children from whom goodness mists
Who know to gaze hard at far horizons
When music lifts the islands.

I carved the beloved name
In the shade of the grandmother olive tree
In the roar of the lifelong sea.

LX

The garden was entering the sea
Dark carnation promontory
Your hand was leaving with the water
To strew the sea as bridal bed
Your hand was opening the sky.

Angels with eleven swords
Were floating by your name
Cutting through the blossoming waves
The white sails were listing down
In gust after northeastern gust.

With white rosethorns
You were sewing bows of expectation
For the hair of your love's hills
You were saying: Haircomber of light
She is a spring of earth who's having fun.

Thief arrow scandal of laughter
Granddaughter of old lady sunshine
Through the trees you were teasing the roots
You were opening funnels of water
Knocking off jujubes of forgetfulness.
Or otherwise at night with prodigal violins
In half-ruined mills
You were talking secretly with a witch
You were hiding a grace in your bosom
Which was the moon itself.

Moon here moon there
Enigma read by the sea
For your own sake
The garden was entering the sea
Dark carnation promontory.

X

Child with skinned knee
Head with cut hair dream with uncut hair
Suit with crossed anchors
Arm of pine tongue of fish
Little brother of the cloud!

You saw a sea-wet pebblewhiten near you
You heard a bamboo whistle
The most naked landscape you knew
The most colorful
Deep down the seabream's funny course
Up high the little church's hat
And far off a boat's red smokestacks.

You saw the wave of plants where the hoarfrost was taking
Her morning bath the leaf of prickly pear
The little bridge on the curve of road
As well as the wild smile
In great knocks of trees
In great solstices of marriage
Where tears drip from hyacinths
Where the sea urchin opens riddles of water
Where stars signal the storm.

Child with skinned knee
Crazy amulet stubborn jaw
Airy shorts
Breast of rock lily of water
Gamin of the white cloud!

With dropsail soul and briny lip
With sailor suit and red sandals
He gets tangled in the clouds
He tramps on seaweed of the sky.
Dawn whistles in her conch
A boat's prow approaches foaming
Angels! Reverse oars
For the Virgin Annunciate to moor here!

How the orchard's gentry feel proud on the ground!
When the cystus turns its uncombed head
The waterbasins overflow
And the Virgin Annunciate enters naked
Dripping foam with starfish on her brow
With a clove wind on her loosened hair
And a crab still straying on her sun-bronzed shoulder!

—Godmother of my white birds
My Mermaid Annunciate Virgin!
What cannonballs of sea blue carnations do your guns shoot on
the pier
How many conch armadas do your fires sink
And how you bend the palms when the southwester goes crazy
And drags over sand and pebbles!

Hopes pass through her eyes
On boats of cuttlebone
To three leaping dolphins
Behind her fluffed flags wave!

Ah with what violas with what lilacs
Would I have fixed a wish oh mercy on your breasts
To set a different fate for me!
I cannot bear land
Bitter-orange trees cannot hold me
Let me head to the open sea with ballads and wooden bells!

Quickly my Virgin quickly
Already I hear a rough voice high above the ramparts
It strikes and strikes against the bronze bolts
It strikes and strikes and strengthens
Its silver pendants flash like suns
Ah and it gives orders—don't you hear?—Ah and it gives
orders: Bouboulina!¹

And the Virgin rejoices the Virgin smiles
The deep-rolling sea so much resembles her!
—Yes you stubborn rascal
Yes sailor boy of the orchard
In your sleep wait three three-masters!

Now with wide straw hat and red sandals
With a jackknife in hand
The sailor boy of the orchard goes
He cuts the yellow cables
Loosens the white clouds
Dawn whistles in her conch
Gunpowder explodes in dreams
Easter in the seaweed of the sky!

1. "Bouboulina": a heroine of Greece's 1821 War of Independence.

XII

Half-sunken boats
Planks that swell with pleasure
Winds barefoot winds
In alleys gone deaf
Cobbled descents
Dumb man crazy man
Half-built hope.

Big news bells
White laundry in yards
Skeletons on beaches
Paint pitch turpentine
Preparations for the Virgin's name day¹
Expecting white sails
And blue pennants for the celebration.

And you in the upper orchards
Beast of the wild pear tree
Slim unripe boy
The sun between your legs
Getting fragrance
And the girl on the opposite shore
Slowly burning because of the hydrangeas.

1. "Virgin's name day": August 15th.

XIII

This wind that loiters amid the quince trees
This bug that sucks the vines
The stone the scorpion wears close to his flesh
And these sheaves on the threshing floors
That play giant to barefoot tots.

Paintings of God resurrected
On a wall the pines scratched with their fingers
Whitewash bearing noons on its back
And cicadas cicadas in the trees' ears.
Great summer of chalk
Great summer of cork
Red sails slanting in the breezes
On the seafloor animals blond sponges
Harmonicas of the cliffs
Perch still with the bad fisherman's fingermarks
Shoals proud in the sun's fishlines.

One and two: no one will speak our fate.
One and two: we shall speak the sun's fate.

XV

Pour fire into the olive oil
And fire into the breast
The soul's palaestra is no prudent corner
Luck takes on a strange sun-seeress's mien
And dances for spring
And May's dizziness in chamomile's seaswell
Rends time opens wide the woodland leaves
So much it wrings the beggar's heart
His roses give forth thorns for the satiated
His roses smell eternity
His roses hide in the filaments
Honest blood that seeks revenge.

Pour fire into the olive oil
Lance the heavy pregnant cloud
Where the toil of rain lies low
The almond tree washed clean opens itself in brilliance
Children rush about the fields
Their voices are no longer rags
But multicolored sails where the eagle embays his victory.

XVI

With what stones what blood what iron
With what fire are we made
Although we seem made of plain cloud
and they stone us and say
We're walking on air
God only knows
How we spend our days and nights.

My friend when night ignites your electric grief
I see the heart's tree spread
Your arms open beneath an all white Idea
Which you keep entreating
But which will not descend
Year after year
It up high you here below.

But the vision of longing wakens one day as flesh
And where only naked wilderness used to flash
A city now laughs as lovely as you wished
You almost see it it waits for you
Give me your hand let's go before Dawn
Inundates it with triumphant shouts.

Give me your hand—before birds gather
On men's shoulders and sing
That at last the sea-vision virgin Hope
Appeared coming from afar!

Let us go together and let them stone us
And let them say we're walking on air
Those who have never felt my friend with what
Iron what stones what blood what fire
We build and dream and sing!

XVII

I played with Mt. Chelmos's snow
I tanned in Lesbos's olive groves
I threw white pebbles in a Myrtoa sea
I braided green hair on Aetolia's ridge.

Places that nourished me
With the sun's juices and the moon's forget-me-not
For you today I dream of eyes
That would keep you company with a better light.

Of eyes for a better walk
The nights are forging
Herculean paintings in your guts.
He who'd get up to say: I master life
Without being thunderstruck by death
He who in a handful of clear wind
Will ask a naked rose to be born
And it shall be born
He will have within his breast a hundred centuries
But he will be young
Young as water's new-cut little voice
That gushes from the side of day
Young as a shoot of an untouched bough
Young without earth-wrinkle or sky-shadow
Without a joyful sinner's delight.

XVIII

With a grainstalk torch on high
Gallantry advances amid the waves and sings:

O fellows who understand me—little patriots of the sun
With osiers and strange birds in your hands
With verdant hearts and clear eyes
You who hear the east buzz from seashores
Warming in your arms a boundless light
From the sky's edge to the heart's depth
With purple stubbornness—little patriots of the sun
You who say: the only road is the east!

The earth of olive trees and fig trees
Of cypresses of vineyards of dry streambeds of great cupolas
The earth leans with one side in your dreams' riverbank
O listen to me I'm family give me a hand
That can love at once that can cut entire dreams
That can swim freely in the youth of clouds.

The earth speaks and is heard by the eyes' quivering.

Variations on a Sunbeam

The mouth that is a daemon word crater
Food of poppy blood of anguish
That is the great cumin of spring
Your mouth speaks with four hundred roses
Beats the trees overwhelms the entire earth
Pours the first shiver into the body.

Great fragrance of the finger multiplies my passion
My open eye hurts on thorns
It's not so much the fountain that longs for two fowls of breasts
As the wasp's buzz on naked hips.

Give me the amaranth's scar the spells
Of the girl who spins
The "goodbye" the "I'm coming" the "I'll give you"
Caves of health will drink a health to the sun
The world will be the loss or the double voyage
Here to the wind's sheet there to infinity's view.

Cane tulip cheek of concern
Cool innards of fire
I'll throw May on his back I'll squeeze him in my arms
I'll beat him I'll devour him.

These seven poems present the eros-girl from dawn to dusk; her epiphany is in IV.

A knife stab into the apple's flesh
A bitterness in the fresh almond's pants
A bound of water into the leek
And the girl who has not yet entered fully into love
But holds in her apron an acrid grove of fruit.

Girl I have in my heart an untouched lawn
And a rain of newborn clover
But the waterfall that did not leap is deeper
Lower
And will leap like a beast of day into your April
When I touch the source and the sun eats you.

Grass a smooth bed
Finch's ear salve of honey welcoming of breath
The wave of the mainland is also big
The touch of the body is also deep
Time is not in vain in the laugh that writhes
From its desire to enter the sky's passion.

I shall enter through the door that a single leaf defends
I shall imitate an adolescent horse's harsh whinny
I shall try the spasm that lifts you to the stars!

Early, grape pink girls cast their
Fireworks voices and loud colors
To the westwind's distant chapel. . . .
Whoosh and ding! the wind surged from the bells
And far off all the sea *whoosh* and *ding!* *whoosh* and *ding!*
Browes on crazy bells. . . .

And they now go naked from the waist up
With wide straw hats cream-colored nipples swaying like slanted
Wheat with a butterfly on the mutinous right breast
Three four sixteen eighty or a hundred
They go and scold the children of grass-mistress earth
They go and blow furies of fire with trumpets on threshing floors
They burn the hay they melt florins they censer with crocuses'
Flowerdust the mainland's chest so it trembles
The aether rages from canary yellow gusts and keeps flashing
It boils with sulphur on the shore and with canebrakes in the
plains. . . .

Girls don't. With what heart can the nightingales hasten!
Don't. With what waterdrop can the pergolas grow!
How can the sky fit into a rosy conch
Girls how could the light be guessed from your eyes!

The Orange Girl

To Andreas Cambas

The sun's juice so intoxicated her
That she bowed her head and bit by bit agreed
To become: the little Orange Girl!

So as the seven skies shone azure
So as the crystals touched a fire
So as the swallowtails flashed
Angels above and girls below were perplexed
Storks above and peacocks below were perplexed
And they all gathered together and saw her together
And they all called her: Orange Girl

The vine and the scorpion get drunk the whole world gets drunk
But the prick of day does not let the pain go
The dwarf heron speaks her into small worms
Water striking speaks her into golden moments
And dew speaks her into the good northwind's upper lip:

Get up little little little Orange Girl!
No one knows you as well as a kiss
Not even laughing God knows you
Who with his open hand in the blazing sunglare
Shows you naked to his thirty-two winds!

How easily I pass from your eyes to the sky
From the water's sleeve to the sea's face
From your little finger to the sapphire star
Hope fame of light infinite expanse
Whatever I see by eye nourishes me.

Whatever I hold by touch nourishes me
Cool body of sea or wind
The cold soap bubble globe of the intangible dream
Your virginity's geography that does not concern me
And silk for trampling
A glass bell-bowl for the deaf
Who dress their heaviest doll in cork.

My doll is your doll is little blue girl
Who naked pierced by stars has fun
And bathes in night and tickles the crickets.

But neither the drop of Dawn drunk by the azure
Nor the resurrection of the nightingale's slyness
Nor the top's vertigo nor the hour's
Fainting that scatters featherdown in the void
Drinks from your spring the spring called freedom.

Nymphs of the deep gave you the evil eye
The northwester's white erinyes too
Igniting the body's jealousy
But when the sun's weavers laughed
Who aspired to an earthly pride
You suddenly took on the dye of the infinite.

Now as I step on the hillsides
On the pinecones spread by the blowing
Of the spellbinding wind with dark blue lips
As I slide mid the pines of the downslope
And open my wings into your boundless gaze

As I fit a hymn to the northwind's mouth
The bay lights for me the sand's deep murmuring
And I see flowers fall on clear water
Swart seaweed in surfsound's lullaby
Patient pitchers on Aegean windowsills.

And I also see a single dark-hued bird
Being drunk by the enigma of your embrace
The way night is drunk by dawn
Or splendor by statue forms.

Violet

Like a coffin that advances while secretly the dead man
Leaves behind him a stream of violets
And Attica softly whispers good evening to him.

Like a painstaking gardener who works
Bent over the link fence and the Jewess stones
But who does not hear the bitter-orange tree's passion

When it wears the wind and waves with grass
To the northern lights of the floating mountains afar
And the clouds are frightened by the vinetender's "ah". . .

From all around earth gathers galaxies of her trees
And gives birth among them to a lake with waters

The earth prepares her sheets:
Amaranths more tender than the angels' small buttons
Bulbs more meek in counting than heaven's shadows.

The wind's threshing floor gleams all alone on high
Mallows get dressed and go to the tombs as candles
A boat vanishing whistles far off.

And as a quiet roof with its chimney
Chants vespers with three threads of smoke
A bat gets caught in the hair of the west!

SONG HEROIC AND
MOURNING FOR THE LOST
SECOND LIEUTENANT OF
THE ALBANIAN CAMPAIGN

Song Heroic and Mourning for the Lost Second Lieutenant of the Albanian Campaign*

I

There where the sun used to dwell
Where time was opening with a virgin's eyes
As the wind was snowing from the shaken almond tree
And riders were lit on the grasses' peaks

There where the splendid plane tree's hoof struck
And a high flag fluttered earth and water
Where weapons burdened no backs
But the whole sky's toil
The whole world shone like a waterdrop
In the morning, at the mountain's feet

Now, as if from God's sigh, a shadow spreads.

Now agony bending with bony hands
Picks and effaces flowers one by one;
Songs recline on the ravines
Where joy's famine stopped the waters;

Monk-rocks with cold hair
Silent break the bread of desolation.

Winter cuts right to the bone. Something evil
Will ignite. The horse-mountain's hair gets wild

High vultures share the sky's crumbs.

* Concerning this sequence of poems Elytis wrote, "The virtues I found embodied and living in my comrades formed in synthesis a brave young man of heroic stature, one whom I saw in every period of our history. They had killed him a thousand times, and a thousand times he had sprung up again, breathing and alive. He was no doubt the measure of our civilization, compounded of his love not of death but of life. It was with his love of Freedom that he re-created life out of the stuff of death" (Letter to Kimon Friar, Friar, pp. 16–17). Elytis's war experience is described in the first two readings of *The Axion Esti*.

II

Now a turmoil rises through turbid water;

The wind grasped by the leaves
Blows away its dust
The fruits spit out their pits
The earth hides its stones
Fear digs a tunnel and runs into it
When the cloud-wolf's howlings
From out of the sky's thickets
Fill the prairie's skin with tempestuous horror
And then the fear piles up the pitiless snow
And then it goes snorting to the fasting valleys
And then it makes men salute back:
Fire or knife!

For those who with fire or knife set off
Evil will ignite here. May the cross not despair
Only let the violets pray far from it!

III

Night for them was a more bitter day
They melted iron, they chewed earth
Their God smelled of gunpowder and muleskin

Every thunder a death riding the air
Every thunder a man smiling opposite
Death—and let fate say what it wants.

Suddenly the moment misfired and found its courage
And threw chips in the face of the sun
Binoculars, range finders, mortar shells, they went white!

Wind ripped easily as calico
Stones opened easily as lungs!
His helmet rolled to the left. . . .

The roots in the ground were disturbed just a moment
Later smoke scattered and day timidly tried
To deceive the mayhem from underground

But night arose like a trampled viper
Just as death paused between the teeth—
And then it was suddenly poured out to his pale nails!

IV

Now he lies on his scorched greatcoat
With a stopped wind in his quiet hair
With a twig of oblivion in his left ear
He looks like a garden the birds suddenly deserted
He looks like a song muzzled in the dark
He looks like an angel's clock that stopped
Just as his eyelashes said "so long"
The question turned to stone. . . .

He lies on his scorched greatcoat.
Black centuries around him
Bark with dogs' skeletons at the terrible silence
And the hours that became stone doves again
Listen attentively;
But the laugh was burnt, but the earth went deaf,
But no one heard the ultimate cry
The whole world emptied with the ultimate cry.

Under five cedars
With no other candles
He lies on his scorched greatcoat;
Empty his helmet, muddy his blood,
His half-finished arm by his side
And between his eyebrows—
A small bitter well, fingerprint of fate
A small red-black bitter well
A well where memory goes cold!

O do not look O do not look at the point
Whence his life fled. Do not say how
Do not say how dream's smoke ascended high
And then one moment And thus one
And thus one moment abandoned the other,
And the eternal sun thus suddenly abandoned the world!

V

Sun weren't you eternal?
 Bird weren't you the moment of joy that never rests?
 Gleam weren't you the cloud's fearlessness?
 And you orchard an odeon of flowers
 And you curly root a flute of magnolia!

Just as the tree shakes in the rain
 And the empty body goes black from fate
 And a madman beats himself with snow
 And the two eyes are about to weep—
 Why, the eagle asks, where is the warrior?
 And all the young eagles wonder where the warrior is!
 Why, asks the moaning mother, where is my son?
 And all mothers wonder where the boy is!
 Why, asks his comrade, where is my brother?
 And all his comrades ask where the youngest is!
 They grasp the snow, the fever burns
 They grasp his hand and it freezes
 As they bite bread it drips blood
 They look at the distant sky and it turns livid
 Why why why why doesn't death emit warmth
 Why such unholy bread
 Why such a sky where the sun once resided!

VI

He was a handsome boy. The first day after he was born
 The mountains of Thrace leaned for the rejoicing wheat
 To appear on the land's shoulders;
 The mountains of Thrace leaned and spit-blessed
 Once on his head, once on his chest, once in his weeping;
 Greeks with powerful arms came out
 And lifted him in the northwind's swaddling cloths. . . .
 Then the days ran, competed in the stone-throw
 Gamboled astride fillies
 Then morning's Strymons rolled along
 Until gypsy anemones tinkled everywhere
 And from the ends of the earth
 Sea-shepherds came to herd the flocks of jibsails

Where a sea cave breathed deeply
Where a big stone sighed!

He was a strong boy;
Embracing bitter-orange girls at night
He dirtied the great garments of stars
Eros was so big in his guts
That drinking wine he could taste the entire earth
Then starting to dance with all the poplar birds
Until dawn hears and pours light in his hair
Dawn who with open arms found him
Scratching the sun on the saddle of two little branches,
Painting the flowers,
Or affectionately singing a soft lullaby
To the small owls who kept watch. . . .
Ah such strong thyme his breath
Such a map of pride his bare chest
Against which freedom and sea broke. . . .

He was a brave boy;
With his dull gold buttons and his pistol
With a man's air in his step
And with his helmet, a shining spot
(They easily reached his mind
That never knew evil)
With his soldiers left and right
And vengeance for injustice before him
—Fire against lawless fire!—
With blood above his eyebrows
The Albanian mountains thundered
Then they melted snow to rinse
His body, silent shipwreck of dawn
And his mouth, a small songless bird
And his hands, open spaces of desolation
The mountains of Albania thundered
They did not weep
Why should they weep
He was a brave boy!

VII

The trees are charcoal that night does not light up.
The wind charges, is beaten, the wind is beaten again
Nothing. In the chill the mountains roost
Kneeling. And howling from the ravines,
From the heads of the dead the abyss rises. . . .
Not even Sorrow weeps. Like an orphaned crazy woman
She turns, she wears a little twig cross
She does not weep. Girt only by the black Akrokeravnia¹
She goes aloft and sets a slab of moon
Lest the planets see their shadow as they turn
And conceal their beams
And stop
There in the chaos panting in ecstasy. . . .

The wind charges, is beaten, the wind is beaten again
The wilderness is tightly wrapped in her black shawl
Bent behind cloud-months she listens hard
Listens hard to what, month-clouds far off?

With her hair rags on her shoulders—oh leave her alone—
Half-candle half-flame a mother weeps—leave her alone—
Let her roam in frozen empty rooms!
Because fate is no one's widow
And mothers are for weeping, men for struggling
Orchards for girls' bosoms to blossom
Blood is for spilling, surf for beating
And freedom for ceaseless lightning-birth!

VIII

So tell the sun to find a new road
Now that its homeland has darkened on earth
If it doesn't want to lose its pride;
Or then again with soil and water
Let it create in azure a little sister Greece elsewhere!
Tell the sun to find a new road
So it doesn't confront even a single daisy

1. "Akrokeravnia": mountains in Albania; the word means something like "thunderheads."

Tell the daisy to come out with another virginity
So she isn't sullied by fingers not right for her!

Separate the wild doves from the fingers
And let no sound speak the water's passion
As the sky sweetly blows in the empty shell
Send no sign of desperation anywhere,
Only bring from the orchards of manliness
The rosebushes where his soul was stirring
The rosebushes where his breath was playing
The little bride chrysalis
Who changes clothes as often as satin changes gusts
In the sun, when goldbugs get drunk on gold dust
And the birds rush to hear from the trees
What seedbirth supported the famous world!

IX

Bring new arms because who now will go
On high to lullaby the infants of the stars!
Bring new legs because who now will join first
The *pentozali*¹ of the angels!
New eyes—My God—because where will the beloved's
Narcissi go now to lean!
New blood because with what joyous greeting will they ignite
And mouth, mouth cool from copper and amaranth
Because who'll say "so long kids" to the clouds!

Day, who will disregard the peach leaves
Night, who will tame the grain fields
Who will scatter green icon-lamps in the plains
Or boldly give the war cry in the face of the sun
So to dress in tempests astride an invulnerable horse
And to become an Achilles of shipyards!
Who will reach the mythic and black desert isle
So to kiss the holy pebbles
And who will sleep
So to pass through the Euboean tide-straits of dream

1. "pentozali": a fast folk dance.

To find new arms, legs, eyes,
Blood and voice
To re-arise again on the marble threshing floors¹
And to throw himself—oh this time—
And with his sanctity to throw himself against Death!

X

Sun, copper voice, holy summer wind
Vowed on his chest "May I enjoy life!"²
There was no place for any dark power
Only with light poured from a laurel branch
And with silver from dew could the cross
Shine there, as greatness dawned
And goodness with sword in hand emerged
To say through his eyes and their flags "I live!"

Hello there river who at dawn could see him
Like a divine child with a pomegranate twig
In his teeth, fragrant from your waters;
Hello to you too peasant medlar tree who became manly
Every time that his dreams were taken by Androutsos;³
And to you too little fountain of noon who reached his feet
And to you girl who were his Helen,
Who were his bird, his Virgin, his Pleiades,
Because even if only once in life
Love of man rings out igniting
The secret firmaments star by star
The divine echo will always and everywhere reign
To adorn the forests with birds' little hearts
Poets' words with lyres of jasmine

And to alter hidden evil wherever it is—
And igniting alter hidden evil wherever it is!

1. "marble threshing floors": The image is from a cycle of folk ballads, compiled in the tenth century, about the heroic Byzantine borderguard Digenis Akritas, who fights and defeats Death.

2. "May I enjoy life!": reverses the common phrase, "If I don't do such-and-such, may I not enjoy life."

3. "Androutsos": heroic guerrilla leader during the 1821 Greek War of Independence, tortured and murdered by his enemies.

XI

Those who committed the evil—since grief had taken
Their eyes they went staggering along
Since horror had taken
Their grief they vanished in a black cloud
Back! and no more feathers on their foreheads¹
Back! and no more nails on their feet
Where the sea undresses vineyards and volcanoes
In the homeland's plains again and with moon as plough
Back! In the places where fingers like hounds
Sniff flesh and where the tempest lasts
As long as white jasmine in woman's summer harvest!

Those who committed the evil—a black cloud took them
They had no life behind them with fir trees and cool waters
With lamb, wine and gunshots, osier and vinecross
They had no grandfather of oak and raging wind
Standing watch for eighteen days and nights
With sorrowful eyes;
A black cloud took them—they had no
Uncle ship's-demolition expert, no father cannon loader
No mother who has slaughtered with her hands
Or mother's mother who dancing with bare
Breast gave herself to the freedom of Death!²

Those who committed the evil—a black cloud took them
But he who confronted it in the sky's roads
Ascends now alone and resplendent!

XII

With morning step on growing grass
He ascends alone and resplendent. . . .

Tomboy flowers wave to him in secret
And speak to him with a thin voice that mists in the aether
The trees lean towards him lovingly

1. "feathers on their foreheads": The enemy Italian soldiers attached black crows' feathers to their helmets.

2. "Or mother's mother . . . freedom of Death": During the War of Independence, the women of Zallongo, rather than surrender to the Turks, danced to death over a cliff, infants in arm.

With nests stuck in their armpits
With their branches dipped in the sun's oil
Miracle—what a miracle, low on the earth
White tribes with azure ploughshares incise the plains
The hillcrests flash far off
And further off the inaccessible dreams of spring mountains!

He ascends alone and resplendent
So drunk on light that his heart shows through
The true Olympus shows through the clouds
And his comrades' praise in the surrounding air. . . .
Now the dream beats faster than blood
The animals gather along the path's sides
They grunt and gaze as though they were speaking
The whole world is truly a great
Giant who pets his children

Crystal bells chime in the distance
Tomorrow, tomorrow they say: the Easter of the sky!

XIII

Bells of crystal chime in the distance—

They talk of him who was burned in life
Like a bee in a gush of thyme
Of the dawn that drowned in breasts of soil
Though it presaged a glorious day;
Of the snowflake that flashed in the mind and died out
When the bullet's whine was heard in the distance
And the Albanian partridge flew aloft lamenting!

They talk of him who never even had a chance to cry
For the deep anguish of life's Passion
When the wind strengthened in the distance
And birds croaked from a ruined windmill's beams
For women who drank wild music
Standing at the window pulling tight their headscarves
For women who drove despair to despair
Awaiting a black mark where the plain begins

Then strong petals outside the threshold
Talk of his hot and uncaressed head
Of his big eyes that life penetrated
So deeply, that it can never get out!

XIV

Now the dream beats faster in the blood
The world's rightest moment rings out:
Freedom,
Greeks show the way in the darkness:
FREEDOM
For you the sun will weep with joy

Rainbow-struck shores fall into the waters
Ships with open sails glide through the meadows
The most innocent girls
Run naked before men's eyes
And modesty cries out from behind the hedge
Boys! there is no other earth more beautiful . . .

The world's rightest moment rings out

With morning step on growing grass
He keeps on ascending;
Now, desires once lost in the solitude
Of sin gleam around him;
Neighbors of his heart, desires flame up;
Birds greet him, he feels them as brothers
Men call him, he feels them as comrades
"Birds my good birds, death ends here!"
Comrades good comrades, life begins here!"
Hoarfrost of heavenly beauty shines in his hair

Crystal bells in the distance
Tomorrow, tomorrow, tomorrow: the Easter of God!

THE AXION ESTI

*Much have they afflicted me from my youth up;
But they have not prevailed against me.*

PSALM 129:2

“Axion esti” means “worthy it is” and is found in a hymn to the Virgin from the Byzantine liturgy and in a Good Friday encomium to Christ: “Worthy it is to glorify Thee, Giver of Life, Who didst extend Thy hand upon the Cross, and shatter the power of the enemy.” It is also the name of an icon of the Virgin on Mount Athos.

The Genesis

Seven free-verse hymns with a refrain, each hymn describing a new stage of Creation, of Man, of Day.

IN THE BEGINNING the light¹ And the first hour
when the lips still in clay
taste the things of the world
Green blood and bulbs golden in the earth
And the sea so exquisite in its sleep spread
unbleached gauzes of sky
beneath the carob trees and the tall standing palm trees
There alone
grievously weeping
I faced the world

My soul sought a Signalman and Herald

Then I remember I saw
the three Black Women
Lifting their arms to the East
Saw their gilded backs and on their right
the slowly dissolving cloud
that they left And plants of strange design
It was the whole many-rayed sun with its axle
in me that beckoned And
he who I truly was He many aeons ago
He still green in the fire He uncut from the sky
I felt him come and lean
over my cradle
like memory become present
it took on the voice of trees, of waves:

"Your commandment," he said, "is this world
written in your viscera
Read and try
and fight" he said

"Each with his own weapons" he said
And he spread his arms like
a young novice God to mold together pain and joy.

First high up on the walls
the Seven Axes² were pried loose
with great force and fell

1. "In the beginning" brings to mind the openings of both John's Gospel and the Book of Genesis.

2. "the Seven Axes": On the wall of Heracleion, on Crete, near where Elytis was born, were seven axes symbolizing the seven regiments enforcing Turkish rule. In 1912 Crete joined Greece, and the axes were taken down.

like the Storm
at its zero point where a bird
is fragrant again from the beginning
the blood returned home clean
and monsters took on a human face

So sensible the Incomprehensible
And then all the winds of my family came
boys with puffed-out cheeks
and wide green tails like Mermaids
and other aged men known of old
testaceous long-bearded
And the winds divided the cloud in two And then again into four
and they blew the bit that remained and sent it North
And lofty the great Koules¹ set a broad foot on the waters
The horizon line brightened
visible and thick and impenetrable

THIS the first hymn.

AND HE who I truly was he many aeons ago
He still green in the fire He not created by Hand
with his finger drew the distant
lines
sometimes ascending sharply on high
and other times curving gently lower down
one into the other
great lands that I felt
smell of earth like mind

So true was the earth
that followed me faithfully
it became redder in secret places
and elsewhere with many small pine needles
Later more indolently
the hills the downslopes
sometimes the hand slow in rest
ravines plains
and suddenly again savage naked boulders
very strong impulses

1. "Koules": Venetian fortress on the bay of Heracleion.

The moment he stood to contemplate
something difficult or lofty
Olympus Taygetus
“Something to stand at your side
“even after you die” he said
And he drew threads through the stones
and brought forth schist from earth’s guts
he fixed in place the wide stairs all around the hillside
There alone he laid

white marble fountains
mills of winds
small pink cupolas
and tall perforate dovecotes

Virtue¹ with its four right angles

And as he thought it beautiful to be in each other’s arms
the big water troughs filled with love
where animals calves and cows innocently stooped
as if no temptation were in the world
as if knives had not been made yet
“It takes guts to endure peace” he said
and turning around he sowed with open palms
mullein crocuses bluebells
all species of earth’s stars
pierced in one leaf as a mark of noble descent
and superiority and power

THIS
the world the small the great!

BUT BEFORE I heard wind or music
as I set off for a clearing

(ascending a boundless red sand dune
erasing History with my heel)

I wrestled with the bedsheets It was this I sought
innocent and quivering like a vineyard
and deep and uncarved like the sky’s other face

1. “Virtue”: The modern Greek word is *arete*. See “Sleep of the Brave (Variation)” in *Six and One Remorses for the Sky*, written at the same time as *The Axion Esti*.

A bit of soul in the clay

Then he spoke and the sea was born
And I saw and I marveled
And in it he sowed small worlds in my image and likeness:
Stone steeds with manes erect
and serene amphorae
and dolphins' slanting backs

Ios Sikinios Seriphos Melos

"Each word a swallow
to bring you spring in the midst of summer" he said
And so many olive trees
sifting the light through their hands
so it spreads soft in your sleep
and so many cicadas
that you don't feel them
as you don't feel the pulse in your wrist
but only a little water
so you hold it a God and understand what its word means
and the tree by itself
with no flock
so you make it your friend
and know its precious name
the soil thin at your feet
so there's no room to spread your roots
and to keep going deeper
and broad the sky above
so you yourself can read the infinite

THIS
the world the small the great!

"AND THIS THE WORLD you must see and receive"
he said: Look! And my eyes cast the seed
running the thousands of untrod acres
faster than rain
Sparks taking root in the dark and sudden jets of water
The silence I reclaimed to brood
germ-cells of letters and golden seeds of oracles
With the spade still in my hands
I saw the big short-legged plants, turning their faces

some barking some sticking their tongues out
Here's the asparagus here's the rabe
here's curly parsley
ginger plant and geranium
Queen Anne's lace and fennel

Secret syllables through which I strove to articulate my identity

"Bravo," he said to me, "you know how to read

and there is still a lot you'll come to learn

if you study the Insignificant in depth

And a day will come when you will take on helpers

Remember:

the infighting Zephyr, the erebus-killing pomegranate

the flaming swift-footed kisses"

And his speech vanished like fragrance

Partridge the ninth hour beat into the deep heart of euphony¹

the houses stood in solidarity

small and square

with white arches and indigo doors

Beneath the grape arbor

I daydreamed for hours

with tiny chirps

croaks, twitters, distant coos:

Here's the pigeon here's the stork

here's the gypsy bird

the oriole and the water hen

and the mayfly was there too

and the praying mantis called Virgin's pony

The seaboard with my limbs naked in the sun

and again the two seas

with a third between—lemon citrus tangerine trees

and the other northwester with its high upper strait

spoiling the sky's ozone

Low at the bottom of the leaves

the smooth seashingle

the flowers' little ears

and the impatient shoot which are

THIS

the world the small the great!

1. "partridge the ninth hour . . . euphony": quoted from "The Whole World" (*Orientations*).

AND then I understood the surf and the long endless whisper of the trees
I saw the red water jugs lined up on the dock
and closer to the wooden window shutter
where I lay sleeping on my side
the northwind crowed more loudly
And I saw

Korai beautiful and naked and smooth as a beach pebble
with a bit of black in the nook of their thighs
and a rich spread of it along their shoulder blades
who standing blew into the Conch
and others writing in chalk
strange, enigmatic words:

ROES, ESA, ARIMNA
NUS, MORILMATITY, YELTIS¹
small voices of birds and hyacinths
or other words of July

At the stroke of eleven
five fathoms deep
perch gudgeon seabream
with huge gills and short boat-stern tails
Ascending I found sponges
and starfish
and slender speechless anemones
and higher up at the water's lip
rosy limpets
and half-opened pina clams and sea grass
"Precious words," he said to me, "ancient oaths
spared by Time and the sure hearing of distant winds"
And near the wooden window shutter
where I lay sleeping on my side
I pressed a pillow tight to my chest
and my eyes filled with tears
I was in the sixth month of my loves
and in my belly a precious seed was stirring

THIS
the world the small the great!

1. "ROES . . .": anagrams. (In Greek a second choice for "ROES" would be "HOURS.")

"BUT FIRST you will see the wilderness and give it your own meaning," he said

**"It will precede your heart
and will continue afterward**

**Know this above all:
what you save in the lightning
will last pure forever"**

**And high above the waves
he set villages of cliffs**

**The foam reached there as dust
I saw a frail goat lick the crevices**

**with a slant eye lean body hard as quartz
I lived the grasshoppers and the thirst and their rough-joined fingers
for the fixed number of years as Knowledge determines
Stooped over papers night after night
and descending into fathomless books
with a skinny rope**

***I sought the white up to the ultimate intensity of black
Hope up to the point of tears
Joy up to extreme despair***

**Then came the moment for help to be sent
and the lot fell to rain**

**streams purled all day
I ran like mad**

**to the slopes I tore broom and my hand offered
much myrtle for the breezes to bite**

**"Purity," he said, "is this
on the slopes as in your guts"**

**And he spread his arms like
an old prudent God to mold together clay and heavenliness
and he lightly tinged the peaks a molten red**

**but he fixed the grass an unbitten green to the ravines
mint lavender verbena
and lambs' little hoofprints**

**or elsewhere again thin threads of silver falling
from the heights, cool hair of a girl I saw and desired**

**A real woman
"Purity," he said, "is this"**

**and filled with yearning I caressed the body
kisses teeth to teeth; then one into the other
I quivered**

like an anchor rope I stepped so deep
that the caves took in wind
White-sandaled Echo passed quickly for a moment
as a garfish under the water
and I saw the Great Ram ascend Unstepping on high
having the hill for a foot and the sun for its horned head
And he who I truly was He many aeons ago
He still green in the fire He uncut from heaven
whispered when I asked:
—What is good? What is evil?
—A point A point
and on it you balance and exist
and beyond it trepidation and darkness
and behind it the grinding teeth of angels
—A point A point
and on it you can infinitely proceed
or else nothing else exists anymore
And the Scales that, as I spread my arms, seemed
to weigh light against instinct, were

THIS
the world the small the great!

AND BECAUSE THE HOURS turned like days
with broad violet leaves on the garden clock
I was the clock's hand
Tuesday Wednesday Thursday
June July August
I was pointing to necessity which struck my face
like seaspray Insect of girls
Distant lightning flashes of Iris
"All these the time of innocence
the time of the whelp and the sprout
long before Necessity," he said to me
And he pushed danger away with one finger
He clothed the cape's ridge in a black eyebrow
From an unknown place he poured phosphorous
"For you to see," he said, "inside
your body
veins of potassium, manganese

and the calcified
 ancient remnants of love”
 And then my heart clenched tight
it was the first creaking of wood inside me
 perhaps of an approaching night
 the voice of the owl
 the blood of somebody killed
 returning to the upper world
 Far away, at the edge of my soul, I saw
 secretly passing by
 high lighthouses like field hands Crossbeamed castles on cliffs
 The polestar Saint Marina with the demons¹
 And much further behind the waves
 on the Island with bays² of olive groves
 It seemed for a moment that I saw Him
 who gave his blood for me to incarnate³
 once more ascending the Saint’s rough road
 once more
 Once more
 placing his fingers on the waters of Yera⁴
 and so the five villages ignite
 Papados Plakados Palaiokipos
 Skopelos and Mesagros
 authority and inheritance of my kin
 “But now,” he said, “your other face
 must ascend to the light”
 and long before I had in mind
 a sign of fire or shape of tomb
 Where no one was able to see
 bending over
 his hands stretched out
 he prepared the great Voids on the earth
 and in the body of man:
 the void of Death for the Coming Infant

1. St. Marina wards off demons.

2. “Island with bays”: Lesbos, Elytis’ ancestral island.

3. “who gave his blood...”: St. Theodore of Mytilene, (eighteenth century), claimed as an ancestor of Elytis.

4. “Yera”: a beautiful bay on Lesbos; the five villages listed here overlook it. Elytis’s mother was from near Yera.

the void of Murder for the Just Judgment
 the void of sacrifice for the Equal Compensation
 the void of Soul for the Responsibility to Others
 and Night a pansy
 of an old
 Moon sawn by nostalgia
 with ruins of an abandoned mill and the harmless fragrance of manure
 took a place inside me
 It changed the dimensions of faces; it portioned out burdens differently
 My hard body was the anchor sunk in men
 where is no other sound
 but thuds wailings and lamentations
 and cracks on the face's other side
Of what nonexistent race was I the descendent
 only then did I realize
 that the thought of the Other
 like a glass edge diagonally
 incised me from one side to the other as I stood
 I saw clearly as if there were no walls
 old women holding lanterns going about their houses
 cracks on their foreheads and on the ceiling
 and other mustached young men tying weapons around their waists
 speechless
 two fingers on the gunstock
 centuries now.
 "See," he said, "they are the Others
 and there's no way for Them without You
 and there's no way for You without Them"
 See," he said, "they are the Others
 and you really must confront them
 if you want your countenance to be ineffaceable
 and to stay so.
 Because many wear the black shirt
 and others speak the language of oinks
 and they are Raweaters and Louts of Water
 Wheatphobes and the Livid and Neocondors
 a bunch and crowd of the Fourbeamed
 cross's points.
 If you truly stand firm and confront them," he said,
 "your life will acquire keenness and you will lead," he said
 "Each with his own weapons," he said

And he who I truly was He many aeons ago
He still green in the fire He uncut from the sky
He passed into me And became
he who I am

It was night's third hour
the first cock crowed
far over the huts

I saw for a moment the Standing Columns the Metope with S
and Men bearing Divine Knowledge

The Sun assumed its face The Archangel forever on my right

THIS then am I
and the world the small the great!

1. "Standing Columns . . . Animals": the Parthenon.

The Passion

Three forms are represented in this sequence: free-verse psalms (P), odes of complex metrical responson (O), and prose readings (R). There are three sections, identically structured: PPOROPPOROPP. In the first, consciousness confronts tradition (Greeks resist in Albania in World War II); in the second it confronts danger (occupation of Greece in WWII); in the third, it overcomes danger (civil war, post-WWII).

Elytis did not use the designations *psalm* and *ode* except in his notes. They are added here as an assist to the reader and for convenience in scholarly reference.

Psalm I

BEHOLD here am I
created for young Korai and Aegean islands;
lover of roe deer's leaping
and initiate of olive leaves;
sun-drinker and locust-killer.
Behold then I confronting
the black shirts of the resolute
and the empty belly of years, in convulsion
aborting its children!
Wind lets loose the elements and thunder assails the mountains.
Fate of the innocent, again alone, here at the Narrow Passes!
At the Passes I opened my hands
At the Passes I emptied my hands
and I saw no other riches, and I heard no other riches
but cool fountains flowing with
Pomegranates or Zephyr or Kisses.

Each with his own weapons, I said:
At the Passes I shall open my pomegranates
At the Passes I shall post Zephyrs as guards
I shall unleash old kisses my longing consecrated!
Wind lets loose the elements and thunder assails the
mountains.
Fate of the innocent you are my own Fate!

Psalm II*

I WAS given the Greek language;
a poor house on Homer's beaches.
My only care my language on Homer's beaches.
Seabream there and perch
windbeaten verbs
green sea-currents amid the azure currents
which I felt light up in my viscera
sponges, medusae
with the first words of the Sirens
pink shells with their first black shivers.
My only care my language with the first black shivers.
Pomegranates there, quinces
swarthy gods, uncles and cousins
pouring olive oil in huge jars;
and breaths from the ravines smelling
of chaste-tree and lentisk
broom and ginger root
with the first cheeps of the finches,
sweet psalmodies with the very first Glory to Thee.
My only care my language with the very first Glory to Thee!
Laurel there and palm fronds
censer and censings
blessing the sabres and flintlocks.
On the ground spread with vineleaves
odors of grilled meat, eggs cracking
and Christ is Risen¹
with the first gunshots of the Greeks.
Secret loves with the first words of the Hymn.²
My only care my language, with the first words of the Hymn!

* The unprinted title is "The Poet and His Language."

1. "On the ground . . . Risen": Easter celebration. Friends knock together the tips of red-dyed eggs to see whose will crack first.

2. "the Hymn": the Greek national anthem, words by the poet Dionysios Solomos (1798–1857), who crucially influenced modern Greek poetry; Elytis considers him his master.

Ode 1*

MY MOUTH was still in clay * and then he named you
Rosy newborn babe * with specks of dew
And from that time he molded * the line of your lips
And the smoke of your hair * deep yet in dawn
He gave you articulation * and the lambda and epsilon¹
The airy and the in * fallible stride.

And from that same moment * an unknown prison
Opening in me * dun and white birds
Bickering in the aether * rose up and I felt
That the blood was for you * the tears for you
The horrible and excellent * struggle throughout the centuries
For you the enticement * and the beauty.

During the pyrrhic dance * clashing spears and swords
I heard You say to * the trees' woodwinds
Secret commands and also * pure virginal words
Words with the resplendence * of clear green stars
And hanging over the abyss * I could recognize hovering
THE TERRIBLE CUTTING * EDGE OF YOUR SWORD!²

* "Birth of Liberty and Language"

1. "the lambda and epsilon": the first two letters of "Elytis" and of the words for freedom, Hel-
las, and Helen, all important themes throughout Elytis.

2. "The terrible . . . sword": words adapted from the national anthem (see note 2. to Psalm II),
the first two stanzas of which are

I recognize thee by the edge
of thy terrible sword,
I recognize thee by the countenance
that with violence measures the earth.

Sprung from the sacred
bones of the Greeks,
valorous as at first
hail, hail, O Freedom!

First Reading*

The March to the Front

AT DAWN on St. John's Day, the day after Epiphany, we received the order to move up to the places where there are no weekdays or Sundays. We had to take over the lines till then held by the army of Arta, from Heimarra to Tepeleni, because they had been fighting without a break right from the start and only half of them were left and they couldn't hold out any more.

We had already spent twelve days in the villages behind the lines. And as our ears again became accustomed to the sweet rustlings of the earth, and timidly we gave ear to the barking of the dogs, or to the sound of distant church bells, it was then we had to return to the only din we knew: slow and heavy from the cannons, dry and quick from the machine guns.

Night after night, we marched without stopping, one behind the other, as if blind. Slogging through the mud with great effort, we sank in up to the knee. Because it often drizzled on the roads as in our souls. And the few times we stopped to rest, we wouldn't exchange a word, but grim and silent, with a little torch for light, we shared out our raisins one by one. At other times, if we had the chance, we hurriedly loosened our clothes and furiously scratched ourselves for a long time till we bled. Because the lice had come up as far as our necks, which was even more unbearable than our exhaustion. And then the whistle was heard through the darkness, signaling us to start off again, and like pack animals we advanced as far as we could before daybreak, when we would be targets for the airplanes. Because God had no idea about such things as targets, and as was his wont, he always made daybreak at the same hour.

Then, hidden in gullies, we rested our heads on their heavy side, whence no dreams emerge. And the birds got angry at us, thinking we paid no attention to their words—or because we had perhaps made creation ugly for no reason. We were peasants of another kind, with spades and iron tools of another kind in our hands, damn them.

Twelve days ago, while at the villages behind the lines, we had looked in the mirror for many hours at the contours of our faces. And as our eyes again became accustomed to their old familiar features, and we timidly gave eye to our naked lip or our cheeks freshened by sleep, so we saw that on the second night we had changed somewhat, on the third night even more so, on the fourth and last, it was obvious we were no longer the same. It was as if, you might think, we were a motley crowd with

* "Evil Confronted." "The March to the Front" is based on Elytis's personal experience in World War II, fighting the Italians near Albania.

all generations and years mixed together, some from present times, and some from times long past, whitened with an abundance of beard. Unsmiling chieftains with turbans, and gigantic priests, sergeants from the wars of 1897 and 1912, axemen swinging their axes over their shoulders, Byzantine borderguards, and shield-bearers with the blood of Bulgarians and Turks still on them. All together, not speaking, grunting side by side for innumerable years, we crossed ridges and ravines, thinking of nothing else. Because as when continual setbacks always strike the same people so they become used to Evil and finally change its name to Destiny or Fate—so we advanced straight toward what we called Messed-up, as if we said Mist or Cloud. Slogging through the mud with great effort, we sank in up to the knee. Because it often drizzled on the roads as in our souls.

And we realized that we were very near the places where there are no weekdays or Sundays, neither sick nor hale, neither poor nor rich. Because the distant boomings, something like a thunderstorm behind the mountains, kept getting louder, so much so that we could finally make them out, slow and heavy from the cannons, dry and quick from the machine guns. And because, more and more frequently, we came across medics with the wounded, moving slowly from the front. Wearing armbands with red crosses, they set down their stretchers and spat in their palms, their eyes wild for a cigarette. And when they heard where we were heading, they shook their heads, and began to tell horrible stories. But the only thing we paid attention to were those voices in the darkness, rising still burning from the pitch of the pit or from the sulphur. "Oh mother, oh mother." And sometimes, less often, we heard choking gurgles, like snores, which those in the know said were the death rattle itself.

Sometimes the medics brought prisoners with them, captured only a few hours before during the sudden attack by the patrols. Their breath smelled of wine and their pockets were full of food tins and chocolate. We didn't have such things, because the bridges behind us were down, and our few mules were incapacitated by snow and slippery mud.

Finally, rising smoke appeared here and there, and the first bright red flares on the horizon.

Ode 2

*STILL very young I came to know * voices of a hundred years
Not the old pine tree's creaking for * a moment in the chest of forests*

*Only the dog's loud barking in * the mountain whereon the men have trod
And there was smoke from low-slung houses * and the gaze ineffable
Of those in death's last agony the * turmoil of the other world*

*Not the quick caws of leggy storks * lingering within the wind
Calm falls like rain and in such rain * the garden vegetables grunt softly
Only the writhing animals' * all-inarticulate stifled gasp
And two times two black circles under * neath the Holy Virgin's eyes
Within the fields of women's aprons * and the fields of burial*

*Only a knock upon the door * nobody at all is there
Neither a single trace of hand * is found in that thin frost of tresses
Though I have waited many years * I never seem to have got the calm
The portion that I got was short when * all my siblings shared things out
The harness with its studs of stone the * perfidy of sliding snakes.*

Psalm III

YOU NEVER gave me wealth
continually devastated by the races of Continents
and continually praised by their boasting!
The North received the Grapevine
and the South the Ear of Wheat
buying out the wind's course
and sacrilegiously cashing in the toil of trees
two or three times.

I knew nothing
except the thyme in the sun's pin
I felt nothing
except the waterdrop in my uncut beard
yet I laid my rough cheek on the stone's rougher cheek
century after century.

I slept on my concern for the morrow
like a soldier on his rifle.

And I explored the mercies of night
as an ascetic his God.

They set diamond in my sweat
and they secretly replaced
the virgin of my gaze
They weighed my joy and found it wanting, they said,
and crushed it underfoot like an insect.
They crushed my joy underfoot and shut it in stone
and in the end they left me the stone,
a terrible portrait of me.

They strike it with a heavy axe, they pierce it with a hardened
scalpel

They carve my stone with a bitter chisel.

And the more time erodes matter the clearer
the oracle comes out from my face:

FEAR THE WRATH OF THE DEAD
AND THE STATUES OF THE ROCKS!

Psalm IV

I ADDED UP my days and I never
found you anywhere, to hold my hand
through the roar of the cliffs and through my chaos of stars!
Some took Knowledge and others took Power
incising darkness with effort
and fitting little masks of joy and sorrow
on a ruined face.

I myself never fitted masks,

I put joy and sorrow behind me,
generously I put
Power and Knowledge behind me.

I added up my days and remained alone.

Some said: why? he too should inhabit
a home with flowerpots and a white betrothed.

Black and flame red horses kindled in me
a stubborn fire for other whiter Helens!

I yearned for another, more secret valor
and from where they hindered me I, invisible, galloped
to return the rain to the fields
and to reclaim the blood of my unburied dead!

Some said: why? he too should know
life in the eyes of someone else.

I saw no other eyes, I faced
only tears in the Void I embraced
only sudden downpours in the calm I endured.

I added up my days and did not find you
and I girt on my weapons and alone I went out
to the roar of cliffs and to my chaos of stars!

Ode 3

*ALONE I governed * my sorrow
Alone I colonized * abandoned May
Alone I embayed * fragrances
On the field * in halcyon days
I fed flowers with * yellow I pastured the hills
I shot the wilder * ness with red!
I said: the knife's stab will not * be deeper than the cry
And I said: the Unjust won't be more * honest than blood!
The hand of earthquakes * hand of famines
The hand of enemies * the hand of my
Kith, they raged despoiled * devastated annihilated
Once and twice * and thrice
I was betrayed and stayed * on the plain alone
Conquered and vanquished like * a castle alone
The message I bore * endured alone!*

*Alone I led death * to despair
Alone I bit into * Time with stone teeth
Alone I set off * on a long
Trip like trum * pets in the aethers!
Nemesis steel and * dishonor were in my pow'r
To go with war's dust * cloud and arms
I said: with my cold-water * sword alone I'll compete
And I said: with my mind's Purity * alone I'll strike!
In spite of earthquakes * and of famines
In spite of enemies * in spite of my
Kith, I resisted * I held out was heartened was strengthened
Once and twice * and thrice
I founded my house on * memory alone
I took my halo and * wreathed myself alone
The wheat that I pro * claimed I scythed alone!*

Second Reading*

The Mule Drivers

IN THOSE DAYS the mule drivers finally arrived where we were after three full weeks. And they said a lot about the towns they passed through, Delvino, Hagioi Saranda, Korytsa.¹ And they unloaded the herring and halvah,² trying to finish up as soon as possible and leave. Because they were scared of the booming in the mountains and the black beards on our ravaged faces, things they had not yet got used to.

And one of them happened to have on him some old newspapers. And surprised we all read what we had already heard, that in the capital people were celebrating and that they lifted the soldiers on leave from cushy posts at Preveza and Arta onto their shoulders. And the bells tolled all day and in the evening at the theaters they sang songs and depicted our lives for the ignorant to applaud.

Deep silence fell on us, because our souls had grown wild from months in the wilderness. And without talking about it, we reckoned our years. And then Sergeant Zoes³ shed a tear and pushed away the papers with the world news, damning them with an obscene gesture. And the rest of us said nothing and only our eyes showed something like gratitude.

Then Lefteris,⁴ rolling a cigarette with forbearance, as if he had taken on himself the sufferings of the World, turned and said: "Sergeant, why so resentful? Those whose lot is herring and halvah will always return to them. And others to their endless account books and others to their soft beds, beds they make but have no power over. But you should know that only he who wrestles with his inner darkness will tomorrow have his place in the sun." And Zoes said: "Well then, so you think I have no wife, no fields, no worries, that I'm just sitting here guarding this godforsaken place?" Lefteris answered him: "A person should fear those things he doesn't love, because they're lost from the start, even if tightly held on to. But there is no way to lose the things of the heart, mind you, and godforsaken places work for this. Sooner or later, those meant to find them will find them." Again Sergeant Zoes asked: "And who do you think will find them?" Then Lefteris, slowly pointing his finger, said: "You and I will, brother, and anything else chosen by this moment listening to us now."

And right then we heard a shell's dark *whoosh* coming our way. And we hit the ground face down on the scarp because by then we knew by heart the signs of the Invisible, and our ears could determine the exact spot where the fire would meet the

* "The Struggle for Freedom"

1. "Delvino, Hagioi Saranda, Korytsa": towns on the Albanian border.

2. "Halvah": cheap food.

3. "Zoes": a common Greek name, means "life."

4. "Lefteris": an ordinary name, means "freedom."

ground, opening and scattering. And the fire didn't touch anyone. Only some mules reared on their hind legs and some got frightened and ran off. And in the settling smoke you could see the men who had brought them here with such difficulty running after them gesticulating. Faces pale, they went on unloading the herring and the halvah, trying to finish up as soon as possible and leave. Because they were scared of the booming in the mountains and the black beards on our ravaged faces, things they had not yet got used to.

Ode 4*

*A SOLITARY swallow * and Spring's great worth is found
It takes a lot of work * to make the sun turn round
Their shoulders to the Wheels * it takes a thousand dead
It also takes the living * to offer up their blood.*

*God my greatest Masterworker * high in the mountains You built me
God my greatest Masterworker * You have surrounded me with sea!*

*The body of dead May * the Mages took to save
And they have buried it * entombed in a sea grave
They keep the body sealed * away in a deep well
The darkness filled all the * Abyss with its sweet smell.*

*God my greatest Masterworker * You are in Easter lilacs too
God my greatest masterworker * You smelled the Resurrection's dew!*

*Memory's terrible * insect emerged from earth
And wriggled like a sperm * in a dark womb of birth
The way a spider bites * the light it bit the light
The beaches all were shining * the open sea shone bright.*

*God my greatest Masterworker * You girt me round with coast and sea
God my greatest Masterworker * in the mountains You founded me!*

*"Sacrifice." "Masterworker" is after a folk song about a bridge at Arta. The worker's wife must be buried alive in it for its completion.

Psalm V*

MY FOUNDATIONS in the mountains
and the peoples bear the mountains on their shoulders
and on them memory burns
neverburnt bush.

Memory of my people they call you Pindus and call you Athos.¹
Time is distressed

and hangs the days by their feet
emptying out with a thud the bones of the humbled.²

Who, how, when did they ascend the abyss?
Which, whose, how many armies?

The sky's face turns and my enemies fled.
Memory of my people they call you Pindus and call you Athos.

You alone recognize the man by his heel
You alone speak from the stone's cutting edge.

You sharpen the features of the saints
and you draw Easter lilacs
to the rim of the centuries' water!

You touch my mind and the infant of Spring hurts!

You chastise my hand and it whitens in the dark!

Always you pass through fire to reach the glow

Always you pass through the glow
to reach the high snow-resplendent mountains.³

But what are mountains? Who and what in the mountains?

My foundations in the mountains

and the peoples bear the mountains on their shoulders
and on them the memory burns
neverburnt bush!

* "Guardians of the Mountain"

1. "Pindus . . . Athos": two great mountains, the first with heroic associations, the second with spiritual.

2. "the bones of the humbled": Elytis is remembering David's song of repentance, Psalm 51, the commonest (at least four times a day) in Orthodox worship.

3. "snow-resplendent mountains": quoted from *Sun the First*, III

Psalm VI

THE POET of clouds and waves sleeps within me
His dark lips on the tempest's teat
and his soul with the sea's kick
at the feet of the mountain!

A biting Thracian wind descends uprooting oaks
Small boats at the cape's turning
suddenly list and vanish.

They reappear high in the clouds
on the other side of the deep.

Seaweed clings to the anchors
to the beards of sad saints.

Beautiful beams around the face
vibrate the sea's halo.

Old men fasting turn their empty eyes there
And women clothe immaculate whitewash
with their black shadows
with them I stand and move my hand

Poet of clouds and waves!

With them I dip my brushes in a humble
can of paint and then paint!

The new hulls
the black and golden icons!

Be our aid and shelter Saint Kanaris

Be our aid and shelter Saint Miaoulis

Be our aid and shelter Saint Manto!¹

1. Kanaris, Miaoulis, and Manto were not saints but heroes of the 1821 War of Independence.

Psalm VII*

THEY CAME
my enemies innumerable times
dressed as "friends"
trampling the ancient soil.
And the soil never fit their heels.
They brought
The Sage the Founder and the Geometer,
Bibles of letters and numbers,
absolute Subjugation and Power,
dominating the ancient light.
And the light never fit their coverings.
Neither was the bee fooled into starting its golden play;
nor the zephyr into swelling the white aprons.
They erected and founded
on peaks, in valleys, in ports
mighty towers and villas
wood and other boats,
Laws instituted for their own benefit,
adjusted to the ancient measure.
And the measure never fit their thinking.
Neither did a god's trace leave a mark on their souls;
nor did a fairy's glance take their speech.¹
They arrived
my enemies innumerable times
dressed as "friends"
offering the ancient gifts.
And their gifts were nothing
but iron and fire.
To expectant open hands
only guns and iron and fire.
Only guns and iron and fire.

*"The Enemy Without"

1. "Fairy's glance . . . speech": In folk tradition, if you look at a fairy, she'll steal your voice.

Psalm VIII

THEY CAME

with their gold braid

fowls of the North and beasts of the East!

And dividing my flesh in two

and finally quarreling over my liver
they left.

“For them,” they said, “the smoke of sacrifice,
and for us the smoke of fame,
amen.”

And we all heard and recognized
the echo sent from the past.

We recognized the echo and again
we sang with spiritless voice:

For us, for us, the bloody iron
and the triple-wrought betrayal.

For us the dawn in copper
and teeth clenched to the final hour
the deceit and the invisible net.

For us crawling along the ground
the secret oath in the dark
the unfeeling eyes
and never any Recompense.

Brothers they fooled us!

“For them,” they said, “the smoke of sacrifice,
and for us the smoke of fame,
amen.”

But with your word you lit
the lantern of the star in our hand, mouth of the innocent
portal of Paradise!

We see the power of smoke in the future
a plaything of your breath
and its dominion and reign!

Ode 5

*WITH THE star-lantern I * went out into the skies
Into the chill of meadows * and the world's only coast
Where can I find my soul * the four-leaf teardrop!*

*And myrtles sad with sorrows * silvered over with sleep
Sprinkled on my face and * I blow and go alone
Where can I find my soul * the four-leaf teardrop!*

*O Guide of lightbeams and * Magician of bedchambers
Charlatan, you who know * the future, speak to me
Where I can find my soul * the four-leaf teardrop!*

*My girls are mourning for * the centuries and aeons
My boys are bearing rifles * and yet they do not know
Where can I find my soul * the four-leaf teardrop!*

*And hundred-handed nights * throughout the firmament
Agitate my entrails * This pain oh how it burns
Where can I find my soul * the four-leaf teardrop!*

*With the star-lantern I * go roaming through the skies
Into the chill of meadows * and the world's only coast
Where can I find my soul * the four-leaf teardrop!*

Third Reading*

The Great Exodus

IN THOSE DAYS the boys met together secretly and, because bad news kept increasing in the capital, took the decision to get out into the streets and squares with only one thing remaining to them: a hand's length of space beneath their open shirts, with the black hair and the sun's little cross. Where Spring had its state and its authority.

And because the day was near when the nation celebrated the other Rising, they chose that day for the Exodus. And they went out early into the sunlight, with their fearlessness unfurled wide as a flag, the young men with swollen feet they called bums. And they were followed by many men and women and the wounded with their bandages and crutches. And suddenly you could see their faces so lined, that you might think many days had gone by in a short hour.

The Others, however, hearing of such audacity, were upset exceedingly. And calculating their possessions with their eyes three times, they took the decision to get out into the streets and the squares with only one thing remaining to them: an arm's length of fire beneath the iron, with the black gunbarrels and the sun's teeth. Where neither shoot nor blossom ever shed a tear. And they fired at random, their eyelids shut in despair. And Spring possessed them. As if there were no other road on the entire earth for Spring to take except this one, and speechless they had taken the same road, gazing far off, beyond the edge of hopelessness, at the Serenity that they would become, the young men with swollen feet they called bums, and the men and women and the wounded with their bandages and crutches.

And many days went by in one short hour. And the beasts slaughtered many, and arrested others. And the next day they put thirty men against the wall.

* "The Heroic Dead." This piece describes the first important resistance to the Nazis in occupied Athens, occurring on March 25 (Independence Day), 1942, when students brought laurel wreathes to 1821 War of Independence heroes.

Ode 6

*O SUN of Justice in the mind * and you O glorifying myrtle
do not oh I implore you * do not forget my country!*

*It has high mountains eagle-shaped * and rows of vines on its volcanoes
and houses very white * for neighboring the blue!*

*Though touching Asia on one side * and brushing Europe on the other
it stands there all alone * in aether and in sea!*

*It's not a foreigner's idea * nor is it any kinsman's love
but everywhere a mourning * and light is merciless!*

*I turn my bitter hands that hold * the Thunderbolt in back of Time
I summon my old friends * call them with threats and blood!*

*But all the blood has gone for lost * and all the threats been quarried now
and winds and winds all turn * the one against the other!*

*O sun of Justice in the mind * and you O glorifying myrtle
do not oh I implore you * do not forget my country!*

Psalm IX*

HE is
our Judas always invisible
Seven gates cover him
and seven armies fatten in his service.
Aerial machines kidnap him
and heavy with furs and tortoise shell,
they set him in Elysées and White Houses.
And he has no language because they all are his—
and he has no woman because they all are his—
the Almighty!
The naïve admire
and near the glow of crystal those in black smile,
and half-naked tigresses
heart-leap in Lycabettus'¹ lairs!
And no course for the sun to take its fame into the future,
And no Judgment Day, because
we, brothers, we are Judgment Day
and ours the hand that shall be deified—
casting the silver pieces in their face!

* "The Bourgeois"

1. "Lycabettus": steep hill in Athens.

Psalm X

THE YOUNG Alexandrians mocked me to my face:
Look, they said, at that naive tourist of the century!

Who insensitive
exults while we lament
and when we exult
he sulks for no reason.

He bypasses our cries with indifference,
and serious and alone,
with his ear to the stone he attends to
what's invisible to us.

With neither friend
nor supporter,
trusting only in his own body
and seeking the great mystery in the sun's thorny leaves,
this is he
outcast of the agoras of the century!

Because he has no brains
and gets no profit from the tears of others
and on the bush burning our anguish
he merely deigns to urinate.

The antichrist and callous demonist of the century!
When we all mourn
he wears the sun.

And when we all scoff,
he wears ideas.

And when we proclaim peace
he wears knives.

To my face the young Alexandrians mocked me!

Ode 7*

*THIS world this world * is the same world
Of suns and of dust clouds * of bustle and of vespers
Weaver of constellations * silverer of moss
At waning of memory * at exiting of dreams
This the same world * is this world
Cymbal cymbal crash * and vain distant laughter!*

*This world this world * is the same world
Plunderer of pleasures * ravisher of fountains
Above the Floods * beneath Typhoons
Hooked and humpbacked * shaggy russet
By night with the syrinx * by day with the high harp
On cities' macadam * in the jibsails of fields
This platycephalic * this macrocephalic
This willing * unwilling
This Solomon * and Haggith's son.¹*

*This world this world * is the same world
Of ebb tide and orgasm * of remorse and cloudiness
Inventor of zodiacs * daredevil of domes
At the ecliptic's edge * and Creation's far reach
This the same world * is this world
Brass horn brass horn blast * and vain distant cloud!*

* "Beauty and Distress"

1. "Haggith's son": Adonijah, who, plotting for the throne, was put to death by his younger brother Solomon. See I Kings 1:13-25.

Fourth Reading*

The Vacant Lot with the Nettles

ONE OF THAT WINTER'S SUNLESS days, on a Saturday morning, a throng of automobiles and motorcycles surrounded Lefteris's¹ block, with its tin window shutters full of holes and runnels of kitchen water in the street. And with wild shouts those persons came with faces cast in lead and hair straight as straw. And they ordered all the men to gather in the vacant lot with the nettles. And they were armed to the teeth with gunbarrels leveled at the crowd. And the boys got very frightened, because almost all of them happened to have some secret in their pocket or in their soul. But there was no way out, and making a virtue of necessity, they lined up and those persons with leaden faces and straw hair and blunt black boots put barbed wire around them. And they cut the clouds in two till sleet began to fall, and their jaws barely kept their teeth from chattering hard enough to break.

Then, from the other side, He appeared approaching with slow steps, with his Concealed Face,² who when he lifted his finger the hours shuddered on the big clock of angels. And whomever he happened to stand in front of, the others seized at once by the hair and pushed him to the ground to be trampled. And then the time came for him to stand in front of Lefteris. But Lefteris did not move. Merely raised his eyes slowly and looked so far off, far into his future—that the other one felt it as a shove and bent back nearly falling. And in a rage he started to lift his black hood, to spit in Lefteris's face. But again Lefteris did not move.

At that moment, the Great Foreigner³ with three stripes on his collar, following behind, put his hand on his hips and guffawed: look here, he said, look here, at these persons who want to change the course of the world! And without knowing that he was speaking the truth the poor fellow struck Lefteris in the face with his whip three times. And for the third time Lefteris did not move. Then, blind with rage because his power was so ineffectual, the other, not knowing what he was doing, pulled out his revolver and shot Lefteris straight through the right ear.

And the children got very frightened and the persons with leaden faces and straw hair and blunt black boots turned pale. Because the poor houses quaked back and forth and in many places the tarpaper fell off and in the distance, behind the sun, weeping women appeared kneeling in a vacant lot full of nettles and clotted black blood. While the big clock of angels chimed exactly twelve.

* "Martyrdom"

1. "Lefteris": see note 4 to "Second Reading."

2. "Concealed Face": a neighborhood traitor, wearing a black mask to protect his identity.

3. "Great Foreigner": the SS officer in charge.

Ode 8*

*I TURNED MY EYES * filled with tears
toward the window
And looking out * upon the valley's
snowcapped trees
Brothers, I said * one day they will
disgrace these too
Blackhooded men in * the next century
prepare their nooses*

*I bit into day * and not one drop
of green blood dripped
I screamed at the gates * my voice took on
murderers' sadness
In earth's center * the nucleus appeared
which keeps darkening
And then behold * the sunbeam became
the thread of Death!*

*O bitter women * with your black clothes
virgins and mothers
Who at the fountain * were giving water
to angels' nightingales
Death happened * to give you also
his handful of it
And from the wells * you draw cries of
the unjustly killed*

*Fire and rancor * do not touch that
my people go hungry
They loaded God's * wheat on high trucks
and it is gone
In the desolate * and empty city
just the hand that's left
Will write with paint * on the big walls
BREAD AND FREEDOM*

* This ode is based on the "Encomia," Orthodoxy's best-loved tune, sung on Good Friday. It begins, "O my sweet springtime / my sweetest child / where has thy beauty set?"

*Night blew, the houses * were extinguished
and it's late in my soul
Wherever I knock * nobody hears
memory kills me
Brothers, it says * black hours are coming
as time will show
The joys of men * have defiled
the guts of monsters*

*I turned my eyes * filled with tears
toward the window
I screamed at the gates * my voice took on
murderers' sadness
In earth's center * the nucleus appeared
which keeps darkening
And then behold * the sunbeam became
the thread of Death!*

Psalm XI

WHEREVER YOU are, brothers, I cry,
wherever you set foot,
open up a fountain,
your own Mavroyenis fountain.¹

Water is good
and the hand of noon that holds
the sun in its open palm is of stone.
The flow is cool and I shall rejoice.

May the speech that knows no lie
recite my mind in a loud voice,
and may my viscera be legible.

I can't stand it,
the gallows overwhelmed my trees
and my eyes blacken.

I can't bear it
even the crossroads I once knew have become dead ends.

Seljuk club-bearers² lie in wait.
Vulture-headed Hagans³ are plotting.

Dog-fornicators and corpse-eaters and Erebus-addicts
fill the future with offal.

Wherever evil finds you brothers,
wherever your mind clouds over,

invoke Dionysios Solomos⁴
and invoke Alexandros Papadiamantis.⁵

Their speech that knows no lie
will bring rest to a martyr's face
with a little glaucous dye on the lips.

1. "Mavroyenis fountain": Nicholas Mavroyenis rose to high position in the Ottoman Empire. In 1777 he gave three fine marble fountains to his home island, Paros, where they are still.

2. "Seljuk club-bearers": Seljuks were Turkish tribes that founded the Ottoman Empire.

3. "Hagans": leaders of barbarian hordes that invaded Byzantium.

4. "Dionysios Solomos": See note 2 to Psalm II.

5. "Alexandros Papadiamantis": Elytis (along with Cavafy and Seferis) considers Papadiamantis (1851–1911), who came from Skiathos, to be Greece's greatest fiction writer. Elytis wrote a book about him.

Water is good
and the hand of noon that holds
the sun in its open palm is of stone.
Wherever you set foot, brothers, I cry,
open up
a fountain open up
your own Mavroyenis fountain!

Psalm XII

AND DEEP midnight in the rice paddies of sleep
no breath of air and the Moon's evil mosquito tortures me!

I wrestle with the sheets and in vain
I try out my thick eyes in the darkness:

O aged bearded winds
guards and key-keepers of my ancient seas
you who possess the secret
draw a dolphin for my eyes

For my eyes draw a dolphin
and let it be swift and Greek, and let it be eleven o'clock

Let it pass by and wipe clean the altar stone
and change the meaning of martyrdom

Let its white seafoam leap up
to drown the Falcon and the Priest!

Let it pass by and unbind the Cross's form
and return its wood to the trees

Let the deep creaking still remind me
that he who I am exists!

Let its flat tail groove my memory
with a way that has no wake

And leave me in the sun again
like an ancient pebble of the Cyclades!

I wrestle with the sheets and in vain
try out my blind hands in the dark:

O aged bearded winds
guards and key-keepers of my ancient seas
you who possess the secret
strike my heart with the Trident

and cross it with the dolphin¹
The sign I truly am is myself

in my first youth let me ascend
to the sky's azure—and there let me hold dominion!

1. "Trident": A popular ancient and neoclassical design, the trident entwined with the dolphin here replaces Christ's sacrificial cross.

Psalm XIII*

INIQUITIES defiled my hands, how can I open them?
Criminal escorts filled my eyes, where can I look?

Sons of men, what can I say?

The earth bears horrors and the soul worse horrors!

Well done my first youth and indomitable lip
who taught the storm's sea pebbles
and in squalls, you talked back to the thunder

Well done my first youth!

You threw so much earth on my roots, that even my thought
flourished!

So much light in my blood, that even my love acquired
the sky's dominion and the meaning.

I am pure from end to end

and in the hands of Death a useless utensil
and in the claws of boors, bad prey

Sons of men, what shall I fear?

Take my guts, I have sung!

Take my sea with its white northwinds,
the wide window filled by lemon trees

the many bird songs, and the one girl
whose joy though I only touched her was enough for me
take them, I have sung!

Take my dreams, how could you read them?

Take my thought, where could you say it?

I am pure from end to end.

Kissing with my mouth I enjoyed the virgin's body.
Blowing with my mouth I colored the sea's hide.

I enriched all my ideas with islands.

On my consciousness I dripped lemon.

* "The Senses Beatified"

Psalm XIV*

TEMPLES with the sky's schema
and beautiful girls
 who with grapes between your teeth were apt for us!
Birds annihilating the weight on our hearts on high
 and ample azure that we loved!
They're gone they're gone
 July with its luminous shirt
and stony August with its small uneven stairs.¹
 They're gone
and in the sea depth's eyes the starfish remained uninterpreted
 and in the depths of the eyes the sunset remained undelivered!
And the prudence of men closed the borders.
 It walled in the world's sides
and on the sky's place raised the nine ramparts
 and on the altar stone it slaughtered the body
and posted many guards at the exits.
 And the prudence of men closed the borders.
Temples with the sky's schema
 and beautiful girls
who with grapes between your teeth were apt for us!
 Birds annihilating the weight on our hearts on high
and ample azure that we loved!
 Gone gone
the Northwester with its pointed sandal
 and the thoughtless Northeaster with its slanting red sails.²
They're gone
 and deep in the ground clouds formed
raising black gravel
 and thunder, the wrath of the dead
and terrible statues of the boulders slowly
 turned breast forward
again, creaking in the wind!

* "The Senses Reinstated"

1. "small uneven stairs": quoted from "The Concert of Hyacinths" XIV in *Orientations*.

2. "slanting red sails": from *Sun the First*, XIII.

Ode 9

LEAVING the clouds * The statues of boulders
behind them voyage
Breast forward as if * All future things
to push to the winds
Lest the vultures catch their scent * and rush on them!

With the bell tolling * The village flocks
death came down
To the slopes facing * And a voice disturbed
the sea the winds
Hunger my boys has made * our soul grow dark!

The nations' hidden * Prepare metal
factories from wheat
They nourish the beast they * And look its mouth
don't want gapes larger
Until nobody remains * and the bones creak!

But first in the quaking * Hades roared as if
valley moaning
The houses' roofs * And then the unhopd-for
came unfixed miracle
Women listening silently * to their infants' crying!

The life that tasted * Naked came back like
death the sun
Alas not having * This life that squandered
anything everything
Fixed a shining poppy * onto the ruins!

If the hawk that rent * Would give us back
the sheep its voice
Our ear to the grass we * How the wrath of the dead
should hear is trained
To grasp the darkness and point * out the other side!

Fifth Reading*

The Courtyard of Sheep

MY PEOPLE said: I acted according to the justice I was taught and lo I am weary of waiting naked for centuries outside the closed gate of the courtyard of sheep. The flock knew my voice and leapt and bleated to my every whistle. But other men, often the very same who praised my perseverance, jumping down from trees and walls, first set foot in the middle of the courtyard of sheep. My people sighed and lo, I always naked and with no flock. And on its teeth the ancient hunger gleamed and its soul creaked on its bitterness the way a despairing man's boot creaks on the gravel.

Then these men who know much, hearing such creaking, became frightened. Because they knew all signs in detail and often from miles away, they read them for their own benefit. And straightway they put on deceiving sandals. And one half pulling against the other half, they said these words: worthy and good your works and here as you see is the closed gate of the courtyard of sheep. Raise your hands and we are with you and the fire and iron are our concern. Have no concern for homes, no fear for families, and never retreat because of the voice of a son or father or younger brother. Should one of you happen to become concerned or to pity or to retreat, he should know: on his head shall the curse fall and the fire we brought and the iron.

And before they finished their speech the weather began to change, far off in the clouds' blackness and nearby in the herd of men. As if a low wind passed moaning and knocked the bodies down empty, without a drop of memory. Heads bruised and voiceless turned upwards, but hands deep in pockets, gripping a piece of iron, iron of fire or of another kind with a sharp point and acute edge. And one group would go for the other, not acknowledging each other. And the son aimed at his father and the elder brother at the younger. So that many homes remained in the middle, and many women two or three times in a row had to dress in black. And if you tried to go out for a bit, nothing. Only wind wailing through the roofbeams and in the few burnt stones the smoke here and there herding the corpses of the slain.

Thirty-three months and more the Evil lasted. And they knocked open the gate of the courtyard of sheep. And no sheep's voice was heard except under the knife. And no gate's voice, except when it leaned into the last flames to burn. Because this people of mine is the gate and this people of mine is the courtyard and the flock of sheep.

* "Lessons from Destruction's Fire." This is a parable based on the horrific experiences of the Greek civil war that followed World War II.

Ode 10*

*THE BLOOD of love * empurpled me
And neverseen * joys shaded me
I corroded * in the south-
* wind of men
My Distant Mother * Rose Unwithering¹*

*Out at sea they * awaited me
Their three-masted * boats fired at me
Was it sin for * me too to
* have a love
My Distant Mother * Rose Unwithering*

*One time in Ju * ly her large eyes
Opened halfway * inside my heart
To illumine * virgin life
* one moment
My Distant Mother * Rose Unwithering*

*And since then the * aeons' rages
Have turned against * me shouting out
"May he who saw * thee live in
* blood and stone"
My Distant Mother * Rose Unwithering*

*Again I looked * like my country
Mid stones I blos * somed and I grew
And I pay back * murderers'
* blood with light
My Distant Mother * Rose Unwithering*

* "Voices from Love's Blood"

1. "Rose Unwithering": an epithet of the Virgin.

Psalm XV

GOD you wanted me thus and look, I reciprocate
I did not give forgiveness

I did not consent to supplication
Like a pebble I endured the wilderness.

What, what, what else remains for me?
I guide the flocks of stars into your arms
and before I could do anything, Dawn,
as you wanted, drew them
away in its nets!

I establish hills with castles
and seas with fruit trees in the wind
and the sunset's bell, as you wanted,
slowly drinks them!

I raise grass as if I cried with all my brains
and look it droops again
because of July's heat,
as you wanted!

What then, what else, what new remains for me?
Behold you speak and I am proved true.

I sling the stone and it hits me.
I deepen mines and I work the heavens.

I hunt birds and I get lost in their weight.
God you wanted me thus and look, I reciprocate.

The elements you are,
days and nights,
suns and stars, storms and calm,

I subvert into order and turn against
my own death
as you wanted!

Psalm XVI

EARLY I woke sensual pleasures
early I ignited my poplar
hand out front I advanced into the sea
alone there I set it:
you blew and tempests encircled me
one by one you took the birds from me—
God you were calling me so how could I leave?
I looked into the future at the months and years
that will return without me
and I bit myself so deeply
that I felt my blood slowly well up
and drip from my future.
I dug the ground when I was guilty
and trembling I lifted the victim in my arms
and talked to it gently
that its eyes opened slowly and trickled dew
on the ground where I was guilty.
I threw darkness on the bed of love
with the things of the world naked in my mind
and I shot my sperm so far
that the women turned slowly in the sun and ached
and gave birth to visible things again.
God you were calling me so how could I leave?
Early I woke sensual pleasures
early I ignited my poplar
hand out front I advanced into the sea
alone there I set it:
you blew and my entrails got excited
one by one the birds returned to me!

Ode 11

*I SHALL tonsure myself * the Monk of verdant things
Modestly I shall serve * the order of the birds
At night's end I shall come * to matins of the Fig Tree
Drenched with dew * to bring there in my apron
The cyan * the rosy and the mauve
And there ignite the brave * water-
Droplets * I more brave.*

*For icons I shall have * maidens immaculate
Who are dressed only in * the linen of the sea
And I shall pray that my * own purity assume
The instinct * of myrtle and beasts' muscles
To drown in * my vigorous entrails
The sordid the surly and * faint for-
Ever * I more vigorous.*

*Times of many transgressions * of profit and of honor
Of remorse of beatings * these times shall come to pass
Then raging the Buceph * alus¹ of blood will charge
And he'll kick * my longings my white longings
And yes my * valor my love my light
And when he smells their power * he will
Whinny * I more powerful.*

*But then at the sixth hour * of lilies lifting up
Just when my judgment will * effect a breach in Time
The eleventh commandment * will emerge from my eyes
It will be * this world or won't the Birth
Dei * fication the Forever
That I'll have proclaimed with * my soul's
Justice * I more just.*

1. "Bucephalus": Alexander the Great's warhorse.

Sixth Reading

Prophetic

MANY YEARS after Sin which they called Virtue in the churches and which they blessed. The tempest that man's mind shall give birth to sweeping away relics of old stars and cobwebbed corners of the sky. And Creation paying for the works of the ancient Rulers shall shudder. Turmoil shall fall on Hades, and the planking shall sag under the great pressure of the sun. Which first shall hold back its beams as a sign that it is time for dreams to take revenge. And then it shall speak, and say: exiled Poet, say, what do you see in your century?

—I see the nations once arrogant, given over to the wasp and to sorrel.

—I see axes in the air splitting busts of Emperors and Generals.

—I see merchants stooping to collect the profit from their own corpses.

—I see the sequence of secret meanings.

Many years after the Sin which they called Virtue in the churches and which they blessed. But before that, behold, there will be the handsome Phillips and Roberts who admire themselves narcissistically where three roads meet. They shall wear their rings reversed and they shall comb their hair with a nail. And they shall decorate their chests with skulls, to tempt loose women. And these women shall be dazzled and give in. So that the word may become true, that the day is close when beauty shall be given over to the flies of the Agora. And the body of the whore, having nothing else to envy, shall be outraged. And the whore shall become the denouncer of the wise and the mighty, using as a witness the sperm that she served loyally. And she shall shake off the curse, stretching out her arm to the East and crying: exiled Poet, say, what do you see in your century?

—I see the colors of Hymmetus¹ at the sacred base of our New Civil Code.

—I see little Myrto the whore from Sikinos a stone statue raised in the Agora square with the Fountains and rampant Lions.

—I see the ephebes and I see the girls in the annual Lottery of Couples.

—I see on high in the aethers the Erectheum² of Birds.

The tempest that man's mind shall give birth to sweeping away relics of old stars and cobwebbed corners of the sky. But before that, behold, generations shall move the plough upon the barren earth. And secretly the Rulers shall take stock of their human merchandise, declaring wars. And the Policeman and Military Judge shall be satiated. Leaving the gold to the unseen, and they shall collect the wages of insult and torture. And big ships shall hoist their flags, marching songs shall advance along the

1. "Hymmetus": mountain overlooking Athens, traditionally renowned for its violet hues.

2. "Erectheum": the beautiful temple on the Acropolis.

roads, balconies shall strew flowers on the Victor. Who shall live in the odor of corpses. And near him the mouth of the tomb shall open up the darkness according to his measure, crying: exiled Poet, say, what do you see in your century?

—I see the Military Judges burn like candles, on the big Easter table.

—I see the policemen offer their blood, a sacrifice to the purity of the heavens.

—I see the continual revolution of plants and flowers.

—I see the cannonbearers of Eros.

And Creation paying for the works of the ancient Rulers shall shudder. Turmoil shall fall on Hades, and the planking shall sag under the great pressure of the sun. But before that, behold, the young shall sigh and their blood shall grow old for no reason. Prisoners with shaved heads shall strike their mess-kits on the bars. And all the factories shall empty out, and then they shall fill up again because of requisitions, to produce dreams conserved in thousands of tin cans, and bottled natures of a thousand different varieties. And pale years shall come and years weak in their bandages. And each shall have a few grams of happiness. And the things in him shall already be beautiful ruins. Then the Poet, having no other exile where he can lament, pouring out the health of the storm from his open chest, shall return to stand amid the beautiful ruins. And the last of men shall speak his first word, that the grass grow tall, and the woman emerge from his side like a sunbeam. And again he shall worship the woman and shall lay her on the grass, according to the order of things. And dreams shall take revenge, and they shall sow generations forever and ever!

Ode 12*

*I OPEN my mouth * and the sea rejoices
And it carries my * words to its dark caves
And then the sea whispers * the words to little seals
Who weep at night * for men's troubles.*

*I incise my veins * and the dreams turn crimson
And they become hoops * in kids' neighborhoods
And become sheets for girls * who secretly keep watch
At night to hear * love's miracles.*

*Honeysuckle dizzies * and I go to my garden
And bury the corpses * of my secret dead
And I cut the golden * cord of their betrayed stars
So they may fall * in the abyss.*

*The hard iron rusts * and I punish its aeon
I who suffered the * many piercing points
And from violets and * narcissi I fashion
A brand new knife * fit for Heroes.*

*I lay bare my chest * and the winds are unleashed
And they sweep out the * ruins and spoiled souls
And they clear away the * earth's thick cover of clouds
So to reveal * Meadows of Bliss!*

* This ode is based on the Sunday *orthro* (matins) service, which is also sung before the Salutations (see note to "Friday, 3" in the *Diary*, and to "What One Loves [Aegean Route]" in *The Little Seafarer*). It begins:

I shall open my mouth and it will be filled with spirit
and I shall bring forth a word to the Royal Mother
and I shall be seen joyfully celebrating
and rejoicing I shall sing her miracles.

Psalm XVII

I'M ON MY way now to a far and sinless country.
Now I'm followed by featherlight creatures
with polar iridescence in their hair
and meek goldgleaming on their skin.

I go through the grass, my knee for prow
and my breath chases away the last wisps of sleep
from the face of the earth.

And the trees march alongside me, against the wind.

I see great mysteries and paradoxes:
Helen's crypt a fountain.

The sign of the Cross the dolphin Trident.
The unholy barbed wire a white gate.

That I'll pass through in glory.
The words that betrayed me and the beatings having
become myrtle and palm fronds:
Hosanna ringing to the coming one!

I see deprivation as the pleasure of fruit.
Years of wrath behind iron bars
as sloped olive groves with blue between their fingers.
And Marina's depth, an endless shore,
wet with the witchery of beautiful eyes.
Where I shall walk pure.

The tears that betrayed me and my humiliations having
become breezes and birds of perpetual daylight:

Hosanna ringing to the coming one!¹
I'm on my way now to a far and sinless country.

1. "Hosanna . . . coming one": Refers to Palm Sunday; see John 12:12-13.

Psalm XVIII

I'M ON MY way now to a far and unwrinkled country.
Now cyan girls follow me
and little stone horses
with the sun's small wheel on their wide foreheads.
Generations of myrtle recognize me
since I trembled on the water's icon-screen,
crying, holy, holy.¹
Conqueror of Hades and savior of Eros,
he is the Prince of Lilies.²
And from those Cretan wafings,
I was painted again for a moment.
For the crocus to get justice from the aethers.
In whitewash I now enclose
and trust my true Laws.
Blessed, I say, the strong who decipher the Immaculate.
For their lips the intoxicating nipple,
on the volcanos' breast and the virgins' vine.
Let them follow in my steps!
I'm on my way now to a far and unwrinkled country.
Now the hand of Death
makes a gift of Life
and sleep does not exist.
The noon bell strikes
and slowly on the sun-red stones these letters are carved:
NOW and FOREVER and AXION ESTI.³
Forever and ever and now and now the birds sing
AXION ESTI the price paid.

1. "holy, holy": see Revelation 4:8.

2. "Prince of Lilies": a Minoan fresco showing a plumed man in a lily field.

3. "NOW and FOREVER and AXION ESTI": words frequent in Orthodox worship. This is the poem's climax. Here at last are beauty and justice, where reality, poetry, and Greece are one.

The Gloria

"The Gloria" contains three metrical sections of praise for the world. The first and third sections contain 6 quatrains + 1 triplet + 6 quatrains + 1 triplet + 5 quatrains + 7 couplets; the middle section symmetrically expands this. There are further rhythmical and rhyming bindings. The couplets that conclude the first section "hail" the girl Poetry, who is savior and kore. The second section's couplets heroize the poet. The third's chant the poem's overriding theme, "now" and "forever." These sections are based on the Acathist Hymn (see notes to "Friday," 3 in the *Diary*, and to "The Traveling Bag [Aegean Route]" in *The Little Seafarer*), which contains 156 lines praising the Virgin, all of which begin with *hail*.

AXION ESTI the light and the first
wish of man incised in stone
the beast's vitality that guides the sun
the plant that warbled and day came to be

The land that dives and lifts its back
a stone horse the sea rides
myriads of little cyan voices
the great white head of Poseidon

AXION ESTI the Mermaid's hand
that holds the schooner¹ as if to save it
And make it a votive² to the winds
as if to leave it and then again no

The little heron of the church
nine in the morning like bergamot
a pebble refined down in the deep
plantations and roofs of the glaucous sky

THE LEADING WINDS who officiate
who raise the sea like the Mother of God
who blow and the oranges light up
who whistle to the mountains and they come

Beardless novices of the storm
runners who covered the miles of sky
Hermeses with their pointed sunhats
and with the caduceus of black smoke

*Maistros, Levantes, Garbis
Pounentes, Graigos, Sirocco
Tramountana, Ostria³*

AXION ESTI the wooden table
the blond wine with the mark of the sun
water playing along the ceiling
the corner's philodendron on duty all day

1. "Mermaid's hand . . . schooner": a folk motif that sometimes decorates fishing caïques.
2. "votive": Greeks hang votive plaques on icons that prove helpful.
3. "Maistros . . . Ostria": common names of winds.

Stone walls and waves hand in hand
a foot that gathered wisdom in the sand
a cicada that persuaded a thousand others
consciousness brilliant like a summer

AXION ESTI the sun's heat hatching
the beautiful rocks under the bridge
children's shit with green flies
a sea that's boiling endlessly

The sixteen deckhands that haul in nets
a slow-sailing seagull never landing
the masterless voices of the wilderness
a shadow's passage through the wall

THE ISLANDS with boats orange and black
islands with a Zeus's column-drum
the islands with their deserted boatyards
islands with drinkable blue volcanoes

Luffing jibsails in the summer wind
Sailing with a following southwester
foaming from one end to another
with purple pebbles and heliotropes

*Siphnos, Amorgos, Alonnesos
Thasos, Ithaca, Santorini
Kos, Ios, Sikinos¹*

AXION ESTI Myrto standing
on the stone bench facing the sea
like a beautiful eight or a water pitcher
holding her sunhat in one hand

Noon porous noon all white
a featherdown of sleep ascending
dulled gold within the pylons
and the red horse who is escaping

1. "Siphnos . . . Sikinos": names of Aegean islands.

Hera she of the ancient tree trunk
the laurel grove boundless and light-devouring
a house like an anchor of the deep
Aunt Penelope twisting her distaff

The other bank's bosporus of birds
a citron that poured out the sky
the glaucous hearing half under the sea
longshaded whispers of nymphs and maples

AXION ESTI celebrating the memory
of Saints Cyricus and Julitta¹
a miracle burning threshing floors in the heavens
priests and birds singing the hail:

HAIL to thee Burning and hail Verdant
Hail Unrepentant with the prow's sword

Hail who steppes and the footprints vanish
Hail who wakest and miracles happen

Hail to thee Wild in the paradise of depths
Hail Saint of the wilderness of islands

Hail Mother of Dreams and hail Pelagic
Hail Anchorbearer and Star-Quintessence

Hail with loosened hair gilding the wind
Hail demon-tamer with lovely voice

Hail who formest the Missals of Gardens
Hail who fittest the belt of the Serpent

Hail to thee brilliant sword and modest
Hail girl prophetic and daedalic

1. "Saints Cyricus and Julitta": Cyricus was Julitta's son. They were martyred when he was three, during the persecutions of Diocletian (r. 284–305). Alexander, an abbot or provincial governor of Tarsus in Cilicia, tried to win over the boy with flattery to conjoin him, but Cyricus, lisping the name of Christ, kicked him in the belly; so the tyrant flung him down the steps of the judgment seat and burst his head open. His mother died after many tortures.

AXION ESTI the soil that raises
a smell of thunder as if from sulphur
the bottom of the mountain where the dead
flourish as flowers of tomorrow

The never hesitating law of instinct
the pulse the fast player of life
the clot of blood the sun's double
and ivy the high-jumper of winters

AXION ESTI the scarab-knocker
the reckless tooth of the sun in the chill
April who felt its sex changing
the fountain's bud about to open

The pushcart tilting on its side
a goldbug that set fire to the future
the water's invisible aorta pulsating
so to keep the gardenia alive

THE FLOWERS nourished by Nostalgia
the trembling flowers infants of rain
the four-legged little ones on the footpath
the high to the suns and reverie-swayed

The modest with red engagement rings
the swaggering on horseback through the meadows
and those wrought in a clear sky
the contemplative and inlaid with chimaeras

*The Lily, the Rose, the Jasmine
the Campion, the Lilac, the Hyacinth
the Violet, the Daffodil, the Aster*

AXION ESTI the cloud on the grass
the lizard's *sllt* on the wet ankle
the deep gaze of Mnesarete¹ that
though not the lamb's grants absolution

1. "Mnesarete": a girl depicted on a Classical Athenian funeral stele, now in Munich.

The gold-rousing wind of the bell
the horseman who goes west for ascension
and the other imaginary horseman who goes
to impale the time of deterioration

The calming of wind on a June night
jasmine and dresses in the orchard
the stars' little animal ascending
the moment of joy just before weeping

A knot of soul and not a word
Aretousa¹ like an empty window
and eros "that descendeth from heaven
having put on a purple chlamys"²

THE GIRLS the bluegrass of utopia
the girls the Pleiades led astray
the girls Vessels of Mysteries
filled to the brim yet bottomless

Acrid in darkness yet miraculous
painted in light and yet all black
turned on themselves like lighthouse beams
sun-devouring and moon-strolling

*Ersi, Myrto, Marina
Helen, Roxanne, Photeine
Anna, Alexandra, Cynthia*

The hatching of whispers in the conchs
a girl lost like a dream: Arignota³
a distant light that says: sleep
perplexed kisses like a crowd of trees

1. "Aretousa": Princess heroine from the long, popular seventeenth-century romance *Erotocritos* by Vicenzos Cornaros, a Cretan; episodes from the poem are still performed there, accompanied by the lyra.

2. "that descendeth . . . chlamys": from Sappho (Lobel-Page, fr. 54). The whole fragment, translated from Elytis's modern Greek rendering in his *Sappho*, might go: "you and Eros who always obeys me / arriving from the high heavens dressed in a purple chlamys."

3. "Arignota": probably Sappho's Ἀριγνώτα (Lobel-Page fr. 90), about longing for Atthis, now among the Lydians: "here like a goddess she was manifest enchanted by your sweet song!"

The bit of blouse the wind wears out
the grassy down along the shin
and the deep violet salt of the vulva
and the cold water of the Full Moon

AXION ESTI the song from afar
Helen's inlet with the little wave
the prickly pear glowing in the armpit
the future's grove-ruins and the spider's

Endless wakefulness in the heart
the sleepless clock which has no use
a black bed which keeps on floating
along the Milky Way's rough coasts

THE BOATS standing with a black foot
the boats goats of the Hyperboreans
chess pawns of the North Star and Hypnos
the boats Nicothoa¹ and Evadne²

Filled with northwinds and Mt. Athos's³ hazelnuts
smelling of dregs and ancient carobs
prows written like Saints' names on icons
heeling and motionless at the same time

*the Angelica, the Polar, the Three Hierarchs
the Intrepid, the Little Maria, the Sea Master
the Halcyon, the Trust In God, the Annunciate*

AXION ESTI the wave that's raging
and lifts five fathoms in the air
the hair poured to the raptor wheeling
and strikes the windowpanes in the storm

Marina as before she existed
with the dog's skull and with the demons

1. "Nicothoa": one of the Harpies.

2. "Evadne": faithful wife of Capaneus, one of the Seven against Thebes, burned herself on his funeral pyre.

3. "Mt. Athos": the Orthodox Holy Mountain.

Marina the horn of Selene¹ the Moon
Marina the very ruin of the world

The quays exposed to the sirocco
the priest of clouds who changes his mind
the poor little houses that sweetly lean
one against the other and fall asleep

The sad face of the young rain
the virgin olive tree climbing the hill
not one voice in the tired clouds
the town's small snail that was crushed

AXION ESTI thou the bitter
and the alone lost from the start
the Poet working with the knife
in his third hand indelible:

FOR HE is Death and he is Life
The Unforeseen and the Institutions

He's the plant's straight line that intersects the body
The lens's focus that burns the spirit

He is the thirst after the fountain
He is the war after peace

He is Ion² regarnder of waves
He the Pygmalion of fire and monsters

He the fuse that the lips ignite
The invisible tunnel that outflanks Hades

Sensuality's Thief who can't be crucified
The Serpent at one with the Ear of Wheat

He the darkness and the lovely folly
Vernality of the rain of light

1. "Selene": the Moon, a goddess.

2. "Ion": might refer to the eponymous ancestor of the Ionians (see Euripides' play), especially important in early Athenian propaganda; or the fifth-century Chian poet famous for his tragedies, poems, and prose works; or the rhapsode in Plato's dialogue.

AXION ESTI the wolf's muzzle
turning into man's and his to an angel's
the nine steps Plotinus climbed¹
the earthquake's chasm that filled with flowers²

The little touch the seagull leaves
and lights the pebbles like innocence
the line that is incised in your soul
sending word of the mourning of Paradise

AXION ESTI before the vision
Acheron's fanfare and fiery ocher
the burning poem and death's sound box
words spear-pointed and suicidal

The inward light milky white
in the image and likeness of the infinite
the mountains cast from no mold emitting
identical faces of eternity

THE MOUNTAINS with the arrogance of ruins
the moody mountains, with mammal's breasts
mountains like the reefs of vision
wholly enclosed yet with forty passes

Filled with drizzle like monasteries
hidden away in the fog of sheep
going about calmly as cowherds do
with black capes and with headscarf

*Pindus, Rhodope, Parnassus
Olympus, Tymphrestus, Taygetus
Dirphys, Athos, Aenus³*

AXION ESTI the mountain-saddle opening
a way of eternal azure in the clouds

1. "nine steps Plotinus climbed": refers to the philosopher's chief work, the *Enneads*, a neo-Platonic mystical book whose nine chapters, or steps, lead to God.
2. "earthquake's . . . flowers": quotation, slightly varied, from Solomos's "The Free Besieged."
3. "Pindus . . . Aenus": names of Greek mountains.

a voice dropped by chance in the valley
an echo day drank up like balsam

The oxen's effort to haul the heavy
olive groves towards the west
the smoke all undisturbed that goes
to seek and dissolve the works of men

AXION ESTI the lantern's passage
filled with ruins and black shadows
the page written under earth
the song Lithe-Girl sang in Hades¹

The carved-wood monsters on the icon-screen
ancient poplars sparkling like fish
lovely Korai with their stone arms
and Helen's neck that's like a beach

THE STARRY trees with their good will
musical notation of another world
the old faith that the very near
and yet invisible always exists

The shadow that leans them toward the earth
a something yellow in their memory
their ancient choral dance over the tombs
their wisdom that's beyond all price

*the Olive, the Pomegranate, the Peach
the Pine, the Poplar, the Plane Tree
The Oak, the Beech, the Cypress*

AXION ESTI the uncaused teardrop
welling slowly in beautiful eyes
of children who are holding hands
who speechless gaze at one another

1. "Lithe-Girl . . . Hades": Name of a folk song ("Λυγερή"), in which she asks three men to let her escape with them from Hades so she can comfort her grieving family. They warn her that her loved ones have already forgotten her and are enjoying life.

The stammering of loves on the rocks
the lighthouse discharging the centuries' sadness
the cricket persistent as remorse
and desolate wool against the chill

Acrid oath-breaking mint in the teeth
two lips that can't consent—and yet
the “goodbye” shining briefly on the lashes
then the always turbid world

The slow and heavy organ of storms
Heraclitus in his ruined voice
the other invisible side of murderers
the little “why” that stayed unanswered

AXION ESTI the hand returning
from a horrible murder and now knows
which world truly excels
which the “now” and “forever” of the world:

Now the wild beast of myrtle Now the cry of May
FOREVER the utmost conscience Forever the plenilune

Now now the hallucination and mimicry of sleep
Forever and forever the word and starry Keel

Now the moving cloud of lepidoptera
forever the mysteries' hovering light

Now the Earth's husk and the Authority
Forever the Soul's nourishment and quintessence

Now the Moon's incurable swarthinness
Forever the Milky Way's gold-cyan scintillation

Now the amalgam of peoples and the black Number
Forever Justice's statue and the great Eye

Now the Gods' humiliation Now the ashes of Man
Now Now the zero

and Forever the world the small the great!

SIX AND ONE REMORSES
FOR THE SKY

Beauty and the Illiterate*

Often, at the Dormition of Dusk, her soul would take on a lightness from the mountains opposite, for all that the day were harsh and tomorrow unknown.

Yet, when it got fully dark and the priest's arm appeared above the garden of the dead,
She

Alone, Erect, with the few domestics of night—the blowing of rosemary and the pit-kilns' smoke-soot—kept nightwatch at the sea's threshold

Differently beautiful!

Words from waves or half-guessed in a rustling, and others that resemble the dead's and are startled amid cypresses like strange zodiac signs, in orbit just ignited her magnetic head. And an

Incredible clarity let the true landscape appear very deep within her,

Where, near the river, black men wrestled with the Angel, showing how beauty is born

Or what we, differently, call a tear.

And as long as her thought held, you felt, it overflowed her countenance glowing with bitterness at the eyes and huge cheekbones—like those of an ancient Temple Prostitute,

Stretched between the outermost points of Canis Major and Virgo.

"Far from the city's pestilence, I dreamed of a wilderness beside her, where a tear would have no meaning, and where the only light is from the fire devouring all my possessions.

* "The poet comes to learn of a feminine beauty of a different kind: the deeper beauty of the suffering soul, a beauty beyond matter, beyond even life itself, the beauty born out of love's tears" (Decavalles, p. 671).

**"Shoulder to shoulder we two would endure the weight of future things, vowed to
utter quietude and the co-dominion of the stars,**

**"As if I, the illiterate, didn't know that it's exactly there, in utter quietude, that the
most abominable dins are heard**

**"And that loneliness, ever since it became unbearable to man's breast, has scattered
and sown stars!"**

The Autopsy

So, it was found that the olive root's gold had dripped into the leaves of his heart.

And from so many times keeping vigil by a candlestick, waiting for daybreak, a strange heat had seized upon his entrails.

A bit beneath his skin, the intense cyan-blue horizon line. And abundant glaucous traces in the blood.

Birds' voices, which he had come to learn by heart in loneliness's long hours, all seemed to have burst forth, so that it wasn't possible for the knife to penetrate to any great depth.

The intention mostly sufficed for the Evil.

Which he confronted—it's evident—in the terrible stance of the innocent. His eyes open and proud, and all the forest stirring still on his unblemished retina.

Nothing in his brain, except a ruined echo of the sky.

And only in the conch of his left ear, a little fine, sifted sand, as in shells, which means that many times he'd walked by the sea, all alone, with love's pining and the roar of wind.

As for those fireflakes on his groin, they truly show that he went hours ahead, every time he joined with woman.

We shall have early fruit this year.

Sleep of the Brave*

They are fragrant still of incense, and have faces burnt from their passage through
the Great Dark Places.

There where they were suddenly thrown by the Immovable

Face down, in soil whose smallest anemone would suffice to embitter the air of
Hades

(One hand in front, as though struggling to grab hold of the future, the other hand
beneath the unfortunate head, turned sideways,

As if to see for the last time, in the eyes of a disemboweled horse, a heap of ruins
smoking)

There Time released them. One wing, the reddest, covered the world, the moment
the other wing, delicate, stirred already in space,

And not one wrinkle or remorse, but very deep

The old immemorial blood that with great effort commenced to be etched in the
blackness of the sky

A new sun, still unripe,

Not yet able to dissolve the hoarfrost of lambs from living clover, yet even before
sprouting a thorn it dispelled the oracles of erebus. . . .

And from the start Valleys, Mountains, Trees, Rivers,

A creation of vindicated feelings glowed, identical and inverted, for them to pass
through now, with the Executioner slain within them,

Peasants of the boundless blue!

* "The poet comes to learn of a feminine beauty of a different kind: the deeper beauty of the suffering soul, a beauty beyond matter, beyond even life itself, the beauty born out of love's tears" (Decavalles, p. 671).

Neither the hour striking twelve within the depths, nor the Pole's voice falling vertically, refuted their footsteps.

They read the world greedily with eyes open forever, there where they were suddenly thrown by the Immovable

Face down, and where with force the vultures descended to exult in the clay of their guts and blood.

Sleep of the Brave (Variation)

They are fragrant still of incense, and have faces burnt from their passage through
the Great Dark Places.

There where they were suddenly thrown by the Immovable

Face down, in soil whose smallest anemone would suffice to embitter the air of
Hades

(One hand in front, as though struggling to grab hold of the future, the other hand
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sprouting a thorn it dispelled the oracles of erebus . . .

And from the start Valleys, Mountains, Trees, Rivers,

A creation of vindicated feelings glowed, identical and inverted, for them to pass
through now, with the Executioner slain within them,

Peasants of the boundless blue!

Without months or years to whiten their beards, with their eyes they roamed the sea-
sons, to give things back their true names,

And for every infant that opened his hands, not one echo, only the rage of innocence
that continually strengthened waterfalls . . .

SIX AND ONE

REMORSES FOR THE SKY

A drop of clear water, vigorous above the abyss, they called Arete¹ and gave her a slim boyish body.

All day now little Arete descends and labors hard in places where the earth putrefied from ignorance, and men had inexplicably acted darkly,

But at night she always sheltered up there in the Mountain's arms, as on Man's hairy chest.

And mist that rises from the valleys, they say, is not smoke, but nostalgia that escapes the fissures of the sleep of the Brave.

1. "Arete": This complex ancient and modern Greek word means virtue, honor, self-respect, valor, excellence. Consider this Elytis-like stanza by Kalvos (Ode XII, 56–60):

If arete, and free
law are worshipped
sincerely as sacred things,
then as with paradise
the earth gives roses.

Laconic

Anguish¹ of death so inflamed me, that my glow returned to the sun.

It sends me now into the perfect syntax of stone and aether,

So, he whom I sought, *I am*.

O flaxen summer, prudent autumn,

Slightest winter,

Life pays an olive-leaf obolus

And in the night of fools again confirms with a little cricket the lawfulness of the
Unhoped-for.

1. "Anguish": in Greek the word means a burning grief, and also a burning longing, which explains the resulting radiance.

Origin of Landscape; or, The End of Mercy

All at once, the swallow's shadow reaped the gazes of those nostalgic for it: Noon.

The sun grasped a pointed pebble, and slowly, skillfully, engraved, above the shoulder of the Kore of Euthydikos,¹ the zephyr's wings.

Light working on my flesh, the purple imprint appeared for a moment on my chest, there where remorse touched me and I ran mad. Later, amid slanting leaves sleep desiccated me, and I remained alone. Alone.

I envied the dewdrop that unobserved glorified the lentisks. Would I were in the wondrous eye that got to see the end of Mercy!

Or was I really? In rock's roughness, uncleft from peak to abyss, I recognized my stubborn jaws. Which rent the beast in another age.

And the sand beyond, packed by delight that the sea once gave me, when men blasphemed and I swam far in a rush to find solace in it; was this what I was seeking: purity?

As the water current reversed, I entered the myrtle's meaning where those in love hide out. I heard again the silk that touched my hairy gasping chest. And the voice "my precious," at night, in the ravine, where I cut the stars' last sternline and the nightingale took care to acquire pattern.

What anguishes indeed and what sneers I had to pass through, with a bit of the vow in both my eyes and my fingers beyond decay. Such years they were—oh yes—when I labored to make the boundless blue so tender!

I said. And turning my face, I again confronted it in the light staring at me. Without mercy.

And this was purity.

1. "Kore of Euthydikos": a marble statue (ca. 490 B.C.) in the Acropolis Museum. Of a beautiful young girl with a serious expression, it is one of the earliest works in the Classical style and was dedicated, according to the inscription, by Euthydikos.

Lovely, and pensive from the shadow of years, beneath the sun's semaphore, the Kore
of Euthydikos wept

As she saw me walk, again within this world, without Gods, but heavy with what, in
living, I took away from death.

All at once, the swallow's shadow reaped the gazes of those nostalgic for it: Noon.

The Other Noah

I hurled the horizons into whitewash, and with a slow but sure hand, began to anoint
the four walls of my future.

It's time now, I said, for lust to begin its sacred vocation, and in a Monastery of Light
to keep secure the supreme moment when the wind scraped off a bit of cloud
above the outermost tree of earth.

Those things I toiled alone to find to keep my style amid contempt, shall come—
from a eucalyptus's strong acid to a woman's rustling—to be saved in my as-
ceticism's Ark.

And the most distant and neglected brook, and from the birds the only one left me,
the sparrow, and from distress' scant vocabulary, two, maybe three, words:
bread, anguish, love . . .

(O Times that warped the rainbow, and tore the crumb from the sparrow's beak, and
left not even a tiny voice of clear water to spell out my love to the grass,

I, who tearless could bear the orphanhood of glowing, I, O Times, do not forgive.)

And when, gnawing each other's guts, men diminish, and from one generation to

Another, Evil, rolling on, becomes brutal amid the all-devastating uranium,

My solitude's white particles, whirling over the ruined world's rust, shall go to justi-
fy my small prudence

And again assembled shall open far horizons, so that one by one bitter words may
crackle on the water's lips,

Giving my old meaning of despair

Like biting a uranic eucalyptus leaf, so that the sacred day of sensualities may be-
come fragrant

And the Verdure-Bearing Woman naked may ascend the stream of Time

And opening her fingers with royal slowness, once and for all she shall send the bird

Over man's unholy weariness, from where God erred, to trickle

Trills of Paradise!

Seven Days for Eternity

SUNDAY.—Morning, in the Temple of the Calfbearer.¹ I say: may lovely Myrto become true as a tree; and may her lamb, looking my assassin straight in the eyes, for one moment, punish the bitterest future.

MONDAY.—Presence of grass and water at my feet. Which means I exist. Before or after the gaze that will petrify me, my right hand holding aloft a huge blue Ear of Wheat.² That I may establish the New Zodiac.

TUESDAY.—Exodus of numbers. Battle of 1 with 9³ on a deserted beach, full of black pebbles, seaweed heaps, beasts' great backbones on the rocks. My two old beloved horses, whinnying, erect above the vapors that rise from sea sulphur.

WEDNESDAY.—From the Thunderbolt's other side. The burnt hand that will sprout again. To smooth the creases of the world.

THURSDAY.—Open gate: stone steps, geranium heads, and farther on transparent roofs, paper kites, pebble flakes in the sun. A he-goat slowly ruminates the centuries, and smoke, serene, rises between his horns. The moment when, secretly in the backyard, the gardener's daughter⁴ is kissed, and from her extreme delight a flowerpot falls and shatters. Ah, could I but save that sound!

FRIDAY.—"The Transfiguration" of women I have loved without hope: Echo: Mari-naaa! Hel-ennn! With each toll of the bell, lilac in my arms. Then strange light, and two dissimilar doves who pull me up high to a great ivy-adorned house.

SATURDAY.—Cypress of my lineage, which fierce and silent men cut down: for betrothal or death. They dig the earth all round and sprinkle the tree with carnation water. I having already recited the words that demagnetize the infinite!

1. "Calfbearer": a beautiful marble statue (ca. 570 B.C.) in the Acropolis Museum, of a nude young man bearing a calf on his shoulders. According to the inscription, his name is Rhombus.

2. "Ear of Wheat": In the ancient Eleusinian Mysteries, the ultimate vision, granted by the grain goddess Demeter to the initiate, was probably an ear of wheat.

3. "battle of 1 with 9": the battle "between the two extremities of a decade" (Friar, p. 184).

4. "gardener's daughter": the Greek word for daughter is *kore*.

THE LIGHT-TREE AND THE FOURTEENTH BEAUTY

*7, Rue de l'Éperon. Paris VI.
Villa Natacha Saint-Jean-Cap-Ferrat.
Labruyère. Île-de-France.
Salutations*

In a newspaper interview, Elytis said of these poems, "I give Greece again through the analogy of light upon the senses. . . . I express in them my poetic understanding of the quintessence of the Greek realm" (*Kathimerini*, October 21, 1979, trans. by Andonis Decavalles).

Palm Sunday*

It must have been Palm Sunday of the sky since even the birds descended with
a green twig in their beaks and in my sleep

A girl stood still for no reason and left her blouse unbuttoned

Glass in the light and inside it kitchen tiles as much as my eye could take a
figure fluttering tulles twice as high as the house with her fingers on the invis-
ible doorknob

Rap gleam air rap gleam air ceaselessly As later when someone be-
came a saint and even new things seem old

And the children who returned from the stone ship with octopi and the women
from the olive press and the donkey's voice at sunrise over the vegetable gardens
how many years how many centuries

"Things keep coming round" my mother used to say and her arthritic hand
stopped like a begonia leaf

In the end Even these very memories go behind things to catch up with them
Where even those old ones again seem new

The day when no one thought to grumble shall remain legendary for descen-
dants but brilliant lemons shone in leagues of foliage little suns of aether.

* See John 12:12–13.

The Kore the Northwind Brought

At great distance within the fragrance of mint I pondered where I was going
and I said so that the wilderness not get the upper hand I shall find
a chapel to speak to

The roar from the sea ate like a goat my black guts and left me an opening more
and more inviting to the Happinesses Nevertheless nothing no one

Only the sortilege of the wild olive tree incandescenced all around

And the whole sloped all along the sea foam way over my head spoke oracles
and susurrated with myriad mauve tremblings and cherubic little insects
Yes yes I agreed these seas shall take revenge *One day these seas shall take revenge*¹

And then up there detached from her ruins gaining in height and
beautiful as can be with all the whims of birds in her quaverings the kore
the northwind brought appeared and I awaited her

Yard after yard just as she put forward her small breast for the wind to resist
a terrified joy within me went up to my eyelid and fluttered

Ah wraths and ah insanities of my homeland!

Fans of light broke behind her and left in the sky something like intangible signs
of Paradise

I had just a moment to see the fork of her legs widening and all the inside
place with the little saliva of the sea Later her odor came to me all fresh
bread and wild mountain anise

I pushed the little wooden door and lit a candle For an idea of mine had become
immortal.

1. "One day these seas shall take revenge": "I consider the sea to be the heir of the Hellenic tradition. The North Wind comes from Constantinople. But it is the sea which possesses all the values of the Aegean world, and it eventually will take its vengeance" (Interview, p. 641).

Delos*

As diving he opened his eyes under the water to bring his skin in contact with that white of memory which pursued him (from a certain passage in Plato)

With the same movement he passed directly into the heart of the sun and heard his innocent self erect his stone throat to bellow high above the waves

And until he rose to the surface again the coolness left him time to drag something incurable from his innards onto the seaweed and the other beauties from underwater

So that he could finally shine within the *I love* as the divine light shines in the wailing of the newborn

And this the sea was legending.

*Sacred Delos is Apollo's birthplace.

August Event

I turned circles in the sky and cried out

In danger of touching a happiness

I picked up a stone and aimed it afar

Talked into it by the sun Fate

Pretended not to see

And the girl's bird took a crumb of the sea and ascended.

Three Times the Truth

I

The wild bird transposed the truth *pit-pit* among the boulders It kept nibbling
tlip tlip at the briny water in the rock pools Something something some-
thing *definitely* must exist

I swear I became a saint from waiting I grew a monkish beard which I kept
fondling and scratching Something something Something else to be found

At last I made up my mind I hauled just as you haul a boat to shore the
man to a certain place so you could see inside him

—Hey who is he?—The murderer who passed by—And why such a racket?—the
hawk the hawk arrives has arrived—Good and who's in charge around here?—
Noman Noman¹—I didn't hear who does he say?

But already the words became fewer What's to say anymore Such is the
truth.

II

Such is the truth When the words receded what could you say then the sea
appeared like an old estate surrounded by cypresses

Seated in the shallows a stone woman while combing her hair remained
with her hand high in the air Two ships traveled beyond all smoke without
advancing And everywhere in the fountains and rosemary a confidential *Our
Father* ascended before breaking into dew

Our Father who art in heaven I who loved I who kept my girl like a vow who
went so far as to catch the sun by the wings like a butterfly² Our Father

I lived on nothing.

1. "Noman": the name Odysseus used to trick the Cyclops in *Odyssey* IX.

2. "I who kept my girl. . . like a butterfly": "The final image is that of a young woman on whose naked breast a butterfly descended one day at noon while cicadas filled the air with their noise. This was for me another revelation of the mystery of light" (Interview, p. 642). This image, very important for Elytis, also appears in "Chronicle" (*Open Papers*, p. 319), as a memory.

III

I lived on nothing Only the words didn't suffice me In a passing air my
ears spinning out an otherworldly voice *fchia fchiu fchiu* I thought up so
many things What handfuls of polished stones what baskets of fresh bees
and what water jugs bulging where you heard the captive air thunder *vvv*

Something something Something demonic but that could be caught in a net in
the shape of an Archangel I was raving and running I reached the point of
imprinting the waves from the tongue to the hearing

—Hey black poplars I cried and you blue trees what do you know of me?—
Thoi thoi thmos—Hey? what?—*Arieo ethymos thmos*—I didn't hear what is
it?—*Thmos thmos adhyos*

Until at the end I felt and let them call me crazy that from nothing comes
Paradise.

“Through the Myrtle”*

Thus for something very little which I never received at all
Not even a gleam
I was literally sold

“Through the myrtle” as said Archilochus

Secretly I strove to pass the thievings
Of time to the bifurcations of a girl
In the yet undeclared summer

The mussel of a kiss on the lips of July

Celebrating the anniversary
Of a sea battle on the forward mast
The reds of the black with the blue vapor

For this to be the moment that god was unfaithful to me

The sun where I serve my sentence mid-sky
The boats of the houses
Drawn out

While the basket-bearing sea passes by far off.

* The title is an entire fragment, on an erotic subject, by the Parian poet Archilochus (7th cent. B.C.).

On the Republic*

From four stones and a little seawater I made a Temple and sat down to guard
it

Noon pressed down and what we call thought in the black grape beat to burst

Something must be happening in the sky for someone to touch with the body like a
wet dream

"Slowly in an auditorium enlarged by its resonance the bearded one ap-
proached the cage and opened the grate Such hard labor of the centuries for a
motion small as a switchman's which all desired but no one dared

"The curtains stirred and brushing the roof the bird's sound arrived before its
image

"It shone about the sculptures and above the peristyle held motionless a moment
like vertigo and the trees struck one another at the north window and you saw
the northern lights changing place until

"There she is the naked woman with green spray in her hair and vest of gold
wire came and sat softly on the flagstones with her legs half-parted

"And this in my consciousness took the flower's meaning when danger opens for it
the first tenderness And afterwards exactly as

"In the Apocalypse the four horses passed in a row: the black the silver
the guilty and the dream-taken without saddle or rider wanting to
show that their glory had passed away

"And that the masses trudging on behind them a whole army go to be swal-
lowed by the gehenna of Paradise as was written

"Opposite her the man opened his garment and his handsome animal moved
forward for a life in the country of forests and suns."

* "It is typical . . . that the sexual act should take place in heaven and brim over into life in a
wet dream. Moved by the revelation that in Paradise love and lust are an inseparable entity,
the poet frenziedly takes up his pen" (Friar, p.37).

I smelled in the air the fig tree's body as it came to me still fresh from the sea's
pigments

While I moved over it until I awoke sweetly and felt its milk sticky between
my legs

In a frenzy I continued to write "On the Republic" within the extreme exaltation of
the boundless azure

And amid large diaphanous leaves The islands appeared a moment and
still higher in the aether appeared all the manners birds had of flying step by step to
the infinite.

Without Yashmak

Who was winning in the face so that one had to squint to see
Such divided ascent of miles of coral
To the trembling earrings bits of sea
Distant Cilicia swarthy without yashmak

And the golden shovel which while emptying sand into the sky
One early Monday struck the shell
We saw sunrods shake and the Pentateuch
Upon the waters but eros appeared in the waves

It's he who was winning and hath night-dwelled¹ in the cheek at
the hour that
From hyacinth's artesian wells fragrance
Wafted all night and buckets of fresh heat
Were poured over beauty naked as a single diamond.

1. "hath night-dwelled": Elytis's ancient Greek is from Sophocles' chorus to Eros in *Antigone*, 784, where Eros crosses the sea and rests on a girl's cheek. Horace is no doubt remembering the same image in Book IV, Ode XIII, 1.8.

The Red Horse*

On the wall that shuddered and returned all my touch expressed in a horse
red I could hear the gallop *clip clop* in the other world:

—Hey Woman where are you going with a pointed hat for I can't endure any more

—In the red jujube trees I go and in the hanging water in which I've baptized you
pure

—Evil men arrived and from my years they stole a day

—The air is passing there and the evil ones live far away

—Give to Christ a little kiss tell the smallest flower to remember me

—I shall say the yard got smaller and the child is sleeping who plucked you free

—You masters and apprentices bring a bucket of whitewash duly

—And I go forth to say to God Hello and he is risen truly.

* In Revelation 6:4, the Lamb opens the second seal: "And there went out another horse that was red: and power was given to him that sat thereon to take peace from the earth."

Little Green Sea

Little green sea thirteen years old
How I'd like to adopt you
And send you to school in Ionia
To study tangerine and absinthe
Little green sea thirteen years old
In the lighthouse's little tower at high noon
To turn the sun and hear
How fate comes undone and how
From hill to hill our distant
Relatives still communicate
As they hold the air like statues
Little green sea thirteen years old
With your white collar and ribbon
Enter Smyrna by the window
To copy for me the reflections on the ceiling
From the Kyrie eleison and the Gloria
And with the little Northwind little Levanter
Wave by wave turn back
Little green sea thirteen years old
So I can sleep with you illicitly
And find deep in your embrace
Bits of stones the words of the Gods
Bits of stones fragments of Heraclitus.

The Wall-Painting

Having fallen in love and resided centuries in the sea I learned writing and reading

So that now I am able to see to a great depth behind me succeeding generations
the way one mountain begins before

The other ends And in front again the same:

Young-armed Helen with her side against the whitewash fills with the wine
of the Virgin

The deep dark bottle half her body already fled to Asia opposite

And her embroidery all transposed into the sky with the forked birds
the buttercups and the suns.

The Odyssey

The house amid its gardens pitched and from its great windows you could see
now the mountains disappearing opposite then rising to the heights again

From the stair head on high with a sailor's coat on his shoulders my father would
shout out and everyone would run about right and left one to secure a beam
one to gather the awning hastily in before such a sudden westwind could cap-
size us

In any case we would always voyage in our own places

Forward

And with care as if we knew since then that grief existed from the start and
Greece never existed

Forward easy

The wind swelled the midsails the purple wave about the keel clamored loud as
the ship sped on¹

And we coasted the lands of the Lotus-Eaters with the constant full moon is-
lands black and bony rising on the waters formerly it was Aetolia where the men
turned in their sleep according to the weather

And as they say two times a year at the Equinoxes little white children
slight in weight fell ceaselessly like soft snowflakes and at their first touch
melted and the dew remained

I remember a certain port away from known routes where it wasn't easy to moor
and where the residents glowed at night like fireflies

Glory to God we ranged everywhere unloaded olive oil and wine and
took in exchange tons of flowers those which the natives called in their language
roses little bottles with rare essence of jasmine or we even took women

1. "The wind . . . sped on": see *Odyssey* II, 427–28. Athena sends a wind to help Telemachus on his way to Pylos.

A girl for instance struck by the gaze of the Archangel whom I took as my
slave and still today as I write only she stands by me

Hard to starboard

In the same spot as if stopped for the coasts were slow to appear

"You thought you stopped but the others by pulling away halted you" said my
father correcting my thought

and I would fix his words one by one in my notebook with the butterflies

Along with other words the wind snatched from the basket of the wise men or from
the gypsy's mouth (she'd done years as a bird of prey and brought knowledge down
from the mountains)

Many words without coherence as from some torn poem for example "The water the
turtledove broke and my wound was made beautiful" or "May I have nothing but you"

And whatever I began to think the wind continued for me and many times the sail-
ing ships heaped with watermelons and other fruits would take it from me

In the upper room with the round windowpane

Incessantly the gypsy girl searched in the coffee cup and incessantly stooping
over old maps and sextants the seven wise men of the world conversed:¹ Thales
of Miletos Ibn al Mansour Symeon the young Theologian Paracelsus
Hardenburg Yorghis the fisherman and André Breton

Steady as she goes

And there are thousands of ways for you to learn but for you to enter thus
the future requires credulity

1. "the seven wise men": Thales of Miletos (7th century B.C.) was traditionally the first philosopher, and first of the seven wise men. Caliph Ibn al Mansour (d. 775) founded Baghdad. Symeon the Mystic (949–1022), was the great Byzantine poet who established the fifteen-syllable line, or *versus politicus*, which became the standard Greek meter. Paracelsus (1493–1541) was a famous Swiss physician and alchemist. "Hardenburg" (1772–1801) was the German romantic who wrote under the name Novalis. Yorghis (or Georgy) is demotic for Greece's most popular name. Breton (1896–1966) was the leader of the surrealist movement.

Requires you to have known Mary the elder and Mary the younger who put the
pomegranate in your bed and it's always May till morning

Somewhere by there must have been my own Near East because

Both the Rose of Esfahan and famous Farizad¹ who had golden hair on one side
and silver on the other I had them both through the keyhole

In the oblong room which the sea rocked once here once there and I would balance
it

With longing to see how one leg widens where it becomes separate from the oth-
er and the sheen on the knee or if I had luck sometimes even the sea-urchin
one moment in unexplored depths

My heart beat strongly and mintwater ran on my palate being a man you
see in a few days I would have had some opinion

Hold by

So to make the majorities understand that power alone kills and that most im-
portant:

Spring itself is a product of man

Cast anchor

I stooped to listen inside myself

And a warmth as from a creature in love struck me so that the jonquils didn't
know better and came out already white as though I'd been loved

In the pleached boughs and in double leaves where the cloying damp caught in
your nostrils the breaths of the stinkdaisy and the piss of the tree sudden-
ly the other aspect

1. "The Rose of Esfahan," "Farizad": heroines of *A Thousand and One Nights*.

Fanned-out purple world Maids Mistresses the violet the *vienlaviela*
the swords of Osman¹ and the triclinium of Nicephorus²

Where alone his peacock took four hours on the waters with the rucks of the
water snake here and there

Or if he sensed rain in the span of three or four days he kept watch un-
til the sound fell and the blue and rose

Campion got frightened by the thousands and trembled

But the voice of the gardener brought peace and then all the orchard dropped
anchor.

1. "Osman": (1259–1326) founded the Ottoman Empire.

2. "Nicephorus": Nicephorus Phocas became emperor of Byzantium in 963 and was murdered by his wife Theofano in 969. The triclinium was the throne room (plants and flowers are being compared to sabres and thrones). The peacock in the next stanza was the emperor's mechanical toy.

Archetype

The pebble's gunpowder when struck brought me again Smallwater and a
seashore

Where as it seems I had first seen Woman what it means to see the radiant mid-
night rhododendrons later I understood

When I found her to be a dove

When I found her to be Sleep with clusters of waterdrops on her bosom

When I found her on a small terrace where the strong wind unravels her

Till finally just a shoulder remained and the right part of her hair

Above the ruins and the first Hesperus.

The Light-Tree

I

My mother was still alive a dark silk shawl about her shoulders when it
first passed through my mind to find an end in happiness

Death drew me like a strong glare wherein you see nothing else And I
didn't want to know didn't want to learn what my soul made of the world

Sometimes the tomcat who climbed to my shoulder fixed his golden eyes
beyond and it was then I felt a reflection come to me from opposite like an incurable
nostalgia as they say

And again other times when the piano lesson could be heard from the parlor below
with forehead to the pane I looked far off above the woodpiles a drizzle of snow-
white birds breaking on the jetty to become mist

Unknown how the wronged could live within me but perhaps

The wind heard my complaint on a distant May first because look: once or twice
the Perfect appeared to my eyes and later again nothing

Like a bird which before you could catch its song the sun took into its reds and
set.

II

Others went down as I went up and I heard my heel in the empty rooms
Somewhat as in church when God is not there Even the worst things become
peaceful

Someone would have come though perhaps even love but At two in
the afternoon as I leaned on my window to happen on something angry or unlucky
there was only the light-tree

There in the back of the yard among the stinkweeds and scrap iron
though With no one to water it but playing with my spit to aim it from
up high We passed the days until

All at once spring broke the walls the window frame fell away from my el-
bow and I stayed nose down in the air to see

What kind of thing is truth all round leaves leaves tin-glinted red on the
side toward the sun five ten hundreds seized for life by the unknown

Exactly like us And let disasters rage all around let men die let arrive
the far echo of war sent again from the bowels of the lamb it only stopped
for a moment to be tested for endurance

Finally it advanced implacable into the light like Jesus Christ and all those
in love.

III

Anathema that the outside sea had calmed (and inside the house deepened) and I
stayed in my bed abandoned touched by all kinds of crosses

Of flowers and of men who from the time of the first Christians worked in the house
of Aunt Vatana who flickered all night in the empty rooms like the icon-lamp

And of Aunt Melissini who had barely returned from Doomsday and it was
as if something from the cherry red of the virgin still covered her sparse hair

(Sorrow oh my sorrow to which one can't speak but you are a wet ship in
the full moon and an inexhaustible solace in my sleep towing fragrant isles with
half the firmament lit I

Oh I am a person in love and I only seek oh what I don't have)

Pieces of wood floated by and happinesses burnt by the censor's passing on the hills
of nearby Anatolia gold-trimmed seraglios and wisdom formed into glass

I wanted the least and they punished me with the most.

IV

Now on the far island there is no house any more only when the southwind blew
could you see in its place a monastery which the clouds continued on high
and from down in the deeps burbling the green-tinged waters licked over
its walls with their heavy iron gates

I went round and round and gave off light red-tinged from being tormented
and alone

THE LIGHT-TREE

AND THE FOURTEENTH BEAUTY

Completely aimless monks chanted and studied and not even one would allow me
to see again the places I grew up the places my mother scolded me where
the light-tree first sprouted and for whose sake if it still exists

The smoke passed by from somewhere perhaps from St. Isidore's gaze was
sent forth the message that

Our sufferings are proper and order is not going to be subverted

Oh where are you now my poor light-tree where are you light-tree I raved
and ran now I want you now I've lost even my name

Now that no one anymore mourns the nightingale and all write poems.

Palintrope

Courage: sky this is
And we its birds
who resemble no other

Submerged within us
Grain-sea with earth and vast cowsheds

Alone outside remained the sunflower

But who is this who walks in the sun
Black as the light gets stronger?

Courage: man this is
Canis as they call him but
the almost *Arch-halcyon*¹

**Virgin fields June's nomad winds
Etched brown soils where we went up**

Thirsty for a little gleam of Mt. Tabor²

**But what is this that goes by low and shudders
Like the breeze arriving from another world**

Courage: death this is
In the wide poppy
and in the so slender chamomile.

1. "Canis" and "Arch-halcyon" (Κύων and Ἀρχαλκυὼν) form a pun in Greek.
2. "Mt. Tabor": mountain where the Transfiguration of Jesus occurred.

The Garden of the Scorched Hand

In any case lost for good here at the edge where the calamities of this world
thrust me I wanted to attempt a leap quicker than deterioration

And as with head low and feet upside-down in the air I struggled to get
away from my weight this desire which would bring me up high strongly turned
within me that slanting I found myself moving again in a garden flowing
with white pebbles and the mint's cyan translucence

With great vigor I advanced broke the water rods to see ascending and de-
scending with lighted lanterns in their bellies Mika Xenia Manio stars

The mastic of their hair was sticky and now here now there an exquisite
butterfly still half-created stretched to disengage And on the marks the
plane tree left with its wide footprint you could still discern the lines from the
enigma of the first man

(Youth who've suffered much remember how the triremes once set off
laden with wild-eyed peoples Those morning reflections on copper the old
men who gesticulated and screamed *iai iatatai*¹ striking wooden staves on the
flagstones

But what flower the tempests raised! And what portable mountains the great nights
of Selene! The horse that snatched you away to the edge of edges and later the
house hidden amid the trees I say remember then the heart's weight and
the lovely head you took to kiss amid the jasmine's white sprays

And keep in mind keep in mind forever hear me? the ah that killing
gives off the ah that love gives off)

The trees dripped green seeds and on the gooseberry the golden reflection fell
Icicles of fruit melted and sent strange incense down from on high Such delight
pained me nevertheless I tried to relive inversely all my destiny

And as I left my thought behind me like a swallow-breeze changing color in the
waters chilly or annular or translucent with jutting forehead I hit the bot-
tom And a sun leapt up

1. "*iai iatatai*": cries from Greek tragedy.

The aether acquired stripes and I heard roll toward earth the four rivers named
Phison Gihon Tigris Euphrates²

Sun my sun my own take all I have take it all and leave me my pride
That I not show a single tear That I only touch you though I burn I cried
and extended my hand

The garden vanished Spring swallowed it with her hard teeth like an almond

And upright again I remained with a burnt hand here at the edge where the
calamities thrust me to fight the Not and the Impossible of this world.

2. "Phison . . . Euphrates": the four rivers of Paradise.

What Cannot Be

I wish nostalgia had a body for me to push out the window! To smash what cannot be!
Girl by whose naked breast God saved me once as by a life raft

And took me high above the walls with the half-moon so my indiscretions

Would not give you away and the Fortunes not take aim at you As indeed happened
For Life wants and loves such things though we believe them to be elsewhere

And from the other side of love from the other side of death we sleepwalk until
unbearably constricted that which became flesh of our flesh as phosphorous within us catches fire and ignites and we wake

Straight yes goes time but love goes vertically and either they are cut in two
or never meet But what remains is like

Sand from a strong wind in the rooms and the spider and outside at the threshold

The round-eyed wolf who howls all these seem likely and especially the mountains of Crete which as a boy I kept in snow and found them again cool but what does it mean

Even if you remain both a free man and a victor again the sun leans and all around you is

Quietude full of ravaged shores where the clouds still descend to eat grass just before it gets dark forever

As if men had come to the end and nothing else crucial remained to be said.

So Long as Abided the Star

The watermelon froze my teeth and Helen
Remained half-open so long as abided the star

"What you see is the weight of the mountain
Placed on the shawl with the six Chimaeras

"That is the comet Felsfevor
Many years before it arrives and it still resembles Christ

"In the face and the wind's joy before it dies out

"She with hair like horn is fever
Which will shine the children and maybe take them away

"And these the threads in the sand of serenity

"We shall yet see even others
Hermes Trismegistus will appear a moment

"Below the zincs with the cloudiness and the fluoride

"Or perhaps the harmonica could be heard
Black on black and inexplicable."

And the star abided so long as Helen gazed
And the watermelon froze my teeth.

The Two of the World

Evening of the spider how lovely despair smells around me

It has the power of an invisible mimosa very near as when I used to walk with a
girl artless through the unknown territories of Paradise and the world
filled with plaintive yelpings turned far from me

Uriel Gabriel and tonight what as I come again and go disguised as a hap-
py man to deceive the road of Selene!

My days left lulled as Venetian boats from a viola d'amore supine
laden with pointed nails and white carnations (O children

With a little sesame still on your chins you lifted heavy time and all sank to the
bottom but your smile took on nobility from the green side And from the
other side it petrified)

Unintentionally so everything goes into the water of Unforgetting branch-
es of willow and slow lentisk in the swaying marsh reeds and the sepia of the deep

As if Selene were only dreaming of them but in reality she sees them

And the moment we weep or close our eyes to imagine what else of fate remains to
strike our heads another sigh is heard and from there where rose gardens spring
up a fragrant dew overflows to guitar accompaniment

River of August on the plains Here and there float houses and clumps of men
who fall in hate and in love beneath the pistachio trees ignite the

Kisses of old again and again on tiptoe the same vow and the same bitter words
contrary to fate until

All reach the famous fourteenth beauty¹ and later the final waxing at last from
one side all unravel and the naked sin of the earth appears with spring ready to
attach and with the warhorses leaving

1. "fourteenth beauty": "In conversation with me, Elytis hinted . . . that at the time he was composing *The Light-Tree* in France, he was reading a book on Persian Islamic mysticism by Henri Corbin. . . . In that book the number 14 refers to the 'Fourteen Very-Pure,' who . . . are considered theophanic incarnations of 'precosmic eternal entities.' . . . an analogue to his own physical metaphysics" (Gregory, p. 2972).

Uriel Gabriel you held the reins when I heard the gallop and truly it was
As if a terraqueous drop came to me from on high as descent and a wilderness
of dreams lit up while within the dark foliage
Another life the third from two ideas placed side by side began to cry
like a newborn infant!

The Two of the World (Variation)

Evening of the spider how lovely despair smells around me

It has the power of an invisible mimosa very near as when I used to walk with a
girl artless through the unknown territories of Paradise and the world
filled with plaintive yelpings turned far from me

Uriel Gabriel and tonight what as I come again and go disguised as a hap-
py man to deceive the road of Selenel

But who knows And from the women's quarters of the sky she smiles sadly with
a basil flower next to her as if wanting to say that something still true remains
for us

Yes the dew and the translucence perhaps from the passing of the Gospel
Probably even unbreakable pride with the glass wall in the sea the break and the
foam for the many who are nobody So difficult but so

Difficult to live and in the world of the soul the pole an uninhabited territory
Where could you speak? what could you say?

In some places life is rent and in others the blood drips

Steadily aged things survive within our present things And a newlywed little
hair whose spell was pursued plays always the part of the sea

Straight *iiii* whistlings from the opposite shore broken-off pieces of earth
float slow as riverboats and go on flock by flock the nightingales go on since
all still exist

Within the fourteenth beauty

Also he whose voice was taken before the other world could get hold of the wood of
the shipwreck just days before the evil falls a whirling madness

Goes and comes within the aether's cyclamen violently the climbing vines be-
stride the heights while from gardens from courtyards as if they could
smell the arrival of a total eclipse together the animals cry out but

We hear what we want

And from the lightning bolt a little serenity remains to us good-bye good-bye children and again again nothing a wave nothing

Evening of the spider how bitterly but intoxicatingly we lived below the constant rain of August

Full-bodied against the light and death black

What song but what weeping with exhausted breath not understanding how the wrong is turned and empties out how the pain is turned and empties out the din of weapons from centuries is turned and empties out so that

Uriel Gabriel be the reflection of the souls and Selene the looking glass who shows the world double

Here with weeping willows bending over the waters the spaces opulent with gleaming that are impossible to pass without the tallow of sleep

There with the curly-haired elongated expressionless faces of angels gazing and chanting with accompanying guitars *oualali oualali* beneath the dry flowers on the lintel *oualali oualali*

As when I used to walk with a girl artless amid the unknown territories of paradise and filled with plaintive yelpings the world turned far from me!

Theoktisti*

And to find a place on earth like the Cyprian in Siphnos or in Amorgos the Hozoviotissa¹ is very difficult

The soil needs caressing and whisperings like a horseman's in his horse's ear
And the breach within you needs

Not to have already come to the attention of the stones yet it needs you to walk barefoot to give a little joy to the nettles and it needs from the naked body

Fifteen years old for you to know which side of immortality vanishes to be brought back if

You could speak Greek the word *Theoktisti* in which case your hand will follow

Look! the winds which darken the rocks resemble each other and give the sea an ancestral face but then your heart more solitary

Yearns for something else It was enough that feelings were from God So that the sun

In one of its momentary pauses that time didn't even perceive managed to grant the whitewash a hieratic splendor and beauty

The beauty of those in love who without knowing it have assumed the divine form Thus one morning

When misery didn't come back the sparrows obtain a body from a clear water-drop and ascend *tsiou-tsiou* the opposing waters are playing and the cloud comes bearing peace

From one breath of man to the next the verbena mentally runs and the sweet pea deserted by everybody beats with the courage of not knowing that you go on effortlessly free and above the Authorities!

* St. Theoktisti (9th century) was abducted from Lesbos and escaped to a solitary holy life on Paros, where she is much venerated. Her name means "created by God."

1. "Cyprian" and "Hozoviotissa": a chapel and a monastery, both difficult of access, both beautiful.

Then light is founded And a hand which is your own in the sunbaked earth
and in the wild azure begins to engrave as an ideogram the little mistress Theok-
tisti

Here's what's needed first Of course many great transparent mountains remain
and others move in the current opposite to fate And because you merely con-
template it a certain golden mist in the upper frieze of the sky endures

So you say Hyperion¹ was right when he spoke "of other memories of gentler
times" and added "much and beautiful work remains to us before we capture the
Grandeur."

1. "Hyperion": refers to Friedrich Hölderlin's novel; the quotations are adapted from the seventh and ninth elegies of his *Menons Klagen um Diotima*.

Gift of a Silver Poem

I know that all this is nothing and that the language I speak has no alphabet

Since even the sun and the waves are a syllabic script which you decode only in times
of grief and exile

And the homeland a wall painting with successive Frankish or Slavic layers
which should you attempt to restore it you go immediately to prison and give an ex-
planation

To a crowd of foreign Authorities through your own always

The way it happens with calamities

Nevertheless let us imagine that on a threshing floor of olden times which could
even be in an apartment house children play and the loser

In accordance with the rules must speak and give to others a truth

In which case all are found in the end to hold in their hands a little

Gift of a silver poem.

THE MONOGRAM

I shall mourn always—hear me?—for you alone, in Paradise.

I

Fate will turn elsewhere the lines
Of the palm, like a switchman
Time will consent for a moment

How otherwise, since men love each other

The sky will act out our innards
And innocence will strike the world
With the sharpness of the black of death.

II

I mourn the sun and I mourn the years that come
Without us and I sing the others that have passed
If that is true

The bodies spoken to and the boats strumming sweetly
The guitars flickering underwater
The "believe me" and the "don't" there
Once in the music, once in the air

The two little animals, our hands
That sought to climb secretly one on the other
The pot of baby's breath through open yard gates
And the pieces of seas coming together
Behind the hedgerows, above the stone walls
The anemone that lay in your hand
So the mauve trembled three times for three days above the waterfalls

If these are true I sing
The wooden beam and the square weaving
On the wall, the Mermaid with unbraided tress
The cat who watched us in the darkness

A child with incense and the red cross
The hour evening falls on the rocks' inaccessibility
I mourn the garment that I touched and the world came to me.

III

Thus I speak for you and me

Because I love you and in love I know
How to enter like the Full Moon
From everywhere, for your small foot on the huge sheets
How to pluck jasmine flowers—and I have the power
To blow and move you asleep
Through moonlit passages and the sea's secret arcades
Hypnotized trees with silvering spiderwebs

The waves have heard of you
How you caress, how you kiss
How you say in a whisper the "what" and the "eh"
Around the neck around the bay
Always we the light and shadow

Always you the little star and always I the dark boat
Always you the harbor and I the beacon on the right
The wet dockwall and the gleam on the oars
High in the house with the vine arbors
The bound-up rosebushes, the water that feels cold
Always you the stone statue and always I the lengthening shadow
The half-closed window shutter you, I the wind that opens it
Because I love you and I love you
Always you the coin and I the adoration that cashes it:

So much for the night, so much for the roar in wind
So much for the droplet in the air, so much for the quietude
Around the despotic sea
Arch of the sky with the stars
So much for your least breath

That I have nothing more
Amid the four walls, the ceiling, the floor
To cry out of you and so my own voice strikes me
To smell of you and so men turn wild
Because men can't endure the untried
The brought from elsewhere and it's early, hear me
It's too early yet in this world my love

To speak of you and me.

IV

It's too early yet in this world, hear me?
The monsters have not yet been tamed, hear me
My lost blood and the pointed, hear me
Knife
Like a ram that runs amid the skies
And snaps the boughs of the stars, hear me
It's I, hear me
I love you, hear me
I hold you and lead you and dress you
In Ophelia's white bridal gown, hear me
Where do you leave me, where are you going and who, hear me

Holds your hand over the floods

The day will come, hear me
The enormous lianas and the lava of volcanoes
Will bury us and thousands of years later, hear me
They'll make us luminous fossils, hear me
For the heartlessness of men to shine, hear me
Over them
And throw us away in thousands of pieces, hear me
In the waters one by one, hear me
I count my bitter pebbles, hear me
And time is a great church, hear me
Where sometime the figures, hear me
Of Saints
Weep real tears, hear me
The bells open on high, hear me
A deep passage for me to pass through
The angels wait with candles and funeral psalms
I go nowhere, hear me

Either no one or we two together, hear me

This flower of tempest and, hear me
Of love
Once and for always we cut it, hear me
And it cannot come into bloom otherwise, hear me
In another earth, in another star, hear me

The soil, the very air we touched
Are no more, hear me

And no gardener was so fortunate in other times

To put forth a flower amid such a winter, hear me
And such northwinds, only we, hear me
In the middle of the sea
From only the wish for love, hear me
Raised a whole island, hear me
With caves and capes and flowering cliffs
Listen, listen
Who speaks to the waters and who weeps—hear?
Who seeks the other, who cries out—hear?
It's I who cry out and it's I who weep, hear me
I love you, I love you, hear me.

V
Of you I have spoken in olden times
With wise wet nurses and with veteran rebels
Whence comes your sorrow of the wild beast
The reflection on your face of trembling water
And why, then, am I destined to come near you
I who don't want love but want the wind
But want the gallop of the bareback standing sea

And no one had heard of you
For you neither dittany nor mushroom
In Crete's high places nothing
Only for you God agreed to guide my hand

This way, that way, heedful of the whole round
Of the face's shore, the bays, the hair
On the hill wavering left there

Your body with the stance of the solitary pine tree
Eyes of pride and of the translucent
Depths, inside the house with the old breakfront
With its yellow lace and cypress wood
Alone I wait for where you'll first appear

High on the roof terrace or behind the yard's flagstones
With the horse of the Saint and the egg of the Resurrection

As from a ruined wall painting
Big as small life wanted you
To fit the stentorian volcanic glow into the little candle

So that no one might have seen or heard
Anything in the wilderness the ruined houses
Neither the ancestor buried at the yard wall's edge
Of you, nor the old lady with all her herbs

For you only I, perhaps, and the music
That I push down inside me but it returns stronger
For you the unformed breast of twelve years
Turned to the future with its red crater
For you the bitter fragrance like a pin
You find within the body that pricks the memory
And here the soil, here the doves, here our ancient earth.

VI

I've seen much and the earth to my mind seems more beautiful
More beautiful in the golden vapors
The sharp stone, more beautiful
The violets of isthmuses and the roofs amid the waves
More beautiful the rays where without stepping you pace
Above the sea's mountains invincible as the Goddess of Samothrace

Thus I have looked at you and that's enough
For all time to become innocent
In the wake your passage leaves my soul
Follows like an inexperienced dolphin

And plays with the white and the azure!

Victory, victory where I've been vanquished
Before love and with it
For the passion flower and the hibiscus
Go, go even if I've been lost

Alone, and let the sun you hold be a newborn babe
Alone, and let me be the homeland that mourns
Let the word I sent to hold the laurel leaf for you be
Alone, the wind strong and alone the very round
Pebble in the blink of the dark depths
The fisherman who lifted up and cast back again into time Paradise!

VII

In Paradise I've marked an island out
Identical to you and a house by the sea

With a big bed and a little door
I've cast an echo into the bottomless deeps
To see myself each morning when I arise

To see half of you pass in the water
And half for which I weep in Paradise.

STEPCHILDREN

First Series

Psalm and Mosaic for Spring in Athens

Spring purple fragment
Spring pigeon-down
Spring multicolored dust

In the open pages and books
The tepid wind already blew
Seizing gypsy girls
Like
Paper kites
Up high
And birds who tried out their new rudders

Spring bitterness of lentisk
Spring nitrogen of armpit
Spring invisible sesame

From wire that suddenly drew fire
To the street corner with the Caryatids
Turning
A tram
Screeched
In empty lots the sun's tongs stirred
Nettles and snailgrass

Spring anthill of day
Spring bulb's blood
Spring unrestrained machine-gun

In the hands of beautiful women
At random
Blasts
Deaths
Millions of spermatozoa
In the hands of beautiful women
Strong flowers with the sun inside them

Spring stretched calico
Spring wasp of the hand
Spring "don't" "they'll see us" "monster"

And the monster who turned like the hurdy-gurdy
A strange
Other
Neighborhood
And the rude fist that awaited:
Watch so the cast find its dice
And the glass door its daring stone!

Spring crystal and nickel
Spring gardens' misstep
Spring "Sing the wrath . . ." ¹

Goddess! And how curly the dark places
And the lips what sugar violets!
And what a little garden
The loosened
Fresh
Hair
The breath in the soft belly what a trip!

Spring half-giddy ruin
Spring Zeus's head and sea
Spring Mercury Air Sedan

The bells opened afar
In the void of the blue below the eyelashes
One whirlpool
That swallowed
White
Featherdown
The mulberry tree's hormones conquered the heights

Spring unbitten mulberry
Spring screwed-in kiss
Spring swoon's chasm

The wall desired more nails
Within the ocher the Hospital's memory awoke

1. "Sing the wrath . . .": opening words of the *Iliad*.

The song that flashed from the goldbugs
And turned
Circles
Low
In the courtyard with the red and white tiles

Spring buzz in the temples
Spring anvil and hammer
Spring forward submersion

Someone threw words from the open window
Words that broke like almonds
Cactus
Beaver
Condor
Hawk
While in the Girl's School opposite

Spring 37 and 2
Spring Love *Amour* and *Liebe*
Spring no *nein* and *non!*

The girls bit the rubber erasers
And tossed their heads
As if
To pull
Out
The guts of a slaughtered rooster
Pieces of guts between their teeth

Spring fierce tooth
Spring paroxysm's fuchsia
Spring artesian volcano

And others hidden behind the skylight
Struggling with pink ribbons
One little
Moment only
The naked breasts
The trembling broom plants in the plains
Where grasshoppers rejoice

Spring grasshopper's jump
Spring dark womb
Spring indescribable act

In open pages and books
A mauve
Stain
Went back
And forth
The poured waters the stripped limbs
Shone behind the window shutter

Spring spring weighing anchor
Spring spring flag-decorated
Spring "goodbye goodbye children!"

1939

Angel of the Twelve Islands*

What Hermes-of-the-swallow's-paths
Burning the aether at morning with
The Rhodian palm tree's branch is poured
Over the vista of the East
Bell towers domiciles roofs masts
With rainbow-dappled sandal barely
Touching

What one—when dolphingirls jumping
From the sea's vineyards
Emit the screechy sound of wild pigeons
Behind the wind's unspeared fish
And with the pelagia or the jellyfish
Decorate the delicate azure beard
Of St. Nicholas

Of-the-sea-immaculate—what son of Chalke
Destroying the doomed polity
Of the “burned cave” fetches the sacred
Gifts of God that the years haven't
 overthrown
Goes flies—and his mind exults like sun-
Beams on the copper utensils of the
Memory of the ancients

Goes flies—but in souls tolls
A revolutionary bell and a lamb's deliverance
Boulders that the water's echo speaks again
House-flocks that the naked Daphnis¹ bears
Kalymnos's tangerine trees blow airs
And the half-open shells of Kassos
Listen

* “The Twelve Islands,” or Dodecanese, are all named in this difficult poem, which celebrates their unification with Greece in 1946.

1. “Daphnis”: a Sicilian shepherd and son of Hermes, was unfaithful to the nymph Echenais, who then blinded him. In consolation, he invented pastoral music. For another version of his story, see Theocritus I, 66ff.

Of the Thyrsus Cross or sword
Gleam and hymning of Goodness!
For the sweet lip of the future to be
On the breast of a strong young girl always
Together nymph's milk and mythic ears of
wheat
Patmos of praxis and Nisyros
Of dream

Kos Leros Syme Astypaleia
Karpethos Telos Castellorizo . . .
What diver suddenly is felt now slowly
approaching
The seadepth's sky where his sponges he
lights high
The angel and Panormitis of Mystery
Who rushes forward through "golden
Snowflakes"¹

He goes on high with a caduceus of light
Above abandoned chapels and windmills
To strike tidings of freedom upon
The Athenian's thrilled fortifications
Who with the speed of a blast goes quickly
And throws open the Flag of the foaming
Sea.

1946

1. "golden / Snowflakes": Quoted from Pindar, Olympian VII, 1.64, the phrase comes from the section describing the birth of Rhodes.

Ode to Picasso

I

As when

they set fire to a hair wick
Then quarrymen running far off
Signal like crazy men
And a sudden gust of wind sweeps their straw hats in the
streambeds

As when

a violin all alone raves in the dark
A melancholy lover's heart opens its Asia
Poppies within the hand grenade's flash
And the stone hand in deserts that movelessly and terribly
points at the same place always

They cry out

They signify

Life is no hermitage

Life cannot endure in silence

With hot springs and snowdrifts it goes aloft or rolls
down and whispers words of love

Words that whatever they say never tell lies

Words that start out like birds and end up as "fire
conflagrant"

Because the world doesn't have two elements—is not
divisible

Pablo Picasso—and joy and sadness in man's forehead
resemble each other

Juego de luna y arena—they mingle where sleep

Lets bodies speak—where you paint Death or Eros

Both naked and defenseless under the Northwind's
terrible nostrils

Because *only thus* you exist.

Truly Picasso Pablo you exist

And with you we exist

Ceaselessly they erect black stones around us—but you
laugh

Black walls around us—but you at once

Open through them myriads of doors and windows

For the fireblond cry to rush oh into the sun

That frantic with love extols and proclaims the gases
liquids and solids of this world
So that they don't fight one against the other anymore
So that no one fights anymore against another
That no enemies exist
That side by side the lamb walks with the lion
And life O my brother like the Guadalquivir of stars
Tumbles down with clear water and gold
Thousands of leagues within its dreams
Thousands of leagues within our dreams. . . .

II

Thus the knife enters the flesh—and the zest of hot bread
rises thus. But
The creaking of the high beech tree
In mountains the thunderbolt respected—and even
The multitude in the plazas who wave red handkerchiefs
On May Day—Your great black eyes incandesce the world
The Mediterranean sunbasks in them and chamois of the
rocks' air-draught stretch
Their rough necks
Your broad shaggy breast like a sulphured vineyard
And your right hand a mythic insect
Goes back and forth on white papers in light and dark
Goes back and forth buzzing
And rouses colors and shapes
Not only those that housewives put on their shelves on
Holy Saturday
Memories of the betrothed's moon
All golden sequins and rose pink rhombi
But also others one can see when in deep yearning
Inside children's carriages
Inside the caleches of fine wild fellows
Inside the turtle's egg
Inside the vipers who strike back at fire
Or even inside the boundless forests of Continents
—Night falling—
When around the fire cross-legged blacks chant all
together the "hallelujah" with harmonicas. . . .

With a bit more heart the world would be otherwise
The church of the world would be otherwise
But look! the good Samaritan weeps forgotten and binds
an ancient dracunculus root to his feet

The moment when you wild beast
You Pablo Picasso
Picasso Pablo who contain within your unfading eyes
What God could not contain within millions of planted
acres of earth
Work your brush as if singing
As if caressing wolves or swallowing flames
As if sleeping night and day with a nymphomaniac
As if throwing orange peels in the middle of a celebration
While storm-favored
Picasso Pablo you seize Death by the wrists
And wrestle him like a beautiful and noble Minotaur
Who the more blood he loses the more you become virile
You take you pass you leave you grasp again
Flowers animals kisses fragrances manure rocks and
diamonds
To balance all within the infinite like the very movement
of the earth that brought us and will take us
And you paint for you and for me
And you paint for all my companions
And you paint for all the years that passed that pass that
shall pass.

1948

Of the Moon of Mytilene*

Old and New Ode

You made my misfortune so beautiful—that I know:
Only to Thee shall I say it my old Selene of the sea.

It was on my island where if I'm not mistaken
Thousands of years ago Sappho discreetly
Brought you into the garden of our old house
Striking pebbles in the water for me to hear
That they call you *Selanna*¹ and that you yourself hold
Over us and play the mirror of sleep.

How supine I remember July going out
Amid the magnolias of Paradise
I used to see you come down there where shone the pool
And myriads of flies you were phosphorescing
Above the rotting leaves! How all hung suspended! And deep
The rumble of the wheel in the night . . .

Or times you brought me the owl
Into my monastic chamber
Raising shadows from the furniture
To frighten me. But then I didn't know what dead means

Or Time or Vision
Or the silver cover of the Virgin upon the water
The great hieroglyphics on your countenance
Love and death—I just didn't know

And I was so distressed! Merely that it was night
Merely that the leaves were dripping merely that I had
Inexplicably descended into the Mother
Merely that the echo of the fathomless floor
Detached the black fragment from within me
And threw it in the well

* Mytilene is Lesbos, Elytis's beloved home island.

1. "Selanna": the moon goddess Selene, in Lesbian Sappho's Aeolic orthography. Elytis shares with Sappho direct emotion, elaborate poetics, themes of memory and desire, and the island of Lesbos.

Merely that the earth crumbled beneath my sole
And the rosemary was smelling like a peacock
Merely that they were urgent merely that they pressed my breast
I felt the tears well up. . . .

Far away at the houses with silver roofs
The voice raised the other children
Their voice raised them with the harmonica
I alone on the stairway as if rejected wept
And entreated you: take me take me in your arms
And comfort me for being born!

★

Not that I was unlucky—I want to say
That the years over me didn't hold like water
And that my words leaping in the light
Like fish yearned to reach
Into the other sky—But that no one no one
Knew anymore how to read Paradise

My old Selene of the sea only to Thee shall I say it
Because you made my misfortune beautiful—and I know:

I reside still in my old house
And I'm frightened by the same creakings
And again at night July going out
Wrapped in your black greenery I rave

The men left they left like wind
In the deep hidden cypress groves
A slow shudder the dragnet that Night pulls
Amid the leaves all sparkles

Where however the "delight"? Where the "new life"?
But I was a witness when in the third height
One by one the olive plants of the air wakened
And half of me remained outside Time
That I may again confront the valley
Death hid from me. The sapphire Zodiac around me.

Thus far off on earth. Flowings of the sea
And enchantments of the gardens' smoke. But what
Fatigue the poet with his empty lips
incessantly behind his grief: the Unutterable.
Take me take me in your arms
And comfort me for being born.

For so light was the step in the brushwood
So purple the flowers. So lovely the eyes' teardrop
After the happiness vanished
Far in the sea's dawns
The kiss I kept while my star rent
The slopes of August so clear
So bitter the serenity in my palm
So black and small the men
Who with forward foot ceaselessly advance
Advance straight to Cocytus and to Pyriphlegethon!¹

1953

1. "Cocytus" and "Pyriphlegethon": rivers of ice and of fire in Hades.

George Sarandaris*

I'll kindle laurel to stun the sky
Hoping you smell the homeland and return
Amid the trees that knew you and thus
Suddenly burst into bloom the moment of your death

Forget about us gypsies
Us who "reside in the hollows"¹
Since we're ignorant of celebration

And we birds don't put kindling
In our sleep as you had initiated us
This side of deterioration we plait the ivy
We're farther from you than even from Alpha Centauri

"We are as if in some guard"²
Numbed in time
And unlearned in song

You alone the heretic of matter but
Coreligionist of eagles dared the last
Leap. And the herdsmen of Premeti³ saw you
Walking younger in the light of the other joy

And what if the world be vain
You have spoken Greek
Until "the latter time"⁴

And from your speech still
The sea lilies give off incense
And certain legendary girls mystically turn
Toward you the mirror of the sun.

1955

* George Sarandaris (1907–41) wrote brief, translucent poems, mostly in Greek but also in Italian and French, as well as philosophical essays. He early befriended and influenced Elytis.

1. "reside in the hollows": Plato, *Phaedo*, 109c2–3: "We have forgotten that we reside in the hollows and imagine we reside above on the earth."

2. "We are as if in some guard": *ibid.*, 62b3.

3. "Premeti": mountain village on the Albanian border; Sarandaris died of war wound complications from the Albanian Campaign in W.W.II, in which Elytis also fought.

4. "the latter time": Plato, *Phaedo*, 114c3–4.

Small Analogon*

for N. Hadjikyriakos Ghikas

Only as much
As the searoar needs to smooth a pebble
Or for the sky's chill to imprint at dawn
The skin of a violet fig

And there
Far on the headland of Time
Where the black desert isle rages from the southwind

Only so much even there: thrives the Invisible!

But we build it but we garden it
But we day and night relate it

And often at the hour when from the leprosy of continents
With sharp eyebrow and the sun's acanthus
The earth Mother-of-God

Is discerned ascending

As in a dream again we offer it
One the stone one the dew one the sky's roughcast

O earthen man

Behold what the night's parturition has brought
Cyan and cinnabar purple and ocher

Send your gaze on high like an acute thought
To tear through the warring firmament

And say that we the asymmetrical are

The traces left—and which you followed—
By the wild bee and the grief-bearing lamb.

1958

*Nikos Hadjikyriakos Ghikas, a contemporary of Elytis, is one of Greece's best-known painters. He did the frontispiece of the Greek edition of *Stepchildren*.

Mozart

Romance from the Concerto for Piano No. 20, K. 466

Lovely saddening life
Piano distant subterranean
My head leans to the Pole
And the grasses conquer me

Secret Ganges of the night where are you taking me?
From black smoke I see roe deer
Amid the silver they run they run
And I do not live and I have not died

Neither love nor even glory
Nor a dream was it ever
On my side I'm sleeping sleeping
And I hear the engines of the traveling earth.

1960

Second Series

Helen of Crete

From the Front and from the Side

If only worry would give birth to just one bird a rip that would run from
top to bottom in the blackness of the inner world and the wormwood plant
with the sharpness of the Cretan mountains would light up in Hades like nightin-
gale song

Silver buckle Helen

Drench your hands in basil to refresh me as if I read in your caresses the Epistles of
Paul

(She lifted the cage alone
there one here one
and the sunlight shifting with her spread
to light up all her lovely head
there one here one
on every Sunday thus the sun)

The shepherds followed the three winds and you go after the fourth and are il-
luminated so I can see behind your body the mountains and islands hasten-
ing all the isolate words of the northeast wind and the kittens of the yard where
you grew up paradisaal

Helen land of Redolence

I say so much must the gardener of the sky have suffered for your beauty to become
this mint

(She called by the backyard tree
psee-psee psee-psee
and the tomcat lifted up his paw
so from her gleaming eyes to draw
psee-psee psee-psee
their lightning's golden energy)

And as everywhere night sometimes falls yet (the same with love) a little
light all by itself calls "me" "me" and nobody hears it only a reminiscence
ascends like a white figure turned to the sea so with you

Moon Helen surging up

Somebody's teardrop you didn't point out will chastise the dark heart and
it doesn't endure look in the little jasmine of night all demonry

(Oh jasmine as white as sky
and my and my
and my mystic Evening Star so sweet
oh take me take me off to Crete
and mi-and mi-
and mind you do not ask me why.)

1962

The Leaf Seer

This very evening of August eighth
Shipwrecked in the shallows of the stars
My old house with its geckoes
And the candle melted on the commode
Doors windows open
My old house emptying
Its cargo of desolation into the night;

Startled voices and others yet
Running amid foliage gleam like
The secret passings of glowworms
From the depth of a reversed life
Within the cold white of eyes
There where Time is moveless
And the Moon with her ravaged cheek

Despairingly draws near my own;
They commence a dark rustling
As if from a lost love returning:
“Don’t.” And later again “Don’t.” “My baby.”
“What was meant for you.” “One day you’ll remember it.”
“Child little child with chestnut hair.”
“I who love you.” “Say always.” “Always.”

And while all you have goes and sinks
Into the greed of the black orchard
That opens into two
Extinguished carbonized
From the churned water of your soul a
Turbid wave rises whose bubbles are
Just so many old sunsets

Windows trembling in the evening starlight
The moment you passed by happiness
Like a song wherein a girl
Weeping for you hid lest you see her—
All the sanctities of the embrace and the vow
Nothing nothing went for lost
This very evening of August eighth

And again from within the verdure of the deep
The same one interminable shudder
Single-rustles and multi-rustles the leaves
Soliloquizes in the Aramaic of another world
"Child little child with chestnut hair
You were meant to be lost here so to be saved far away"
"You were meant to be lost here so to be saved far away."

And suddenly future things seem like past things;
Passable all seas with flowers
I alone but not alone; as always;
As when a young man I went forward
With the place at my right vacant
And Vega following me up high
Of all my loves the Patron Saint.

1965

Idol of the Century

What eraser I wonder is there
For our internal ugliness, what transforms
The slavery of so many years, repentant Caesars.
You from the other world, tell us
Which leaf, which bird, which garden in the sea
Breaking the waves of May, could compensate for
The corporal
Pain
Which should only one suffer it, we all cry out
How long, how long

I took paths and again found myself facing
Creon and Antigone Electra and Aegisthus¹
Each with a round moon in hand,
His own night.
They live still, they live, they advance and lament.
Even that one, perhaps the most forgotten of all,
The King of Asine,² even he ascends the hill
Here he is, all golden
With the slaughtered and unslaughtered behind him
Toward what? Toward what?

Pale sea and you dark figureheads in the wind
Higher, higher
Give me the strength
To take away the dread future from the seers
And throw it like useless entrails to the dogs
I, who am returning at last from the Hero
And am taking the long road, discouraged
Until finally, I rescue a living cry
From self-conflagration:
Enough, enough

1. "Creon and Antigone Electra and Aegisthus": In Greek tragedy, Antigone and Electra opposed tyrants in authority, Creon and Aegisthus.

2. "The King of Asine": a famous poem by George Seferis. Asine is mentioned once by Homer in the *Iliad*'s Catalogue of Ships; its site in the Peloponnese is known, but nothing else is.

The idol of the century
Trembles trembles far off, in the remoteness of a
 thousand myrrh offerings
In the silver of distress it shines.
Do not return to look, guys,
Do not return to look. Whosoever
Hath lived in so many evils as I
Thereof,¹ he knows this: straight ahead, and only singing
Relentless and resolute in the exodus
We shall bring Eurydice² again
To the light, to the light, to the light.

1968

1. "Whosoever . . . Thereof": Aeschylus, *Antigone*, 463, from her great speech on the unwritten laws, when she calls death an advantage for her.

2. "Eurydice": by the power of his music Orpheus nearly brought his wife back from Hades.

Death and Resurrection of Constantine Paleologus*

I

Thus as he stood firm before the Gate and uncaptured in his sorrow

Far from the world where his soul sought to calculate by the breadth of Paradise
And harder even than stone for no one had ever tenderly looked at him—sometimes
his crooked teeth gleamed strangely white

And as he passed with his gaze a little above men and removed from them all
One who smiled at him the True One whom death could not seize

He was careful to pronounce clearly the word sea so that within it all the dolphins
could shine And there was enough desolation so to contain God and so
every waterdrop could ascend steadfastly to the sun

As a youth he had seen a gold glow flee on his elders' shoulders And one night
he remembers during a great storm the sea's throat groaned so much it grew turbid
but he did not care to stand by it

Heavy the world for you to live it yet for a little pride it is worth it.

II

My God now what He who must struggle with the thousands now as he must
also struggle with his solitude who he who knew how with one word to
quench all the earth's thirst now what

Now that all was taken from him And his cross-tied sandals and his pointed tri-
dent and the wall he mounted every afternoon holding the reins against the weath-
er like a pitching hard-to-handle boat

And a handful of verbena that he had rubbed on a girl's cheek at midnight
to kiss her (how the waters of the moon purled on the stone steps three cliffs
above the sea. . . .)

*Constantine Paleologus, as every Greek schoolchild knows, was the last Byzantine emperor, who died gloriously defending the walls of Constantinople against the victorious Ottoman Turks in 1453.

Noon from night and no one at his side Only his faithful words that mingled all their colors to leave a lance of white light in his hand

And opposite along all the walls' length myriads of heads cast in plaster as far as the eye could see

"Noon from night—all life a brilliance!" he cried and charged into the horde trailing behind him the endless line of gold

And at once he felt setting off from afar the ultimate pallor conquer him.

III

Now as the sun's windmill kept turning faster and faster the courtyards plunged into winter and emerged again bright red from the geraniums

And the cool little cupolas resembling azure medusae reached closer and higher to the silver which the wind worked delicately into an icon of more distant times

Virgin maidens their bosoms glowing a summer dawn brought him fresh palm fronds and branches of myrtle uprooted from the depths

Dripping iodine While under his feet he heard in the great sewer sinking black ships' prows ancient and smokey wood whence eye held open and still upright the Mothers-of-God rebuked

Horses overturned on the dirt a heap of buildings big and small smithereens and dust ignited in the air

Always with one word unbroken on his teeth lying down

He
himself the last Greek!

1969

Villa Natacha*

I

I have something to say transparent and incomprehensible
Like birdsong in time of war.

Here, where I sat in a corner
To smoke my first free cigarette
Clumsy in happiness, trembling
Lest I break a flower, offend some bird
And so put God in a difficult position

And yet all obey me
The standing bamboos and the leaning bell tower
And all the garden's firmament
Mirrored in my mind
One by one names that sound
Strange in a foreign tongue: Phlox, Aster, Cytise
Eglantine, Pervenche, Colchique
Alise, Fresa, Pivoine, Myoporone
Muguet, Bluet
Saxifrage
Iris, Clochette, Myotosis
Primavere, Aubepine, Tubereuse
Paquerette, Ancolie, and all the shapes
Clearly written in the fruit: circle, square
Triangle and rhombus
As birds see them, that the world become simple
A Picasso drawing
With a woman, child, and centaur.

I say: this will also come. And the other will pass.
The world does not need much. A least
Something. Like the sharp wheelturn before the accident
But
Exactly
Toward
The opposite direction.

* Villa Natacha, where Elytis lived part of the time for two years during the fascist junta, belonged to the late modern art collector, publisher, and gardener Tériade, like Elytis a Greek from Lesbos.

Enough we worshipped danger and it's time it repaid us.

*I dream of a revolution from the place of evil and wars, like
Matisse's from the place of chiaroscuro and shading.*

II

Yet when two friends

Speak or even keep silent—then above all—

There's no room for a third thing

And like friends, it seems,

Seas also communicate from afar

A little air is enough, a chip of dark chaste tree

Rubbed between the fingers and look:

The wave? Is it this?

Is it this that speaks to you in the singular and says

"Don't forget me" "Don't forget me"? Is it Anactoria?¹

Or maybe not? Maybe only the water running

Night and day in the chapel of Saint Paraskevi?²

Forget what? Who? We know nothing.

As when this evening something of yours broke

An old friendship, a memory of porcelain

Again you see as day breaks

How unjust you were in judgment

And your mouth is bitter before your coffee

Gesticulating aimlessly, you make an echo of,

Who knows, another life, and it's from this that

(Or maybe from the thought

Sometimes so strong it juts out)

Facing you, suddenly, from top to bottom the mirror cracks.

I say: Fate cracks at the one moment

The only one whose

Arrival you cannot know

1. "Anactoria": a girl beloved of Sappho, whom the latter entreats not to forget her after marriage and departure for Lydia.

2. "water running . . . Saint Paraskevi": A well bubbles up in one corner of the church of St. Paraskevi on Tériade's estate on Mytilene.

And he who gives, takes.
Because if not, then even
Death must be killed and deterioration
Must deteriorate and the little
Pink pebble you once
Held in your palm, this too
Somewhere, millennia distant, must be recomposed.

*With wisdom and courage. Picasso and Laurens. May we,
sunburnt, trample on Psychology, on Politics, on Sociology,
wearing a plain white shirt.*

III

Man, unintentionally
Evil—almost your luck were otherwise.
If only you knew facing a flower
How to conduct yourself
Rightly, all would be yours. Because from few things, sometimes
Even from one—as with love—
We know the rest. Yet the multitude, look:
On the verge of things it stands
It wants and takes all and there's nothing left for it.

Afternoon has already arrived
Serene as in Mytilene or a painting
By Theophilos,¹ and beyond to Eze, to Cap-Estel,
Bays where the air arranges embraces
Such a translucency
That you can touch the mountains and continue seeing the man
Who passed hours ago
Indifferent, though by now he must have arrived.

1. "Theophilos": a great primitive painter (1868–1934) from Mytilene, where Tériade established a museum of his work. Elytis's book *The Painter Theofilos* starts: "Nowhere, in no other place of the world, do Helios and Selene reign harmoniously, divide so fairly their power, as on this piece of earth which once, who knows in what improbable times, God, for his pleasure, cut out and blew afar, like a plane tree's leaf, to the middle of the sea. I speak of the island which, when inhabited later on, was called Lesbos, and which, when we see it marked on maps, does not seem to correspond much to reality." He continues with "So it is not at all by chance that Eros . . . was born in a land such as Mytilene" (*Open Papers*, p. 191).

I say: yes, they must have arrived
War to its end, and the Tyrant to his fall
And fear of love before a naked woman.
They've arrived, they've arrived and only we can't see
But feeling our way keep bumping into phantoms.

Angel, flying somewhere here about
Much-suffering and invisible, take my hand
Men have gilded the traps
And I must remain one of those outside.
Because I feel even the Invisible is present
The only one whom I name Prince, when
Calmly the house
Anchored in the sunset
Gives off unknown flashes
And as by assault, a thought
Just as we are going elsewhere unexpectedly captures us.

1969

Elytonesos*
Commonly Elytisisle

The salt grindstones were shining and in the great
Muteness of the afternoon sea nothing. Only the wind kept on
Kept on with its sprinkler. And two or three birds
Strong and free as happiness.

So I could have lived antithetically
In the imminent and fortunately not
Have obtained anything
Except from my own hand everything
Now again I was heard
Solitary as an ascetic
Before Nea Kaimeni¹ rises from his entrails

At right a boulder was sinking and from the other side the brute
Was raising his head and struggling
Water bubbles at his eroded feet kept abrading to vapor
The sun was breaking stones and on high the angels were gull-cawing

Millennia afterwards
When the water leapt up
So that even grief becomes inhabitable
Low mountains chapels lighthouses
Look they can still be seen
My pasts my presents
From the unknown place. And now?

Vineyards descending in rows with a galaxy of greens
Of old times round the promontory. And spindrift
Borne from the white Marias of the waves
Two hundred meters broad continuous Paradise

How are men now? I wonder
Are they still afraid? In the sloping fields

* *Nesos* means island; the word is formed the way, say, *Peloponesos* is from *Pelops* and island. Elytis follows this with a more demotic spelling.

1. "Nea Kaimeni": Lava flows, from volcanic activity during 1707–11, caused a new islet to form in the bay of Thera; its name means "new-burnt one."

Do they hope for another sky?
Do cherry trees exist?
And which saint now performs
Her miracle
On the whitewash with the paintings?

You could reach God in the air
He smelled of bees and yesterday's mountain rain
One moment she whom you had seen in the garden of deceptions
Without even touching her was passing by you singing

Elsewhere. It's elsewhere
That the perpetual miracle occurs
Above the Great Castle
This hand which shall return
Useless things back to past times
Shall open like a helianthus
And runners with the Greek tongue shall carry this
message

Yards from the hill's heights the desert isles were sounding
Far in the distance like a heavy beast Asia was sleeping
A girl freshly cut from verbena
Stirred in the air and her foot was gleaming

As words are given one to the other
In limpid air
So the girl is felt to appear
Holding a reed basket
Filled with sea urchins and sea violets
You say: these are your loves
With fragrance and with spines

Fought for in the wild the tower of the twelve months was turning
Against the winds and you could hear the trees' accords concurring
A transient little July shared out
The Laws: to each one his own willow tree he was proclaiming

And the day you despaired
Returning like an echo but infinite
And the little sorrows

With their secret red flower
Trembling shadows an untouchable foliage
Of the sky on the water
That the mind alone can touch

The bells of Saint Paraskevi¹ were ringing on her day
And bit by bit the strait was bearing off
The big square houses. Three hours higher
The caiques with open sails were dragging off the roofs

And what if no archeologist of the future
And of heavenly things
Ever felt how many tears
Were shed. Though not in vain.
Because even tears are
A homeland that does not vanish
There where they shone sometime later the truth came.

1971

1. "Saint Paraskevi": Her feast day is July 26. She protects against and cures eye ailments and blindness.

Mystic Versicles*

For a Matins in the Hermitage of Apollos

You awoke Adam and the world recommences
Ivy foliage trembling the waves
Pass over the whitewash myriad shadowings

Within the Unbelievable take stock and say
How much matters the cross and how much She-More-Ample¹
Of your soul which ignited as a golden air

Sea eagle dolphin of the skies
My glaucous life you who in a lightning flash
Said all and scorched them who said all and hid them

Against me I saw grow
Peaks of Ararat and incomprehensible languages
But I proceeded alone without a single tear

I cast a secret lure in the din of the waves
And I hear like the voices of lions
The times I was unjust the times I was deceitful

Swarms of bees devoured
My thin body goddesses chiming
Black seas took my speech from me

For what should I mourn? Who is it who commands?
Lost in the heap what fighter's image
Unintentionally re-arises in me

Three and four times my mind tilted
With the slanting wings of some bird of the tempest
And later nothing again again nothing

* The poem is composed in an elaborate and subtle meter; its form is suggested by Byzantine religious poetry. Apollos, an Alexandrian Jew, was a mystical disciple of St. Paul; Apollos taught the Corinthians (see I Corinthians) about Christ but was saddened by the great tribute of the Corinthians toward himself and did not return to Corinth. See Acts 18:24-28.

1. "She-More-Ample": a title of the Virgin.

Farewell swart Northwind curly-haired
You who keep hidden beneath the earth
My nightingale song my many sins

The Ninestar luminous monster
Journeys up high and throws to my soul
Letters here and there but not one word

I can no longer say anything else
I merely blow and old veils
To others invisible are opened before my eyes

The unsubdued clambering goat
In the heights chews the leaves of the centuries
As before I was born and as afterwards

In front I worship you violet Lady of Flowers
You who look about and the mountains beyond
Vanish evanescent as the Ascension

Endlessly white the cell
Like a waterdrop clear in the sunlight
Takes me and completely naked I speak the miracle.

1972

MARIA NEPHELE

But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil

MATTHEW 5:39

On the other side I am the same.

“The Concert of Hyacinths” XXI, ORIENTATIONS

Nephele is an ancient word for cloud.

The Presence

A

Maria Nephele says

1. The Forest of Men
2. Nephele
3. Patmos
4. Disquisition on Beauty
5. Through the Mirror
6. Thunderbolt Steers
7. The Trojan War

And the Antiphonist

1. The Map-Fix
2. Nephelegeretes
3. The Revelation
4. The Waterdrop
5. Aegeis
6. Hymn to Maria Nephele
7. Helen

The Song of Maria Nephele

B

The Antiphonist says

1. Pax San Tropezana
2. The Dagger
3. Ancestral Paradise
4. Eau de Verveine
5. Upper Tarquinia
6. Hymn in Two Dimensions
7. The Holy Inquisition

And Maria Nephele

1. The Planet Earth
2. Each Moon Confesses
3. Paper Kite
4. Disquisition on Purity
5. Eye of the Locust
6. Declaration of Responsibility
7. St. Francis of Assisi

The Song of the Poet

C

Maria Nephele says

1. Bonjour Tristesse
2. The Poets
3. The Twenty-four Hour Life
4. Disquisition on Justice
5. Electra Bar
6. Djenda
7. Stalin

And the Antiphonist

1. Morning Exercises
2. That Which Persuades
3. The Lifelong Moment
4. Nude Study
5. Parthenogenesis
6. Ich Sehe Dich
7. The Hungarian Uprising

The Eternal Wager

The Presence

M.N. *I walk through thistles through obscurity
toward those to come and those that used to be
and have as only weapon sole defense
my fingernails purple as cyclamens.*

A. I saw her everywhere. Holding a glass and gazing into the void. Listening to records while lying on the floor. Walking down the street in wide pants and an old trenchcoat. In front of the windows of children's stores. Sadder then. And in record shops, more nervous, biting her fingernails. She smokes countless cigarettes. She is pale and beautiful. But if you speak to her, she doesn't listen at all. As if something were happening elsewhere—which only she can hear and is frightened by. She holds your hand tightly, she weeps, but she isn't *there*. I never touched her and never took anything from her.

M.N. *He understood nothing. He was always saying to me "remember?" Remember what? I only remember dreams because I have them at night. But in daytime I feel terrible—how shall I put it, unprepared. I found myself in life so suddenly—without expecting it. I said "bah I'll get used to it." And everything around me was rushing, things and people were rushing—until I too was set rushing like mad. But it seems I overdid it. Because—I don't know—something strange happened in the end. First I would see the corpse and then the murder would take place. First would come the blood and then the blow and cry. And now when I hear it rain I don't know what's in store for me.*

A. "Why don't they bury men erect like Archbishops?"¹—so she would tell me. And once, I remember, in summer on an island, when we were all coming back at dawn from a late night out, we jumped over the railing of the museum garden. She danced on the stones and saw nothing.

M.N. *I saw his eyes. I saw some old olive groves.*

A. I saw a grave stele. A kore in relief on the stone. She seemed sad and held in her hand a little bird.

M.N. *He was looking at me, I know it, he was looking at me. We both were looking at the same stone. We were looking at each other through the stone.*

1. "bury . . . Archbishops": In Orthodoxy, bishops are buried standing.

A. She was calm and held in her hand a little bird.

M.N. *She was sitting. And she was dead.*

A. She was sitting and held in her hand a little bird. As for you you'll never hold a bird—you're not worthy!

M.N. *Oh, if they'd only allow me, if they'd only allow me.*

A. Who won't allow you?

M.N. *The one who allows nothing.*

A. The one, the one who allows nothing there
tears himself from his shadow and walks elsewhere. . . .

M.N. *His words unutterable are all white
his eyes are deep and sleepless day and night. . . .*

A. But he had taken the whole upper part of the stone. And with it her name.

M.N. *ARIMNA . . . as if I could still see the carved letters in the light . . . ARIMNA
EPHE EL. . . .*¹

A. She was missing. The whole upper part was missing. There were no letters at all.

M.N. *ARIMNA EPHE EL . . . just on the EL the stone had been cut and broken. I remember it well.*

A. It seems she saw it in her dream and that's why she remembers it.

M.N. *In my dream, yes. In a great sleep that sometime is to come all light and heat and
small stone steps.*² *Children will walk down the street their arms around each oth-*

1. "ARIMNA EPHE EL": anagram for Maria Nephele. *Arimna* also represents Marina, a common girl's name important in Elytis; *Ephe* is also a girl's name; *e* and *l* are the first two letters of Helen, Eleutheria (freedom), and Elytis. (See *The Axion Esti*, "Genesis" V and Ode 1.) The phrase might also mean, "Marina says Elytis."

2. "small stone steps": These suggest the ladders of Jacob and St. John of the Cross. Such steps are common in island villages.

er as in some old Italian movies. From everywhere you'll hear songs and see huge women on little balconies watering their flowers.

- A. A big sea-blue balloon will then take us on high, here and there the wind will buffet us. First the silver domes will appear, then the steeples. The streets will seem narrower, straighter than we imagined. The roofs with white television antennas. And hills all around and paper kites—we shall pass right by them. Until at some point we shall see the whole sea. The souls upon it will give off little white vapors.

M.N. *I have raised my hand against the black mountains and the demons of this world. I have said to love "why" and rolled it on the floor. Wars occurred and reoccurred and not even a rag was left to hide deep among our things and forget about it. Who is listening? Who listened? Judges,¹ priests, policemen, what is your country? Only my body remains to me and I give it. Those who know cultivate in it sacred things, as gardeners in Holland raise tulips. And those who never learned what sea and swimming are drown in it. . . .*
Confluences of the sea and you distant stars' influences—stand by me!

- A. I've lifted up my hand against all
the world's demons unexorcisable
I've turned now from the side that's ill
to sun and light in self-exile!

M.N. *From many storms I've returned until
mid-men I've gone into self-exile!*

1. "Judges": For the judgment, see *The Axion Esti*, "Sixth reading. Prophetic."

A

The Forest of Men

*Confluences of the sea and you
distant stars' influences—stand by me!
From the waters of the sky's night look
how I ascend
amphi-curved
like the new moon
and dripping blood.*

*Poet my abandoned cicada
no one has noon anymore;
extinguish Attica and come near me.
I'll take you to the forest of men
and I'll dance naked for you with tom-tom and masks
and give myself to you amid roarings and howlings.
I'll show you the man Baobab
and the man Phagus Carnamenti
the old woman Cimmulius and all her breed
gnawed at by parasites;
I'll give you the man Bumbacaroo Uncarabo
his wife Ibou-Ibou
and their deformed children
the mushroomdogs
Cingua Banga and Iguana Brescus.
Don't be afraid
with one hand out front like a storm lantern
I shall guide you
and rush upon you;
my fingernails will enter your flesh
the truth—don't they say?—is painful
and needs, you know, your blood
needs your wounds
only through these will the life you sought in vain
pass—if it ever does pass through—
together with the wind's whistling and ghosts
and the korai with suns on their bicycles. . . .*

The Map-Fix

Whatever you see—it's all right
so long as it's: *Announcement*.
The Moon propitiously sailing the slightest cloud
the alligator of trees
the sullen peace of lagoons
with the distant putt-putt of the engine
if the world once and for all were called: *Announcement*.

Poetry O my Holy Lady—forgive me
but I must stay alive
to cross to the other bank;
anything would be preferable
to my slow assassination by the past.
And if every hurricane remains indelible
on me like encaustic
the fulfillment of days will come
I shall eliminate my self boustrophedon.¹

Unless even this self does not exist
if in the depths of oceans
the blond days singing took with them
once and for all the image
the Light-Tree
with the birds' thousand blinding-bright schists
and the Months all around on tiptoe
gathering crocuses little
tadpoles of aether in their aprons.
It's that men did not wish it, otherwise . . .
Amid emptiness I hoarded treasure and now again
amid treasure I remain empty.

Farewell O Paradises and unclaimed gifts
I leave I go straight to me
far away where I am.

1. "Boustrophedon": as the ox ploughs, left to right, right to left, as in early Greek inscriptions.

Maria Nephele says:

*Forward! Ahead! Scram!
With no club and no cave
among enraged brontosauri
see you manage things by yourself
and invent a language maybe shrieking
e e e e e.*

*Then you'll hear me singing to you again and again
singing to you at night with the xylophone:
"I went into the forest droogoo dooom
the trees ate me up dooom dooom dooom
they tore me into pieces droogoo dooom
they threw me to the vultures dooom dooom dooom."*

THE LAW I AM WILL NOT SUBDUE ME.

The moment came. Maria Nephele
take my hand—I shall follow you;
and the other hand I raise—look—with palm
turned up¹ fingers opened
a heavenly flower:
“Hubris” as we’d say or even “Star”

Hubris-Star Hubris-Star
that’s the map-fix friends
we must keep the connection.
Don’t laugh at my great awkwardness
and time’s weather you know is against us.

COME UP WITH SUCH WELL-AIMED AWKWARDNESS

AND LOOK: GOD!

1. “palm turned up”: Showing the palm, as here the Antiphonist shows his to heaven, is a rude and hubristic gesture in Greece. The image derives from “a production in Paris of Paul Claudel’s *Le Partage du Midi*, in which Jean-Louis Barrault ended the performance by raising his right hand ceremoniously, forming a star” (Athan Anagnostopoulos, *Maria Nephele*, p. 71).

Maria Nephele says:

Nephele

*Day by day I live—who knows what dawn'll discover?
My one hand crumples money up the other smoothes it over*

*Guns you see must speak for our chaotic time
with so-called "national ideals" we must keep in line*

*You never donned a soldier's dress so scribe why stare at me?
the art of making money functions militarily*

*Though up all night—to write many a bitter verse
to cover walls with slogans revolutionary and fierce*

*An intellectual is what to all you'll always seem
and only I who love you: as a captive of my dream.*

*If love's the "common denominator" as it were
I must be Maria Nephele—you, woe, Cloud-Gatherer.¹*

INSCRIBE YOURSELF SOMEPLACE ANY WAY YOU CAN
AND LATER ERASE YOURSELF AGAIN WITH
GENEROSITY.

1. "Cloud-Gatherer": Homeric epithet for Zeus.

Nephelegeretes*

Ah how lovely to be cloud-gatherer
to write epic like Homer for the heck of it
and not care if you're liked
or not

Undistracted you enjoy your unpopularity
so; with generosity; as if you had a mint
at your disposal and then closed it up
and fired all the personnel
and just kept a poverty no one else has
entirely for yourself.

While in their offices despairingly
hanging on to their telephones
the fatties struggle for nothing
you ascend inside Eros
all sooty but nimble
as a chimney sweep
you descend from Eros ready to establish
your own white seashore

without money

you undress as those undress who comprehend the stars
and with great strokes you swim out to weep freely. . . .

IT IS BIGAMY BOTH TO LOVE AND TO DREAM.

* "Nephelegeretes" would mean Cloud-Gatherer, a Homeric epithet for Zeus.

Patmos*

*It's before you know him that death alters us;
from living with his fingermarks upon us
half-savages with disheveled hair we bend
gesticulating over incomprehensible harps.¹ But
the world goes away. . . .
Ai ai the beautiful does not happen twice
nor love.*

*A pity a pity O world
the future dead dominate you;
and no one no one happened
to hear either
the voice of angels or of many waters
nor that "come"² I dreamt in long sleepless nights*

*There there I'd go to a pebbly island
that the sun treads slantwise like a crab
and the sea all trembling listens and replies.*

*Well armed with sixteen pieces of luggage with sleeping bags with maps
plastic bags zoom and telephoto lenses
crates with bottles of mineral water
I started out—a second time—but nothing.*

*Already nine o'clock at the Mykonos dock
wiped out among all the ouzos and English
habituée of a light sky where everything
weighs twice its weight
while the umbilical cord stretches from the stars
to be cut and you vanish. . . .*

* Patmos is the Aegean island where St. John the Divine wrote The Revelation of John, of which Elytis has published a modern Greek translation.

1. "harps": Rev. 14:2, "And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder: and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps."

2. "come": In Rev. 6, as the first four seals of the sealed book are broken, the four beasts about God's throne shout "come!" In Rev. 22:17, the Spirit and the bride say "come!"

The Revelation^{*}

Narrow the road—the wide I never knew
maybe just that once
when I heard the sea while kissing you. . . .

And it's from then I say—it's the same sea
that reaching into my sleep ate away the hard stone
and opened up vast spaces. Words I learned
like green passages of fish
striped with blue chalk
ravings I unlearned on waking
and felt and interpreted again while swimming
being John of loves
face down
on the bedcovers of a provincial hotel
with the naked bulb dangling on the wire
and a black cockroach paused over the washbasin
what's the use of being a man
what could the animal kingdom's degree
of luxury mean
unless thou hast ears to hear¹
fear not what thou art destined to suffer.²

I feared not
I bore it though not at all humbly
I saw death three times
I was driven from all doors.

If thou hast ears to hear. I heard
humming as in a deep seashell
and I suddenly saw turning in the light
four swart-faced boys

^{*} The poem contains many references, quotations, and paraphrases from The Revelation of St. John.

1. "unless thou hast ears to hear": Rev. 2:11 and 3:13.

2. "fear . . . suffer": says God in Rev. 2:10.

Maria Nephele says:

*I slept only as one can sleep
on a bed warmed by others' backs
as if walking on a deserted beach
where the moon hemorrhaged and you heard nothing but
the wind's footfalls on rotten wood.
Knee-deep in the water I started to glow
from a strange yearning in me
I spread my legs
very slowly my innards mauve cyan orange
started to fall out;
stooping I carefully washed them one by one
with affection mainly at points where I saw
the bites of the Invisible had left scars.*

*Until I gathered them all in my apron
without stopping I advanced
music blew and pushed against me
bits of sea here—bits of sea beyond.
My god where does one go when one has no fate
where does one go when one has no star
empty the sky empty the body
and only a round full grief
within the half-moon's stirring her spines
one more female sea urchin
that you can never get.*

*At this point I awoke in a strange house;
my hand groping in the dark
for the nail scissors found the point.
A laceration in the skin
the point a laceration in the world.
On this side loss—on that side salvation.
On this side mercurochrome and tensoplast
on that side the wild beast ravaging the wastelands¹
howling biting
dragging the sun through the smoke.*

WHEN YOU HEAR WIND IT IS SERENITY BECOME A VAMPIRE.

1. "the wild beast ravaging the wastelands": see Rev. 9:3–11.

who blew and pushed pushed and brought
a thin piece of earth bounded by a stone wall
seven olive trees¹ in all
and among them an old man who seemed a shepherd
barefoot on the rock.

"It's I" he said to me "do not fear
what you are destined to suffer."²
And stretching open his right hand
he showed me seven deep grooves in his palm
"These are the great sorrows
and they shall be written upon your face
but I shall efface them with this same hand
that brought them."

And suddenly behind his hand I saw—appeared
a rabble of many persons struck dumb by fear
shouting and running running and screaming
"Look here comes Abaddon look here comes Apollyon."³
I felt a great turbulence and fury
overcame me. But he went on:
"He who is unjust let him be unjust still. And the filthy
let be filthier. And the just
more just."⁴ And because I sighed
he slowly spread his hand with infinite serenity
over my face
and it was sweet as honey but my bowels went bitter.⁵

1. "seven olive trees": There are many mystical sevens in The Revelation, as throughout Elytis.
2. "It's I . . . suffer": Rev. 2:10: "Fear none of those things thou shalt suffer. . . . be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."
3. "Abaddon . . . Apollyon": Rev. 9:11: "the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in the Hebrew tongue is Abaddon, but in the Greek tongue hath his name Apollyon."
4. "he who is unjust . . . more just": Rev. 22:11: "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still; and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still; and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still."
5. "sweet as honey . . . bitter": Rev. 10:10: "And I took the little book out of the angel's hand, and ate it up; and it was in my mouth sweet as honey; and as soon as I had eaten it, my belly was bitter."

And the Antiphonist:

"Again thou must prophesy over many peoples and nations
and tongues and kings"¹
he said; giving off white flames he merged with the sun.

Such was my first dream which I still cannot
separate from the voices of the sea
and I cannot keep it clear.
The dream cannot be put in words.
My lie is so true
that my lips still burn.

IF YOU DON'T BRACE ONE FOOT FAST OUTSIDE THE
EARTH YOU'LL NEVER BE ABLE TO STAND ON HER.

1. "Again thou must . . . kings": Rev. 10:11.

Disquisition on Beauty

Be afraid

*if you want the instinct of Beauty to waken in you;
or if not since we're living in the age of photography
immobilize it: that which next to us
continually with improbable gestures acts:
the Inconceivable!*

- a) a woman's two beautiful hands (or a man's) to have been familiar
with wild doves*
- b) a wire whose every memory is of an electric current and unsuspicious
birds*
- c) a cry that could be considered eternally timely*
- d) the illogical phenomenon of the open sea.*

You'll surely have understood what I mean.

*We are the negative of dream
that's why we seem black and white
and we live the deterioration
on a slightest reality. But
Das Reine Ladies and Gentlemen
kann sich nur darstellen im Unreinen
und versuchst du das Edle zu geben
ohne Gemeines
so wird es als das Allerunnatürlichste¹
says He who made it to
the Upper Paths.*

He must have known something.

MY GOD WHAT BLUE YOU SPEND FOR US NOT TO SEE YOU!

1. "Das Reine . . . Allerunnatürlichste": Hölderlin, letter 167, to Christian Ludwig Neuffer, 1798: "The pure / can reveal itself only in the impure / and you try to express the noble / without any ordinariness / and thus it becomes the most unnatural of all things."

The Waterdrop

My lips burn and sadness gleams
a clear waterdrop above the chasms
dark and full of weeds; only the soul
lit like an old church
shows we'll die in spring. . . .

Ding-dong the chamomile: I got tired of hoping
ding-dong the purple mallow: I got bored with worrying
ding-dong: always such
was man
and I didn't even know it!

Those footfalls on dry leaves
the ox of Time lowing

**Pelasgian masonry along my whole life's length
I walk along it
until the black sea appears
and upon it my three stars light up like fireworks!**

Everything a drop of beauty
trembling on the eyelashes;
a transparent sadness like Athos¹ hanging from the sky
with boundless visibility
where all things happen and unhappen
Death kneels and rises again stronger
and falls again powerless sinks into the chasms.

Alone vigorous the waterdrop above the chasms.

IN THE VILLAGE OF MY LANGUAGE SADNESS IS
CALLED RADIANT LADY.

1. "Athos": the Orthodox Holy Mountain.

Through the Mirror

*Fishing comes the sea
and in its fragrance flash the fish
don't search in vain*

*Somewhere between Tuesday and Wednesday
your true day must have been mislaid.*

*Superstantial you go on while above your head
seadeeps spread with colored pebbles like stars.*

*O music O cloudy Sunday¹
in a distant district with closed two-story houses
beneath the water's surface where I lean
as into a mirror and look at myself
for many hours how can I pass through*
to pass to

*the other face of things
with my coiled hair unwinding
in successive circles
to descend all seven heavens until*

*the reflection
of angels grabs me
until Iannis Anna Nikos with huge
wings like Theotocopoulos's²
slowly in mid-air begin chanting
until windows once more open
and florists communicate with huge anemones
placed over their ears like earphones;*

1. "cloudy Sunday": a beautiful popular song from 1944 during the occupation; it took on new poignancy during the Colonels' noxious dictatorship in the 1970s. The second stanza goes:

You are a day like the one when I lost my joy;
cloudy Sunday, you make my heart bleed.

2. "Theotocopoulos": El Greco.

Aegeis*

I don't know where; it's not in dream
not in olden times perhaps not on this earth
but even if it were

the land

where no one lives anymore continues
to exist three scales higher
than what man's black finger could contrive.

Without our knowing it
Justice there
formulated in the tongue of birds
is continually reproduced overflowing the walls
sparking from one to another consciousness
void of body like a Hertzian
wave that cannot find an antenna to receive it but still
broadcasts the divine message
that ambrosia-fragrant music

which is complete
in all combinations of sound from the hanging waters
falling until dawn and all works of art
exist there "in potential" as they say
of cobalt terracotta and ocher
of jasper and copper
works which man with unimaginable
toil could detach from the Full and Imperishable but it's
impossible.

Didn't I myself
maybe once go up
those stairs of endless summer
a lofty mountainous sea
didn't I wear the cyan cloak
for King Evenor's¹ sake

* Aegeis refers to a mythical Aegean island and is another name for Atlantis.

1. "King Evenor": king of Atlantis. Plato, *Critias*, 111c.

Maria Nephele says:

*mysterious sign-words
"Asterbadon" "Idiolathes" "Mykyon"—meaning
your will is done and the earth's voice
is verified already in the flowers. Before long
a concert that managed to turn into a garden
will appear in the same full world of antimatter
as scientists say—where feeling
is made tangible.*

*And I who was created to hunt the miracle
on an imposing hill like the Escorial
what do I discover now?
the martyrdom of St. Maurice¹
who in our days lived again in different dress
again and again thousands of times.
Eminent officials with gold epaulets
and black instruments
in fetid barred-off cellars again and again.
The writer who hides his manuscripts—where?—from whom?—
Who is he—what's this we call superior
power by God's grace or the grace of tanks*

O

*music O cloudy Sunday
in the mirror's inner world where I pace
searching for my true day
where I hold and open the sea like an old umbrella
above my head
shine seadeeps with their colored pebbles like stars.*

CHILDREN AND GRANDCHILDREN OF DENIAL
ARE ALL OF THEM BASTARDS.

1. "the martyrdom of St. Maurice": a painting by El Greco in the Escorial.

And the Antiphonist:

so to judge and be judged by others
in midnight's vertical hour. . . .

The fields furrowed straight as Mondrian's paintings
seen once and for all
still live they live within me

the church's enclosure wall with stark-naked girls
holding myrtle

and the drum the drum
"sun-water" "sun-water"
as the laws of gravity further weakened
my mind pulled the birds and all the sky's tree farm to the
heights.

These.

And now we
disembarked sailors who lost
the divine shipwreck forever
standing at night facing the turbulent sea
exorcise only what is saved in superstitions
and what from the shadeless proto-earth.

**SUPERSTITION BROUGHT TO A MATHEMATICAL
CLARITY WOULD HELP US PERCEIVE THE DEEPER
STRUCTURE OF THE WORLD.**

Maria Nephele says:

Thunderbolt Steers*

*What's got tangled in my hair
like a bat so I shake my head in terror;
sometimes like an invisible net cast from afar
it pulls me so I can't escape it;
it grabs my thought as I have heard traps grab birds
I stop thinking and it leaves me alone;
I run to the mirrors and see nothing.*

Death is elsewhere.

Thunderbolt steers.

*You people will vanish
the comb in your hand will immobilize a morning in air
and the mirror will show the subcutaneous web
of tissues where time
is trapped like an insect in despair.*

Death is elsewhere.

*Don't let me run because I'll vanish.
Grace of tears has not been given to me but I'm afraid.
I have no relatives
 from my whole life
I've tried to make a stony youth

I've filled love with crosses.*

SORROW GETS PRETTY BECAUSE WE LOOK LIKE HER.

* “Thunderbolt Steers”: Heraclitus’s fragment 64: “The thunderbolt steers the course of all things.”

Hymn to Maria Nephele

Now I'll spread my open arms
and in the currents I'll create there
without approaching you'll appear
Iris¹ Maria Nephele
green in big clothes stores
violet in underground cafés
red in funerals of the poor
and blue in infants' sleep

Iris Maria Nephele
flying with your nightgown
in the wind and asleep
as in a Leonor Fini² painting
chrysalis of my sleep

*Tra un fiore colto e l'altro donato
l'inesprimibile nulla.*³

You're lovely as a natural phenomenon
in what leads in you to the eel and the wildcat;
you are rainfall in apartment houses;
current's god-sent interruption;
astrology will watch your bed
and base its predictions on your despair;

1. "Iris": the Olympian rainbow messenger goddess. Xenophanes fragment 13: "She whom men call Iris is also cloud by nature, violet and red and pale green to behold." A similar image appears in Rev. 10:1: "And I saw another mighty angel come down from heaven, clothed with a cloud; and rainbow upon his head, and his face as it were the sun, and his feet as pillars of fire."

2. "Leonor Fini": Parisian artist (b. 1908).

3. "Tra un fiore . . . nulla": "Between a cut flower and the other given flower / the inexpressible nothing." From "Eterno," a poem by Giuseppe Ungaretti, (1888–1970), whom Elytis knew and admired.

And the Antiphonist:

you are lovely as despair
as paintings the bourgeoisie detests
and tomorrow buys for billions
Iris Maria Nephele
with your backside's charm when
it suddenly sits on a razor.

THE TERRORIST IS A BOOR OF MIRACLES.

The Trojan War

*If only we lived on the reverse side
would we see things straight on? Bah. Reversal
has a stubborn permanence;
it constitutes let's say the rule.
Which means that if we manage to live
surely we live by exceptions.
We pretend nothing happens
exactly so that in the end something will happen
outside and above derision.
When all wretchednesses
winter in a cherry
it glows despite them
pure omnipotent blameless showing
what man's excellence could have been.*

*The drop of blood each April
free and for all.*

*Unfortunate scouts and reversed
drivers of the sky's heavy tanks
even the clouds are laid with mines
watch out: spring depends on us.
let's give the soil back to our feet
green to green Neanderthal
to Neanderthal. Muscles are useless now
what's needed is beast-love
what's needed is a tigress's leap into ideas.
So long as there are Achaeans there'll be Helen of Troy
even if the hand is not where the neck is*

Each time with its Trojan War.

FAR OFF IN THE FARTHEST DEPTHS OF THE LAMB

THE WAR GOES ON.

Helen

Maria Nephele undoubtedly
is a sharp girl
a true threat to the future;
sometimes she gleams like a knife
and a drop of blood on her
has the same significance as once had
the Lambda¹ of the *Iliad*.

Maria Nephele goes forward
redeemed from the revolting meaning of the eternal cycle.

By her mere existence
she finishes off half mankind.

Maria Nephele lives at the antipodes of Ethics
she is all ethos.

When she says "I'll sleep with him"
she means she'll once more kill History.
One must see then what enthusiasm comes over the birds.

Anyway in her own way
she perpetrates the olive tree's nature.
Depending on the moment she becomes
now silver now dark cyan.

Thus the adversaries keep on
campaigning—look:
these with their social theories
those simply brandishing a flower

Each time with its Helen.

FROM YOUR THOUGHT

THE SUN THICKENS WITHIN THE POMEGRANATE
AND REJOICES.

1. "Lambda": Book 11 of the *Iliad*, wherein Strife afflicts the Greeks, many heroes are wounded, and Patroclus is tragically inspired to fight in Achilles' armor.

The Song of Maria Nephele

"Pity about the girl," they sigh
heads shaking disapprovingly
Looks like it's for me they cry
and won't let me be!

Up amid the clouds I walk
like the lovely lightning-vein
and what I give and what I take
changes into rain.

Watch it kids look here I say
from either of two sides I cut
when I wake moody is the day
I curse the Virgin out

and when I tumble on the lawn
of anyone when it is night
it's as if I joust till dawn
droom droom droom I fight.

I tread on sorrow with both feet
and I don't know a thing of bliss
Like the angel my wings beat
above the precipice.

B

Pax San Tropezana

What a buffalo earth has become of late!
She plods on all fours and snorts with joy
get on!
Glory to the establishment fathers
peace reigns
small and large animals ships traverse there. . . .

Painted tits two-tone pants
oversize straw hats of all sorts
coats of arms of rich princes who'll become masochists
so-called writers
actors for twenty-four hours
they piss in the sea and emit small cries
in Europeanese
oo-oo oo-oo!

High in the sky black voids
gape and the osmosis
of souls lets thick smoke spill out.
Sometimes a Saint's gaze is descried
wild as ever
"it doesn't mean anything the meaning is elsewhere"¹
colored groping crowds with half-closed eyes
go crawling by
get on!
Pax
Pax San Tropezana
peace reigns.
In Europeanese everything gets said
happens unhappens
on easy terms in installments.
Time of spare parts:
blow a tire—change a tire

1. "it doesn't mean . . . elsewhere": a line from Elytis's "Clepsydras of the Unknown" 1, in *Ori-entations*.

The Planet Earth

*Ah this is no planet
all chickens and sheep
and other stooped stupid beings.
Neglected planet at the Universe's outer edge
with its bitty oceans
with its little Himalayas
with its four billion apterobipeds
forever fighting over altars and hearths¹
over oil wells and other productive regions.
This is no planet
clogged with poisonous gases
exposed to meteor showers
to philosophers' thoughts
to long struggles for freedom
(always our own—never others' freedom).
A chess game for crows trained
always to win from either side
"black birds" that say "black tidings."*

*No no this is no planet
it's just a plain mistake that leads far back
to Zeus to Christ to Buddha to Mohammed
who finally have grown
feeble so that we all
stay in a yielding posture
simply from acquired speed.
The countdown to total extinction.*

*The only thing to remain untouched
is revenge.
Iron and stone have their way
they'll overwhelm us
and we'll be in a new stone age
terrified by enraged brontosauri;*

1. "altars and hearths": in Greek a set phrase whose meaning is a similar to "hearth and home."

The Antiphonist says:

lose Jimmy—find Bob
C'est très pratique as Annette would say
the beautiful waitress of the Tahiti.
Nineteen lovers signed her breasts
with their places of origin
a small tender geography.

But I think at bottom she was gay.

EAT PROGRESS BOTH ITS RINDS AND PITS.

And Maria Nephele:

*maybe then we'll be nostalgic for
the precision and perfection
of a Patek Phillipe watch.*

*Hey you Gentlemen of Technocracy
a little more to the right please:
reserve me a seat in Alpha Centauri
and then we'll see what happens.*

UNFORTUNATELY EVEN THE EARTH TURNS AT OUR EXPENSE.

The Dagger

The blasphemers fell asleep and look: our moon
found courage to step outside. Once more the mountain spoke
sacred incomprehensible attractions
from leaf to leaf
the water's fawn and the caper bud.
High unmoving horses
sleeping at the side
and way down half the valley in white.
Courage. Now. It is the moment
my God to emerge from the obscure.
In smooth-tiled baths lovely women
reclining amid the water vapors
set the divergent course: the planet leaves.
The shell will show full of black
holes and lightning flashes and slowly
man will turn inward
until he wholly vanishes.
Courage. Now.
At least I'd rescue sensual pleasure my God.
Give me the dagger.

IT IS IMPOLITE TO KISS THE HAND OF DEATH.

Each Moon Confesses

*Each moon confesses and then hides in the trees where you can't see it
glow;
you've so mixed up the seasons that from where you'll get the messages
now you don't even know.*

*You're one of those to whom they gave a big piece of paper to write on but
who wouldn't even lift his pen;
one to whom luck came like a dimple on the cheek and who wouldn't
even consent to smile then.*

*You're the man on whom they threw the net in his bath but who's still
reigning in his kingdom there;¹
who shoves love out the window and later weeping says the laws have not
been fair.*

*Each moon confesses and you pretend that you don't understand.
You know you wear the sun—and that before the moon sets you ascend.*

GIVE YOUR TIME FOR FREE

IF YOU WANT SOME DIGNITY LEFT.

1. "You're the man . . . kingdom there": allusion to the death of Agamemnon.

Ancestral Paradise

I don't know a thing of ancestral sins
or other such Occidental inventions.
But truly far away
in the first days' dew
before our mother's hut was there
how beautiful it was!

The angels' white garments as if I could remember
were closed in front but left unbuttoned
like the aprons of girls who work in beauty parlors
miracle—and you could see all
the geraniums, on a long whitewashed
stone bench turned to the wind, ceaselessly
grinding the sun's black kernel.

Days so fresh in umber and sienna
that the island seemed a boundless Lasithi¹
lightweight and barely set down
on a dazzling shattered sea.

One foot on the other
on a beach ridged by wind
filled with golden sparks from spurs
I remember I could see
sirocco-girls with dewy buttocks galloping
unwinding hair of clover;
and my heart echoed back putt-putt
from the naked mountains like a motorboat.

It was the time of the Glittering Leaf
when Sathes and Merione² reigned.

1. "Lasithi": fertile plain in east Crete.

2. "Sathes and Merione": Rare ancient Greek words; the former means "penis" and is used in Archilochus's fragment 97 and *Lysistrata* 1119; the latter means "pudenda" and comes from Rufinus (*Greek Anthology* I, fr. 35), all erotic contexts.

Paper Kite

*And yet I was created to be a paper kite.
I liked heights even when
I lay prone on my pillow
punished
for hours and hours.
I felt my room rise
I wasn't dreaming—it was rising
I was scared and liked it.
what I saw was—how to put it—
something like the “memory of the future”
all trees leaving and mountains changing appearance
geometric fields with curly thickets
like pudenda—I was scared and liked
just to touch the belfries
to caress the bells like testicles and to disappear. . . .*

*Men with light umbrellas passed obliquely
and smiled at me;
sometimes they tapped my window: “miss”
I was scared and liked it.
They were the “upper men” as I called them
they weren't like the “lower”;
they had long beards and many held gardenias in their hands;
some half-opened the balcony door
and played me strange records on the record player.
There were I remember “Annetta with Sandals”
“The Spitsbergen Geyser”
the “We didn't bite the fruit May is not coming”
(yes I remember other things too)
I repeat—I was not dreaming
for instance the “half-open your dress I have a bird for you.”
The bicycle Knight brought me it
one day as I sat pretending to read
he leaned his bicycle very carefully
next to my bed
then he pulled the string and I billowed into the air
my colored underclothes gleamed*

At night I possessed a meaning—I gave it to all the
 nightingales
and sweet sleep was filled with half-moons
rills in C major for viola d'amore.

There were daisies you could eat
and others that ignited in the dark like fireworks;
broom shrubs moaned and made love;
stars passed under your feet
like schools of fish and the dark blue
strait advanced into your entrails—
how beautiful it was!

Angels teased me; often
gathered about me they would ask:
“what is pain?” and “what is illness?” but I knew not at all.
I neither knew nor had ever heard of
the Tree whence Death came into the world.¹
Well? Was death the truth? Not this one—the other
that shall come with the newborn's first bawling? Was
 injustice
the truth? The nations' mania? Toil night and day?

In a bed of herbs I suckled verbena
and all the Archangels Michael Gabriel
Uriel Raphael
Gabudelon Aker Arphugitonos
Beluchos Zabuleon² laughed and their golden heads
stirred like ears of corn;
knowing that the only death the only one
is made in the mind of men

And their great lie the Tree did not exist.

ONE “MAKES” THE TRUTH EXACTLY AS ONE MAKES
THE LIE.

1. “the Tree . . . world”: as in Genesis 3.

2. “Michael . . . Zabuleon”: in the *Revelation of Esdras*, governing angels at the world's end.

And Maria Nephele:

*I knew how transparent those who love become
tropical fruit and kerchiefs of a far continent;
I was scared and liked it
my room or I
would rise—I never understood it.
I am of porcelain and magnolia
my hand is descended from the ancient Incas
I slip through doors like
an infinitesimal earthquake
felt only by dogs and infants;
deontologically I must be a monster
and yet opposition
has always nourished me and this depends
on those with pointed hats
who secretly converse with my mother
at night so to judge. Sometimes
the bugle's voice from distant barracks
unraveled me like a streamer and everyone around me
applauded—fragments of incredible times
in mid-air.
Open faucets in the bath next door
prone on my pillow
I watched fountains sprinkle me with immaculate white;
how beautiful my God how beautiful
trampled on the ground
still keeping in my eyes
so distant a mourning for the past.*

IMAGINATION IS WORN BOTH INSIDE OUT

AND IN ALL SIZES.

Eau de Verveine

I said: I am clean
washed with essence of vervain
90 degrees pure—a Hellene
from birth among savages.

“Without sighs and fear”¹

I’ll detach my white spot
and direct it
with a soul’s speed
toward the invisible corymb.

THE INFINITE EXISTS FOR US

AS THE TONGUE FOR A DEAF-MUTE.

1. “Without sighs and fear”: according to Athan Anagnostopoulos, a quotation from the *Philokalia*, a mystical Orthodox codex.

Disquisition on Purity

*And I add: your shadow
is an evil counselor;
walk always
beneath the sun at zenith.*

*"Without limits without terms"*¹

*Because Ladies and Gentlemen
what the swallows impute to us
—the spring we did not bring—
is exactly our purity.*

LIVE PRIVATELY AMID THE UNBLUSHING.

1. "Without limits without terms": quoted from Andreas Embeirikos's poem "The Arrows"; Embeirikos (1901–75), a surrealist, was a good friend of Elytis, who wrote a book, *Report to Embeirikos*, about him.

Upper Tarquinia*

We who live suspended
amid the dust of centuries
in a long and boring Palazzo Pitti¹
we faultless in perspective and proportion
our collar gleaming white
beauty mark on the cheek
eat and sleep and go about
in a faultless chiaroscuro
almost under the earth;
time for us to knock the walls down
I mean we should open the passage
to the roof that will let us rise
through the same earth for a moment
to the coolness of the tombs!

O Tarquinia the dead who rejoice²
in the sun of horses and the air of flutes
will teach us unbroken continuity

there! at the third height! with spring's reins
in their hands Troilus and Achilles³
face to face—and between them
a myriad laurel berries
dappled words of the Gods all green.

So once from a virgin birth
long before Mary the colorful winds
burst out and the new chicks nestlings
of all kinds softly arrived
to sit unafraid
among huge bluebells. It's they who now

* Upper Tarquinia is an Etruscan city. Tarquinia's frescoes are contrasted with Renaissance frescoes, to the latter's disadvantage.

1. "Palazzo Pitti": a huge Renaissance palace in Florence, now a museum. Elytis mistrusts Renaissance perspective and chiaroscuro; in the "Chronicle" the Renaissance is "the enemy."

2. "the dead who rejoice": as in Etruscan tomb frescoes.

3. "Troilus and Achilles": The Trojan and Greek heroes who fought each other in the *Iliad*; Achilles won.

Eye of the Locust*

Ah

*how could I not be scared of insects!
When there are bugs that look like us
big guys up to here
who chew and eat with open closets
whose enormous soles
wouldn't take much to squash you*

Two or three yards beneath the ground

*is my alibi. I shall not betray it.
I'll never agree to speak about
the vast rooms with boards that creaked
whenever St. Symeon¹ walked on them
in a rage and left in the washbasin
his three black stones: one for the outer world
one for the inner; the third for the invisible other one*

Think

*really I'm not much different from Sophie von Kuhn,²
I too like rock formations*

plaid capes flowers

*even tuberculosis if there still were
a way to die and be buried like a prince
armies of the night with fixed bayonets
because I still weep secretly
I still get involved with dreams
of the sky's dark times*

* Insects have compound eyes. This poetic locust eye sees seven separate visions.

The binding lines set flush right, together read, "Ah, two or three yards above the ground, think, in a pit of time, even there the sky gushes forth, and I would know nothing!"

1. "St. Symeon": either the Stylite, a Syrian monk (ca. 390–459) who stood day and night on a column, or the New Theologian (949–1022), the Byzantine Christian mystic, abbot, and writer.

2. "Sophie von Kuhn": the beloved fiancée of the German romantic poet Novalis (1771–1801); when she died, aged 14, he deified her in his poetry. See "Elegy of Grüningen" in *The Elegies of Jutting Rock*.

sway near the trees
with huge pink bows in the branches
while the Flutist
passes by his brick body naked
one foot forward—and veils
souls newborn butterflies open.

But here is what I mean by all these
which we the living fools between dangers
not even interesting forget:
the house is not always smaller than the mountain
man is not always bigger than a flower
all distances the eyes give
are misleading and we boast
wrongly I think when we say
“the world is this.”

The world is this
the smoke that pursues the dog
the plant that gets up and runs with the music
the children who paint on walls
and open their umbrellas like ancient Aeolians
so to carry up in assumption the most virgin part
of things. The synthesis
of all these.

A life full to perfection.

Piero della Francesca¹ ultimate angel
of this earth—hold on!

It is in piety we shall go naked.

The tomorrow of our life will again be life
transferred to Upper Tarquinia.
Come on. Give the sign. We shall never become soldiers.

WE MUST CREATE ANTIBODIES EVEN FOR RESPONSIBILITY.

1. “Piero della Francesca”: The quattrocento master was as adept at angelic beauty as at perspective.

And Maria Nephele:

*so much so that if at that moment you try to embrace me
you'll get smeared with stars*

In a pit of time

*where you walk unsuspecting
suddenly you feel the houses break around you
and an odor of grandpa and uncle
of sulphur and phosphorous spills over
and seizes you by the throat and keeps you earthbound*

Even there the sky gushes forth

*Something like a very distant dawn
a sea rolling white
but always inverted as though through dioptric lenses
I would run microscopic
all along the factories' black walls
where a blast furnace burns and the statue
of Giorgio de Chirico¹ shifts imperceptibly*

And I would know

nothing.

We are all a gust of wind and nature never even stirs

Nothing!

*So I've made up my mind:
to isolate some leap
at random and make it three times bigger
chiefly from stubbornness or if not then from a
disposition to see what happens when
you go against money against wind
against security against agony;
always between Lady and Kore²
always between Prosperity and Death.*

DARKNESS BY ITS NATURE

MUST ALSO BE A RECEIVER OF STOLEN GOODS.

1. "Giorgio de Chirico": an Italian surrealist painter, born in Greece in 1888; Elytis is probably taking his imagery here from "The Song of Love," in New York's Museum of Modern Art.

2. "Lady and Kore": Demeter and Persephone.

Hymn in Two Dimensions

Now I love you in two dimensions

like an Etruscan figure
like a sign by Klee that was a fish¹
you advance dodecaphonic
annoying
quick as lightning
lovely
with a Caribbean wave in the pleats of your skirt
with heavy blue beads from Pandrosos Street²
around your neck.

Face an aqueous idol
come like light
from a star that vanished
aeons ago.

Then I hear waters and I understand you.
Even if you have no idea
(the Signalmen never has knowledge of the mission)
and I observe behind the paleness of make-up
the boundless road I followed
to speak to you thus

*Voie lactée ô soeur lumineuse*³

My God—the only fate I did not want
Is the one I've shouldered right up front.

IN BAD APPORTIONMENT GOD ALONE LOSES OUT.

1. "a sign by Klee . . . fish": See Paul Klee's 1926 painting, "Around the Fish," in New York's Museum of Modern Art.
2. "Pandrosos Street": a street in Athens noted for its cheap jewelry shops.
3. "*Voie lactée ô soeur lumineuse*": "Milky Way O sister luminous," a line from Apollinaire's poem "La Chanson du Mal Aime," in *Alcools*.

Declaration of Responsibility

*Pay close attention to the fragmentation of my daily life
and its apparent incoherence.
Where it is heading
and with what ultimate goals
does it try to develop itself
and acquire a deeper meaning.
It seeks to discourage the research of scientists
for the benefit of I believe the authenticity of the human
vision.*

On this
en las purpureas horas¹
I admit no retreat.

*It is impossible to see myself
other than
as an antinarrative synthesis
with no historical consciousness
with no psychological profundity
which would make my daily life
tedious as a novel
stillborn as a movie
negative as a funny anecdote
indifferent as a Renaissance painting
harmful as political action and generally
servile and subject to the natural order of the world
and to—as they're commonly called—philanthropic feelings.*

LEGISLATION COMPLETELY USELESS TO THE AUTHORITIES
WOULD BE TRUE SALVATION.

1. "en las purpureas horas": "in the purple hours," from the luscious poem "Fabula de Polifemo y Galatea" by Gongora (1561–1627).

The Holy Inquisition

Don't worry since what pain subtracts from you
it adds to you O man
O Soul-Preserved
you boaster

Fight all you want
Perfection has no heels

And we need to go forward
filling all the Voids
and even to self-destruct drawing strength from things past.
A time shall come when we upright and brave in beauty
shall warble.
Sooner or later
the birds will tame us.

"Let's go boys. . . ."¹

True bravery
must be baptized in the sea
and bring back something of summer winds
to the eighth floor of apartment houses
it must leave the battlefields
and develop in love and books
and emerge with another more beautiful name
and there it must wait
to be attacked and blasphemed
and bound hands behind its back and put on trial.

Each time with its Holy Inquisition.

THE "VOID" EXISTS SO LONG AS YOU DON'T FALL INTO IT.

1. "Let's go boys": From Aeschylus, *Persians* l. 402.

St. Francis of Assisi

*A pity the Linguaphone of pleasure has not yet been found!
Now that "nature" lessens and winds get rarer
and men rot in woods wholly imaginary
it would be supreme wisdom if the Saints were reconciled
with their bodies
so they could hear again angels' speech fall
like a fine spring shower
when knowledge of every kind flames up. . . .*

*Don't say: a justice shall be found for us too.
From politics and science expect
nothing. The brand-new world is also the oldest
world in reverse.*

Don't labor in vain.

*With my beauty I
shall abolish the idea of books;*

*I'll invent new flowers
and pluck them from my guts
and I'll crown the public rose
king in the nook of my thighs.*

*From this rose will blow the wind
of true purity
in which few men will survive
but all the birds will
pecking at the nipples of my breasts.*

Each time with its St. Francis of Assisi.

TRY TO GUIDE TECHNICAL PERFECTION

TO ITS NATURAL STATE.

The Song of the Poet

November second the first time on an
Aegean island's soil at crack of dawn

I went outside to see the world but I
repented when I felt it all awry.

Nine months exactly before my first day
for my father's seed I labored away

and kept on so for five-hundred-and-three
against all falsehood and all poverty.

Our passage here on earth's so difficult
and brings no satisfactory result.

Within myself so deeply I would hide
that even I didn't know how deep inside.

But brought one day by circumstance's insistence
I fell in love and put up no resistance

Yet even in the least attempt I made
I messed it up again, friends, I'm afraid

First because I chased the Intangible
second because my kind's Original.

And cursing thereupon my fortune's lack
I turned around and to myself came back.

C

Maria Nephele says:

Bonjour Tristesse*

*Hello heartache
Bonjour tristesse
insect nesting in me
lurking all night till I open an eye. . . .*

*At first I forgot you;
I look at lines on the ceiling—
suddenly you step and enter
consciousness.*

*You come to make my morning coffee bitter
to take something from the tiny joy
of my hand at the window latch
you bring confusion to the bath water
you provoke the first unpleasant telephone call
you are a monster
a microscopic Minotaur hunting food
sustained by the least thing. . . .*

*Minotaur you eat and eat
these are flesh not air
the way you're going nothing will be left.
Hello heartache
Bonjour tristesse
you've permanently set yourself up in us
you're worse than viruses and bacilli
philosophers examine you in a spectroscope
you're the reason for an excellent literature
we read it and "find ourselves"
we suck our black candies
Let's bug off
creeps of a fifth- or sixth-floor happiness.*

WHEN MISFORTUNE PROFITS CONSIDER HER A WHORE.

* *Bonjour Tristesse* is the title of a novel by Françoise Sagan, the heroine of which shares the modern anxiety of Maria Nephele.

The Poets

*My darling Poets oh what shall I do with you
who call your souls invincible but it's not true*

*Year after year you wait for what I would not wait for
standing in line like unclaimed objects all unsought for. . . .*

*They yell for you—but you don't answer back in turn
the outside world is racked and universes burn*

*No matter what you keep on claiming—I'd like to know
what's up with you—all your rights to the void below!*

*It seems such unconcern—when what's adored is gain—
that you exude the sense that ownership is vain*

*Holding the black-draped and unlucky Globe you go
the Globe wrapped in Palm Sunday's fronds exactly so*

*In man's sulfuric acid stench you are condign
and voluntary guinea pigs of the Divine.*

MAN IS ATTRACTED BY GOD AS SHARKS BY BLOOD.

That Which Persuades

**Please pay attention to my lips: the world depends on
them.**

**On the correlations that they dare and the unacceptable
similes, the way that on an evening wafting sweet
when we throw the woodcutter of the Moon to the
ground**

he bribes us with a little jasmine and we consent. . . .

**That which persuades I maintain is like a chemical
substance that changes things.**

**Even if a girl's cheeks be lovely
sometimes we all with ravaged faces shall return from
Truthlands.**

**Friends I don't know how to explain it
but we must take the place of the old Robbers.
To send our hand so it may go
where a woman waits like an Apple Tree half in the clouds
completely ignoring the distance separating us.**

**And something else: when the rain moves in
let's undress and shine like clover. . . .**

A WRONG SEA CANNOT BE.

The Twenty-four-hour Life

*I got old about eighteen
you could say in just twenty-four hours:
at eight o'clock I went to school I learned I played
by ten past ten I was finished abroad
(horseback riding English and such)
then first marriage travel
by afternoon I was already bored;*

*five to six a few dishonesties
seven I remarried
five after seven I cheated
by eight I was already tired
cards receptions and so forth. . . .*

*After dinner I looked in the mirror
in my third rich husband's
other big house;
I saw running light and in it dolphins
the poet's voice
seemed an echo of another world
Finland*

Groenland¹

Erosland

*I felt as if there were no more time.
At midnight when even the hour calls for it
I committed the necessary crime.
Now the cigarettes and fire of night
remain to me alongside the dead.*

WHEN LIFE FIGHTS

THE DEAD IN HADES GO OVER TO THE MEDES.²

1. "Finland Groenland": from Mayakovsky's poem "About This."

2. "Go over to the Medes": like disloyal Greeks during the Persian Wars (490–79 B.C.).

The Lifelong Moment

Grab the lightning on your way
O man; make it last; you can!
From smell of grass from heat of sun
on whitewash from the endless kiss
extract an aeon;
with a dome for beauty
and the resonance
that angels bring you in a basket
dew of your labors all fruits round
and red;
your anguish
full of plectra that strike metallic in the wind
or vertical pipes you blow through like an organ
and you see all your trees come together
bay and poplar big and small
Marias no one touched but you;

all a single moment all your lone
lightning forever.
The sand you played with the way Fortune played with your life
when your powerless enemy time exchanged
marriage wreaths with the eternal unknown
if you've succeeded
once and for all in staring straight at the light
this is the one moment
vigorous over the abyss
the waterdrop itself
this is Arete¹
with the birds of Skiron and the sails of Argestes.²

YEARS OF LIGHT IN THE SKIES

YEARS OF ARETE IN THE WHITEWASH

1. "Arete": this ancient word means virtue, honor, self-respect, valor, excellence. See "Sleep of the Brave (Variation)" in *Six and One Remorses for the Sky*, where Arete is a kore.
2. "Skiron . . . Argestes": Ancient names for Northwest wind and Southwest wind.

Maria Nephele says:

Disquisition on Justice

*Slowly in the whitewash Holy Tuesday is digested.
Not a wrinkle. Not even a tear.¹
Only the sunwheel is heard like the Monasteries' "save us"
devouring decay
just as the women raise this sound
of the void from the well
we hear it a little before calamity strikes us.*

A hollow like the hand's in which rights fit.

*I loosen my hair before a wall
and on my side I lament a shadow of my shadow.*

*I sing and chant the Unwritten of Humanity
I sky's escapee who saw and saw.*

*I'm sorry my disquisition's manner
is not what suits our day*

Ladies and Gentlemen.

*Nothing suits our day
and I also happen to be sad
as when*

*you feel deep in your body something
which till then you'd just misapplied.*

*Let's cut the jokes:
even when a snake is blameless—you'd wipe it out.*

Such is our justice!

THE VERY EDGE ALSO HAS ITS MIDDLE.

1. "Holy Tuesday": At the Orthodox service on Holy Tuesday evening Cassia's hymn on Mary Magdalene is sung.

Nude Study

If you're of the Atridae¹ go
howl somewhere else. Such fire does not ignite the sun
here where consciousness rose up and took on Kore's real body
with gleams from the boundless plain—

Look: how memory binds back the hair
and lets the eyelashes lower
quivering with so much truth;
how
the skin tautens at shoulder and loin;
something dazzling where no one can ever
be brave or strong.
Can just exist.

Like blood. Like grapes. Man's long road
from gloom to eternal light
touching with finger after finger until the whole
bay is explored and the enigma
that lovely thighs hold tight opens;

the fabulous shore from high armpit to sole.

Because it cannot be. The sailing around
a smooth young naked body
ends where another begins. Like a virgin's
undiscovered rose reborn
to efface murder and to hush the victims'
cries; from the start of History up till today
a smooth young naked body: justice.

A ROSE'S MAGELLAN HAS NOT YET BEEN BORN.

1. "Atridae": Atreus's sons, Agamemnon and Menelaus.

Electra Bar*

*Two or three steps below earth's
surface—and all problems solved at once!
You hold the small world in a large crystal glass;
through ice cubes you see your colored fingernails
faces vaguely smiling;
you see your Luck (but always with her back turned)
a Megaera¹ who wronged you and whom you never avenged. . . .*

*Ah how right was Erika
stewardess on Olympic Airways
she passes high over capital cities;
I must pass below them
below sea monsters—below fat satiated bodies
if I can ever be worthy (which I doubt) of
that vein in which Agamemnon's blood still flows
without more help or some unknown brother—*

Give me another gin fizz.

*It's so lovely when the mind muddies—there Heroes kill
in make-believe as in the movies
you enjoy the blood; when the real thing
gurgles down the stairs
you touch it with a finger and the curse awakens in you
the Queen with spiders
her eyes unbeaten and all dark
I shorn and ugly graze swine
for aeons now outside the walls
I await the message—the first cock in Hades²*

* Maria identifies with the miserable Electra of Euripides' play. Electra's mother Clytemnaestra ("the Queen with spiders") murdered Electra's father Agamemnon; Electra, furious for vengeance and kept in a low state by her mother, awaits her "unknown brother" Orestes.

1. "Megaera": One of the three Furies, a shrew prone to jealousy.

2. "the first cock in Hades": Cocks, whose crowing at dawn signals the sun, were sacrificed to Apollo.

Parthenogenesis

Broom shrubs

broom and maples

mushrooms and snails

untried little raingirls where have you caught me?

Over there? In the third heights?¹ From pollen of invisible
gardens?

So then it is I. I confirm it. I.

Yes for this I was born and for this announced by light
that gave you this power of lightning.

Why didn't I die long ago why didn't

I see the way fish leap from the

sea her who was truly

the earth.

Her I want to see and to dwell in her

sea-purple and wondrous comeliness aureate

white and whiter than gypsum and snow. . . .²

Raise me to the little wheels revolving

amid the aethers and leave me

in the tempests of citrus so that from one

body to another my weight be changed to a blinding

gleam around innocent creatures

that only I wanted and no one else.

1. "third heights": in the Interview (p. 632), Elytis calls these "a third state of the spirit where opposites cease to exist."

2. "fish leap from the sea . . . gypsum and snow": See Plato's *Phaedo* 109–10:

If someone could reach to the summit, or put on wings and fly aloft, when he put up his head he would see the world above, just as fishes see our world when they put up their heads out of the sea; and if his nature were able to bear the sight, he would recognize that that is the true heaven and the true light and the true earth. . . . but there the whole earth is made of such colours, and others far brighter and purer still. One section is a marvelously beautiful purple, and another is golden; all that is white of it is whiter than chalk or snow. (Hugh Tredennick, trans., *The Last Days of Socrates*, Penguin, 1954, p. 173)

Maria Nephele says:

*something like a saxophone with heavenly glitter
little girls running mounted on rubber dragons.*

*Only now is it revealed how great Earth is in reality.
Zeus thunders
blackness
Zeus thunders
this is neither defeat nor victory.
We entombed must dare something else.*

WHOEVER CAN GIVE FORCE TO THE WASTELAND

HAS MANKIND INSIDE HIM STILL.

And the Antiphonist:

Broom shrubs

broom and maples

bluebells and pimpernels

convolvulus and daisies

untried little raingirls guard my place

to the right of spring from now on over there

in the third heights; in mid-air

I go—and the boys your husbands

blow with puffed cheeks—I keep going

with mountain ridges carved on my chest

sunspot on my hair

deep-sea dragnet in one hand. . . .

Alpha: unaging time

Beta: Zeus bright-thunderer

Gamma: landless I.

IF SOMETHING GETS IMPATIENT IN WILD MINT

IT IS THE HOUND OF YOUR HOLINESS.

Djenda

*90 percent of us is contained
in a misfortune of some kind.
The present is nonexistent and half
my hair already waves
somewhere else in other epochs.*

*Houses half-a-float in air
ruins of ancient cities I never knew
bits of Sardis and Persepolis
Corinth Alexandria
ancient temples with stone floors and the heavy
sandals of priests
incense
beneath bare breasts and the clank of links
the hour of dance my soul
pieces of motley patches
exactly like the wide skirts I'm wearing lately
Montgolfiers of remorse
and random phrases in the street:
"You're bringing what?—Gold.—Take heart."¹*

*I "bring" nothing
nor do they "bring" to me
with my body I teach the seabone
blue coral with transparencies
I walk cut by the window and endlessly pump
sky under my feet; I toss the bucket
to lift up jasmine and pentaster;
according to the times they call me Tryphera or Anemone²*

1. "You're bringing . . . heart.": Poem 101 from *The Greek Anthology*, I, Bk. V:
α. Hail maiden. β. You too. α. Who's in front of you? β. What's it to you?
α. I've got my reasons. β. My mistress.
α. Is there hope? β. What are you after? α. A night. β. You're bringing what?
α. Gold. β. Take heart. α. Here it is. β. No way.
2. "Tryphera or Anemone": courtesans from *The Greek Anthology*.

Ich Sehe Dich

Pieces of oceans *ich sehe dich*
Maria in *tausend Bildern*¹
of light and iodine and LAIT INNOXA
and slantwise your hands on the telephone cord.
You are the new Lachesis.² You telephone
to end my service on earth. Don't worry
I'm dying already of heavenly hunger.

I see mythical fish go by
above my head burns the air
BEA TWA SWISSAIR
I'll never O my Nereids oh
get to see my name in print just so
DIE WELT TIMES FIGARO
but behind death with his mane swept back
PHILLIPS OLIVETTI KODAK
a steed awaits me in gleaming magnificence
to jump the fence to jump the fence
I of oblivion's sound and echo
JAGUAR CHEVROLET PEUGEOT
the glass will stop at your lip and hey
JOHNNIE WALKER CINZANO PERRIER
all earthly vainglory's superfluous you'll see
only poetry only poetry
in a lightning-car will carry
SAAB MERCEDES FERRARI
You tearing old houses' façades away
LINGUAPHONE NESCAFÉ
Like magazine covers where all the pretty chic
PARKER WATERMAN BIC
girls of one day have once appeared
like the girl rose-colored and peachy
of ELIZABETH ARDEN and NINA RICCI.

1. "Ich sehe dich" . . . "tausend Bildern": "I see you in a thousand images." From Novalis's "Geistliche Lieder" XV, addressed to the Virgin.

2. "Lachesis": the Fate who spins the thread of life.

Maria Nephele says:

*sometimes even Djenda
how lovely
I understand nothing.*

*Djenda nonexistent word
exactly like a brand of electric bulb
half-Sanskrit half-Celtic
Djenda my trembling
image enlarged in the hands of peoples
Djenda cultural revolution
Djenda I six thousand years ago
with my side against the mountains of Crete
showing
the enormous inequality
which shall spread out to claim the world.*

*Djenda I who forestalled acting unjustly
Djenda.*

**A NAKED BODY IS THE ONLY EXTENSION OF THE IMAGINARY
LINE THAT UNITES US WITH THE MYSTERY.**

And the Antiphonist:

Maria puma of public streets
in diaphanous dralon or nylon
half the ashes that burn away
PHILIP MORRIS KENT CRAVEN A
and half the nerve-racking exhaust as well
BP MOBILOIL SHELL
in the boundless Arizona of our soul
steppe of winter most terrible
you'll raise a cry stentorian
the cry of the wounded animal

O lovely Maria Nephele
O heraldic Maria Nephele.

SOMEWHERE BETWEEN TUESDAY AND WEDNESDAY
YOUR TRUE DAY MUST HAVE BEEN MISLAID.

MARIA NEPHELE

Maria Nephele says:

Stalin*

*Flickering like that glow
once over Bethlehem I'll describe
my orbit above cathedrals and the castles
of crowned heads.*

*Yes the magi know
my pale face my long hair.
Of these they speak—of this heaven-sent virgin
who in peace consented to say: beware
the many counterfeit the One.*

*It doesn't matter whether I am she;
a voice should be automatic and repeating
like a gun whose range covers centuries;
and I start off from the Mongols
I arrive like the trans-Siberian train
with my individual little light and a myrtle branch in hand.*

*So I say it though it's hardly worth the time
because it was suggested by the rhyme.*

*Before the One can up and make me alter
before He's able to impose a "new order"
I say it again and so long—I'm off to jail:
a moon belongs to America—but a soul
that's not for sale—to Matala or Katmandu.*

Each time has its Stalin too.

WHEN YOU HEAR "ORDER" HUMAN FLESH SMELLS.

* "Matala": village on Crete's southern coast, whose caves in the 1970s were as popular with hippies as was Katmandu.

The Hungarian Uprising

You heard the virgin's words:
the One counterfeits the many.

In keeping with the times he wears the General's
chiton and in the Agora is proclaimed "by clamor"
the Supreme
Archon dressed in splendid purple
with scepter and crown by God's grace
blessing with tiara and mitre—advancing with gunbarrels
and caissons in the name of the Party and the People

(hey swallow—tweet if you dare!)

until the Army's Body and Man's Body
become as theory also wanted—One.

Expediency above all
also arrives from on high like a Rublev¹ angel
it's a monster;
no one knows what true light is.

Be careful Maria Nephele—turn the automatic here
and all you armed
dwarfs of fairy tale witches and wild beasts
women men with mattocks hoes
stones from the pavement gas pumps cars
rush him!

(O Virgin so You told me true)²

Each time with its Hungarian Uprising too.

IF YOU'RE TO DIE THEN DIE

BUT SEE YOU BECOME THE FIRST COCK IN HADES.³

1. "Rublev": the great Russian icon painter (1370–1425).
2. "O Virgin . . .": a line paraphrased from Solomos's poem "The Poisoned Maiden."
3. "the first cock in Hades": See note to "Electra Bar," above.

The Eternal Wager

1

THAT one day you will bite into the new lemon
and release
huge amounts of sun from it.

2

THAT all currents of the seas
suddenly illumined will reveal you
raising the tempest to the ethical level.

3

THAT even in death you will again
be like water in the sun
turning chill by instinct.

4

THAT you will be catechized by the birds
and a foliage of words will clothe you
in Greek so you will seem invincible.

5

THAT a waterdrop will culminate
imperceptibly on your eyelashes
beyond the pain and way after the tear.

6

THAT all the world's unsympathy will turn to stone
on which you can sit like a prince
with a docile bird in your palm.

7

THAT alone at last you will harmonize
slowly with the grandeur
of sunrise and sunset.

THREE POEMS
UNDER A FLAG
OF CONVENIENCE

The Garden Sees*

1.

Maybe

if we except Anchorites
I might be the last player
to exercise his rights

presumption

I don't understand
what profit means

a Panselinos¹ who paints though God does not exist
and proves exactly the opposite

stream

what water
blue with sparks

beyond the barrier of the Sirens' sound
signals to me

leaping

come on

somewhere

Perfection lies completed
and lets a rivulet roll up to here

Vivaldi Mozart
earrings all gleaming
the moment that the head's turning reflects them

reality

doesn't care

* Elytis's collage of this title, showing the face of a bronze statue with a living eye peering through bougainvillea, decorates the cover of his song collection *The Rhos of Eros*.

1. "Panselinos": fourteenth-century Byzantine painter of icons and frescoes.

who has good use of the perishable part
and who of the other

tipped-down arrows and tipped-up arrows
have never met

the garden sees

hears the sounds from the colors
iridescence that a caress
leaves
on the naked body the moment
myriad threads draw it

aloft

the messages rage
what to do about it
no one knows

we remain like some wireless
abandoned in the wilderness and out of action for centuries
the waves struggling desperately
to find a receiver
sound sheaves of electronic
music

whose clasp comes undone
and they fall with other shooting stars
deep into night where

earth's curve can barely be descried.

2.

So what will happen when
sometime social struggles stop when inventions
put themselves out of action when all demands are satisfied

void

inside of which will fall those (serves them right)
who turn the wheel for the sake of the Wheel

dazzle

we others
shall begin a life as initiates in the body's Sanskrit
substantively and metaphorically speaking

the way Piero della Francesca
painted or Arthur Rimbaud urinated
always with the consent of heliotropes
(man such poetry)

but roses with religious meaning
still existed then

hallelujah

the Lady of Angels
with golden parachute
descended to your pillow
my Son she would lie near you
The boundless plain
all its tulips blown right
left the wind
errorless colorsetter

the garden sees

it's necessary for us to be transformed each moment into an icon
*Toute la mer et tout le ciel pour une seule
victoire d'enfance*

in other words something slight but also
important enough for
magic to move our hand and interpret it
according to how shadows change position

as if
they have already received God's portion

as did the Saints in other times.

3.

The highest mountains

let's say the Andes

have their counterpart

inside us (as there is

supposed to be another

Universe of antimatter)

where when we advance toward their peaks

there also the air thins

so much that you faint

human organs cannot endure such clarity

A Vermeer once achieved it but

he needed color

the writing stops

wants you to eat the fish bone and throw out the fish

strength

if ever the flame remained motionless among your fingers

with an upward tendency

he who shifts populations will take us

the garden sees

in the green waters of Atlantis

Libyans plunge¹

Kore emerges from the sea

Therasia²

stretching her hand she points to the distance

that separates us from how we can all be

angels with sex.

1. "in the green waters . . . plunge": refers to a fresco from Minoan Thera ("Atlantis"), now in the National Archeological Museum of Greece, depicting a battle between Libyans and Cretans.

2. "Kore . . . Therasia": Kore of Thera (see "To Anoint the Repast" XVII in *The Little Seafarer*, and for her first appearance, the penultimate stanza of "Ode to Santorini" in *Orientations*).

4.

Whether Plotinus¹ was right
or not will one day become clear
the great eye with its transparency
and a sea behind it like Helen
binding the sun
together with other flowers in her hair

a million signs
omega zeta eta²

and if these don't form a word for you
tomorrow
will be yesterday forever

I speak philosophy

inside couples is a goldbug
that eternally repeats the Odyssey
half Nausicaa³ is continued by the waves
and the reflections all the way
to the shores of Asia Minor
where Heraclitus once
steered the thunderbolt⁴
(there's no mistake)

at a second level wars will recur
without anyone's being killed
there are sufficient reserves of death

the garden sees

starts off the countdown

1. "Plotinus": the Neoplatonic philosopher (205–270), for whom reality may be pictured as a series of concentric circles expanding from the One.

2. "omega zeta eta": These Greek letters, rearranged, spell *zoe*, "life,"

3. "Nausicaa": princess of Scheria, whom Odysseus meets on the beach (*Odyssey* VI, 15ff.).

4. "Heraclitus . . . thunderbolt": One of the apothegms of the Ionian philosopher (fl. 500 B.C.) is "The thunderbolt steers the course of all things" (see *Maria Nephele*, "Thunderbolt Steers").

withering
acme
waking

a young woman's breast is already
an article of the future's Constitution.

5.

What! I have thank God
gotten clear of those who
one day will surely prevail

may they never
reach out to me
there will always be two or three
brave men to see the world
without calculation

History is old age
and youth the fruit between the teeth
a single smile—if it's from the source—wins out

and *the garden sees*

gives a sudden push
halfway into the soul to reach us.

6.

Ah if I could only know
real freedom
which I could hymn without

seeming naïve or pharisaical

if exactly like the innocent
I could see
the sky behind the Tyrant
continuing undisturbed to
the mountains opposite
the seas beyond

a transparency
that penetrates my birth
mother and father and fierce ancestors

*otototoi*¹

as says old Aeschylus
let us be frightened so peace
may wake inside us and its necessity
spread a plain—and form new earth
on the water

the garden sees

tufts on tufts of daisies
flammable white ideas
and sea birds
a great island
between East and West
with fourfold rows of palm trees

but no
disturbance like history in which facts are effaced
so it stays at the level of kings

alone
a
Kore
polished like a shell
descends bearing the wind
in a basket.

7.
The garden sees
even before the things I feel
leaving an imperceptible line happen

1. "otototoi": In Aeschylus's "Agamemnon" Cassandra utters this cry when foreseeing and remembering tragedy and death.

as at moments
of death the mountains light as air
soft grasses licking my gigantic feet

the decay of time at last will turn against itself
it is of mint and the words of John

poetry
blows
thus water in the hand
you drink you advance

you encounter the famous grove of Colonus¹
you follow Oedipus

coolness
peace
nightingales
suddenly daybreak
the cock on the weather vanes
it's you in the church
the icon-screen superb with pomegranate trees

Kore stepping on the waves
a gentle westerly
blows

your hand copies
the Inconceivable.

1. "Colonus": where Oedipus goes to his mystical death in Sophocles' last play.

The Almond of the World

1.

What happens when
 there's lightning in the far land of memory
 and scenes yet to happen in some unsuspected time
 are reflected

a little girl running
at the very edge of the shore
to lift the sea's tablecloth (Dali)

 and another girl behind her hoop
 on a long melancholy road (De Chirico)

 a third half reclining on a sofa
 with open limbs (Balthus)

the almond of the world
 is deeply hidden
 and still unbitten

a myriad possibilities shudder
around us which we idiots don't
 even approach

we never understood how pigeons think
two handspans above our head
 what we had lost is already in play

before this body
 that I am existed
 a sea came first
 full of little white rolling
 vowels rattling: alpha epsilon iota

you'd say that even then
in the posture I had before descending into the Mother
 I was shouting with all my might
 aei aei aei
 forever forever forever

but no one was ever willing to believe me.

2.

Ah yes despite my will
the world was made so that

I write as though I were separated from my fate

the almond of the world

is bitter and there's no way
you can find it unless
you sleep half outside of sleep

the houses are magnified
terrible women as far from their
loosened hair as thunder from its flash
go portioning out the sky's
mists here and there
the holes
lead death astray

at night

when I speak as if to stir up constellations
in the upper embers for a moment the face
is formed that God
would give me if he knew
how much the earth in truth cost me
in desperation
in "it was destined" whispered variously at night
in cypresses
centuries old like poems
during the making of which I was disrealized.

3.

Come now

so what if you're not liked
what counts is your course
against this society
against inhibiting idiocy
curly hair that gives off sparks
as soon as you comb it

miracle

come forward my second and hidden
self it's time

you uttered with awe the words
that suit the situation
especially the beautiful and the prohibited

poetry

where oh where then
does such a glow develop into fruit?
something surely
must surreptitiously have been subtracted
from the terraqueous globe

for it to pant so

to turn pale

and for mourning to spread itself

utterly in vain

the almond of the world

throbs amid the foliage

of Paradise by default

I too throb amid the words that in ignorance I subtract

from some perfect achievement

until finally all that's left for me

are two or three standing columns

and on the wall a fresco

let's say Creto-Minoan (if in the meantime

they haven't effaced

the seas and those lovely barebreasted women)

some lilies are still preserved

inconceivable to my contemporaries

even as these verses:

a total eclipse

the moment that everyone's asleep within the Observatories.

4.

Even if you have it all

something's always lacking

it's enough the Integral not be accomplished

and Fortune feel fortunate

at night when hostile eyes appear
in the same place like stars
shadows are described as they descend
one by one to Hades
like those blacks on the sides of an ancient vessel
borne by stooping virgins

it's necessary
for us to be mindful of the most fearsome goodness ever given
by one man to another
love
resembles two glasses at a moment of enthusiasm
ding
flash
shatterings

remember Maria Alcoforado
and Noel Bouton de Chamilly
Jettchen and Heinrich von Kleist
our friend Vladimir and the famous Lily¹

goddamn it
it happened that we always sought
precisely what cannot be²

high in some heavenly Aetnas some mountainous seas
at the distance of a deserted soul
there flourishes yet it seems

the almond of the world

¹ "Maria Alcoforado . . . famous Lily": examples of love gone wrong. The Portuguese nun Maria Alcoforado (1640–1723) wrote the five *Lettres portugaises* to her deserting seducer Noël Bouton, later Comte de Chamilly and a maréchal de France; of high literary quality, they express her shame and sorrow, and they reproach him. Heinrich von Kleist (1777–1811), the great German poet and playwright of the *Sturm und Drang* movement, suffered bouts of near madness; in despair over his literary failures, he first shot his mistress, Henriette Vogel, whom he loved passionately, and then committed suicide. The Russian futurist poet Vladimir Mayakovsky (1894–1930) fell madly in love with Lily Brik, the wife of a friend; after their affair ended, he continued to live with the Briks and, in his suicide note, begged her to love him.

² "what cannot be": a poem title from *The Light-Tree*.

go on my tear go on
take the heavenly roads
this vigil is for you.

5.

(One more cigarette
which lasts until we expire
for two or three minutes of life
with really superb moments
courtyards wherein we inexplicably grew up

and you bitter one who made it your obstinate purpose
to find and pick think of it *the almond of the world*
but just your hand remained
to write some white
poems on the black page

who ever understood
the dusks that you endured trying not to weep?
there is a traitor within you
whose time for punishment will come

O friends

if one of us sinned
it must be God

good for him
we sought and sought as much as possible
to be upright men
on a terrace above the sea
look:
the stars break one by one
even your cigarette's last little light goes out
and is finished
stamp it out
goodbye.)

6.

My God

if sometimes truth becomes
music that eats matter
I must be a liar but more credible

than all beings
buzzing on the planet
listen

man is as if coming from elsewhere
and so he sounds out of tune
with a memory all fragmented but
inclined to miracles

maybe I'm wrong maybe it's because
I don't know reading and writing
all alone

I am hanging
since Heraclitus' time
like *the almond of the world*
from a branch of the North Aegean
an ancient fisherman with his trident
who has known many gales until there:
some time the moment arrives

the waters around him become
brilliant
chilly
rosy
he squints his eyelids
it's because the reflection
all absolute beauty
shows with whom it briefly had with no intention on his part
a confidential meeting.

7.
Come on then
forget me if you dare

the lizards on monuments ignore both sculptors and architects

three in the morning
it's as if I had been born years after
men were distinguished at wrestling and commerce

axiomatically I am living beyond the point where I find myself
besides
continuing along my mother
you will meet me even after death

(the point is not to act indecently otherwise
in the clouds there appears—like the sugar of a diabetic
urinating
on a paper slip—
a black warhorse with one foot forward:
vainglory
and its inside is unattainable)
where? who? when?

seek and ye shall find
little Lady Huntress
who abducts *the almond of the world*
high to the mountains and soars
to an age genuinely golden

truly

no money at all exists there

life is perceived as something you can't add on to

I stand and regard the waves
nothing more perfect more unadmitting of decay
has ever existed.

Ad Libitum

1.

I am alpha years old and European to the middle
of the Alps or Pyrenees
I never touched the snow

there's not one who can represent me
war and peace ate at me on both sides
what remained endures still

till when
friends

must we lift up the excommunicated past
filled with kings and subjects

myself
I feel like a seduced cypress

to which not even a tombstone remained
only empty plots rocks stone enclosures
and the inconsolable northwind
beating yonder on the factories' high walls

enclosed there we all work as
elsewhere in History

the
Future

years say spilled crude oil
set ablaze

help

Rintrah roars and shakes
his fires in the burdend air

you call to mind your limits
always in the dark
conducted by a ground stewardess
completely uninterested in your personal luck

while in the distance a moving vague mountain ridge
ceaselessly gives you the impression you're traveling

farms of the lower world
with blackberries and asymmetrical orchidaceae
pass before your eyes

the cryings of birds of prey
and the complete petrification

wherein you shall be enlisted

thee little one
how can you magnified by thought
defy natural phenomena

(as though a poplar
would ever stop accumulating light
because you subtracted it with your mind)

thee b minor
thee b minor

a least piece of music that endures
amid galaxies and nebulae

to signal and to wave

Ad libitum.

3.

It's been a long time I haven't said a word
as if events ignored me
or even the reverse

it seems I happened to be a phenomenon
for those who hear in the night
 how a pen scratches
 like a cat on the closed
 door of the Unknown

the guards
 have always been infamous
 personae turpi as is said in Law
 and art has been *sine re*

if it tends exclusively to be substituted by
 the guarded sacred
 person whomsoever or even the degraded crowd

it is that for a whole life
outside the walls I've been pursuing voices
specifically: one voice

 that is set free like a lovely kore and let
 to run

 with little buttocks and masses of
 unbound hair
 Jordan waters

poured on the nocturnal sky

Ad libitum.

4.

 Thus it happens
 I go astray sometimes
for my good
 it seems I lost the thread
 of Ariadne¹ it was never unwound to the end

1. "the thread of Ariadne": The love-smitten Cretan princess gave Theseus the thread to lead him out of the Labyrinth after he killed the Minotaur.

who would continue
amid revolutions and wars we all grew up

that's why on our foreheads
the mark of the bullet not shot
at all times continues to cause death

you comprehend what I mean

something occurs that we never managed to locate
the sweet nights when the jasmine overwhelms you
and from water running

somewhere

some inexplicable shudder

gives a shove to the grasses

it is as if she ascends from a moving

stairway and incessantly straight toward you

grows here she is: the goddess Verdancy with her huge
drum

and her barefoot slaves with their hair as torches

boom the left foot boom the right foot

love strife

love strife

the old eurythmia¹

some forty meters high above the sea

the house with its three arches

and great standing palms with bare outer branches

rustling in my sleep

the northwind

Ad libitum.

5.

It's a fact

I've entered all the way into the minefield

and therefore even should I solve the enigma

I'm not afraid to speak

1. "love strife . . . eurythmia": as in the philosophy of Empedocles (ca. 493–33 B.C.).

which my enemies wished sometimes
ignorant of how useless it is to profess dark Apollo
right in the middle of Delos
having transformed all your self
into a wax likeness
like those seen in Madame Tussaud's Museum
what a civilized breed we'd be
if our mind weren't going incessantly to
Cimmeria the ill-fated
which in our time ended up
being considered even enviable

when even a Homer always with the proper
dignity for the bearer of Greek
simply consented to empathize
where lie the Cimmerian people's land and city
wrapt in mist and cloud
ne'er on them doth flaming Helios gaze with his beams . . . but
deadly night is spread
abroad o'er all these wretches¹

so then
shall we speak of light and blue seas?
or of heliotropes and Helens?

even though
from the frescoes of Thera and the luminous
mosaics of Ravenna divine annunciation continues
to be dispensed directly

like that extra something and inconceivable
whose flash the aged fisherman for a moment
perceives
later he forgets it and then goes to the Agora and from his basket
golden mist continues to rise

poetry rises

1. "where lie the Cimmerian . . . wretches": direct quote from the *Odyssey*, XI, 14–15.

once more
it vanishes from your essence O tough-willed Greek
be inspired still

Ad libitum.

6.
Kiss me sea before I lose you

from my sight passed a country
of boulders with high huge Monasteries
and little novice Monks like me
regularly carrying pomegranate branches
girls' diaphanous underwear
and other celebratory immaculate
words like "northwind"
or "harvest" or even "pediment"

it is at Dawn
that I ponder
how hardly real
we are
and our sphere
an engine where no
screw no lever no
piston is in place
nevertheless
functions and the myriads
of horned bison that we are
go at random butting
the blessed hand shall appear
as if amid golden icons

inexplicably the bushes move about
I feel breath take me
lightly to the water
I sign my name and vanish

Ad libitum.

7.

And here's the final conclusion: be the aristocrat but
from the other side
of your pressed white cuff
to "make agreements with the Saint"
as says Makriyannis¹
as you know

how to behave like rain on zinc roofs
rhythmically with loftiness
I always saw the deeds that tended
in an underhanded way to drain me

what can one say

until we become men whom health does not bore
some Beauty will be travelling in space
camouflaged never struck by anyone

an idol that still

knows to preserve the olive tree's aspect
among the Scythians²
and that will be restored to us
like a lovely echo from the Mediterranean
smelling still of a deepsea goat

one for the other Odysseus
upon a raft
centuries now

I cry out in Greek and no one answers me

it is that no one knows anymore
what noon reflection means

1. "Makriyannis": general in the 1821 War of Independence. Illiterate, he learned to write in order to compose his memoirs. His simple, direct style, perfectly expressing his nobility of spirit, is one of the foundations of modern Greek prose.

2. "Scythians": fierce barbarians from north of ancient Greece.

how and whence omega leans to alpha
who finally disunites time

Ad libitum.

P.S. But there is a different version: don't believe me

the more I age the less I understand

experience untaught me the world.

DIARY OF AN
INVISIBLE APRIL

Come now my right hand demonically paint that which pains you, but also adorn it

With the Virgin's silvering that wildernesses have at night in marshwaters forlorn.

WEDNESDAY, 1

The horses keep on chewing whitesheets and keep on penetrating triumphantly into the Threat.

I heard oaks, beeches, holm oaks dragging on the roof of the old carriage as I somehow jumped on it to get away. Playing again a film shot once in secret that got old without anyone's having seen it.

Fast. Before images fade. Or suddenly cease—and the worn-out film cuts off.

WEDNESDAY, 1 b

There about midnight I saw the first fires above the airstrip.

Over here the black void.

Later it seemed that *flora mirabilis* came erect on her chariot and emptying flowers from a huge cone.

The victims bent over and took the position they had before separating from the Mother.

On the stem of night the moon was writhing.

THURSDAY, 2

"Artine" . . . "Cleopas" . . . "Barnabas" . . . but what gender is this place being buried? I must take off the vestments to wear again my golden breastplate and go forth with sword in hand.

Take the children away. Hang the balconies with black. Martial music already can be heard approaching.

Attention! Present arms!

THURSDAY, 2 b

Somewhere people weep and the air darkens in patches. Sithonia¹ vanished, the waters covered it.

There are certain frightening facts that God is taking away from me and my mind giving back to me.

Something green within me but dark that dogs bark at.

And a sea brought from afar, still smelling of the egg of the Swan.

THURSDAY, 2 c

I put my books on the shelves and in the corner a sad Angelica.

The portion of beauty that was mine goes, I've spent it all.

I want the coming winter to find me thus, without fire, with ragged trousers, shuffling blank papers as if I were conducting the deafening orchestra of an ineffable Paradise.

FRIDAY, 3

Slant, oblong eyes, lips, odors as from the early sky of a great female sweetness and dead-ly drink.

I turned on my side—almost capsized—into the psalms of the Salutations² and the chill of open gardens.

Ready for the worst.

1. "Sithonia": beautiful peninsula in northeast Greece.

2. "Salutations": an elaborate popular poetic composition addressed to the Mother of God, contained in the church service books and chanted at Friday evening services during Lent. Its refrain is, "Hail, Bride unbridled."

SATURDAY, 4

As I went up the narrow, wet, cobblestone street—almost three hundred years ago—I felt myself snatched up “by the hand” of a Powerful Friend and, really, until I recovered, I saw Domenicos¹ lift me with his gigantic pinions high in his heavens

that time when they
were full of orange trees and speaking waters of the homeland.

SUNDAY, 5

Suddenly, just when I opened the dilapidated window shutters, the yard grew large. No one else could see the descending parachute. Only some of my ancestors, wild and tormented, followed the scene from the other bank and every so often fired rounds in the air.

The countryside filled with Greek words misspelled, from ancient dowry contracts and from vows of the Friends.² And I started to weep as I had once seen my father weep, in August of '22.³

Later the police sergeant with the district surveyor appeared coming from afar and immediately the yard took on again its true dimensions.

SUNDAY, 5 b

The end of Alexander

He folded the four seasons and remained like a tree whose air was used up. Later he sat up and peacefully placed the cliff to his side.

To his other side he carefully spread out a piece of sea, all azure ripples.

Hours passed until, one moment, the woman's eyes blinked.

Then the Lady entered and he expired.

1. “Domenicos”: Domenicos Theotocopoulos, the Cretan painter better known as El Greco.
2. “Friends”: patriotic organization during the 1821 War of Independence.
3. “August of '22”: the 1922 Smyrna disaster, when many Greeks (and Turks) were massacred, leading to a population exchange.

TUESDAY, 7

I found a little church all running water and hung it on the wall. Its candelabra are clay and look like my fingers when I write. From the way the windowpanes flash I understand whether an angel has passed. And often I sit afternoons outside on the stone bench and can hold out in bad weather like a geranium.

TUESDAY, 7 b

I saw her come straight to me from afar. She wore canvas shoes and advanced light-footed and in black and white. Even the dog behind her was half-immersed in black.

I got old waiting, truly.

And now it's too late for me to understand that as she advanced, so the void grew larger, and that we were never going to meet.

WEDNESDAY, 8

Who is it who thunders on doors and windows?

What could it be that the ventriloquist wind—now near by now far off—says and says again?

What does she want with her torn hair and cat's eyes painted on the window pane?

What kind of solitude is this the distant soldier plays on his trumpet?

Is it dawn or getting dark?

WEDNESDAY, 8 b

As after the detonation, in an extended void, the old ancestral landscape began to emerge.

Grandmother was not in her seat nor the hands on the wall clock.

The place where I had first seen the Virgin (or my Mother) smelled of burnt pine and forgiveness.

DIARY

OF AN INVISIBLE APRIL

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WEDNESDAY, 8 c

Mother where are you so to see me: as I was born, I left. I was so very little—who knows these things?—and so many monsters crawled by on splayed, greasy paws.

Thus, throughout a life set up with such difficulty, there is nothing left except a half-ruined door and many big rotting water anemones. There I pass and go—who knows where?—to a belly sweeter than the homeland.

THURSDAY, 9

It will be one of those closed and uninhabited houses
in the ivy that loosened the leash
from the abominable events inside it

And you feel now the howlings rush upon you
and those first bites from the epoch of Adam
the dentures of the old man who yet dares to love
and blew tirelessly on his secret lime-trees
one vulnerable April night.

These things that intend to bring you to your knees
also intend to wipe you out with blood.

FRIDAY, 10

The wind kept whistling and it kept getting dark and the distant voice kept reaching my ears: “a whole life” . . . “a whole life . . .”

On the opposite wall the shadows of trees were playing a movie.

FRIDAY, 10 b

Somewhere, it seems, people might be enjoying themselves
although there are no houses or men
I can hear guitars and more laughter not from nearby

Maybe they're far off deep in the ashes of heavens
in Andromeda in Ursus Major or in Virgo. . . .

I wonder whether solitude is the same in all worlds?

FRIDAY, 10 c

Past midnight my room moves about over all the neighborhood and shines like
emerald. Somebody within it searches—and the truth continually escapes him.
Hard for him to imagine that this truth is found lower down

Much lower down

That death also has its own Red Sea.

SATURDAY, 11

I went looking for new wounds
above the old afloat like water lilies

(In that ancient sea I knew

The world would have sunk by now
with its two slanted masts out of the water

And I, as if I were real, shall go on writing).

SATURDAY, 11 b

Stopped all night in sleep
like an old car with defunct lights
I happened in the dark to catch again
men's movements as incomprehensible
as those I saw about me
for years and years a whole life:
"The Mystery of the Woman in Mourning Black"
for example or "The Dumb Man with the Wax Doll"
"The Last Days of Pompey" if not
also—in its first run—"The Kiss of Death."

SUNDAY, 12

In Memory of Memas

I went down to the yard with the rose pink flagstones, the weeds and the coal stove in the middle lit as if for a sacrifice.

Then suddenly a flower-festooned oxhead appeared in the air and at once vanished again.

Perhaps it mistook the century.

Later appeared the truck with the Monastery's necessities and Father Isidore holding the dish with the memorial wheat.

WEDNESDAY, 15

I advance through stone candles and women holding half-moons. God is absent. This garden has no end and no one knows what is in store for him.

Every name glows for a while in the dark and then goes out and vanishes.

WEDNESDAY, 15 b

She opened the air of the garden and you could see her hair leave to the left. Later she would shift position on the icon-screen, sad, holding in her arms many little white flames.

It was a season full of revolutions, uprisings, blood. You might say that she alone from afar preserved the duration of things.

But from close up she was simply a beautiful woman garden-fragrant.

WEDNESDAY, 15 c

I ascend her soft soil, I reach the peak and bind her hair behind with branches.

Later I cross myself.

Then the bell tolls and on her eyelids appears this year's first tear.

It could have been something sublime.

THURSDAY, 16*

Drizzle says something to everybody. To me nothing. I shut the windows and began to beckon alphabetically: the Angel of Astypalaea; Briseis; Gaugamela; the slave of Krinagoras; the Hellespont; Zagoria; the Prophet Elijah; Theodore the new-martyr

* In Elytis's Greek, each item of this list begins with a different letter, in alphabetical order.

"Angel of Astypalaea": Elytis's created a collage with this same title, showing a Byzantine angel over the island of Astypalaea, and it illustrates his book of song lyrics, *The Rhos of Eros*.

"Briseis": Achilles' beloved concubine; she is the prize whom Agamemnon takes and gives back in the *Iliad*.

"Gaugamela": where Alexander defeated Darius in 331 B.C.

"Krinagoras": elegiac poet (b. ca. 70 B.C.) of Mytilene, whose poems Elytis, another Lesbian poet, has translated.

"Hellespont": the Dardanelles.

"Zagoria": a semi-independent association of Greek villages in Epirus during the Turkish domination; something like the Hanse.

"Theodore . . . of Mytilene": St Theodore of Mytilene (18th cent.) is considered to be an ancestor of Elytis; also see Elytis's "Genesis," "And because the hours."

"Issus": Syrian river where Alexander defeated Darius in 333 B.C.

"Constantine Paleologus": the last Byzantine emperor, who died defending Constantinople from the Turks in 1453; see "The Death and Resurrection of Constantinos Paleologus" in *Stepchildren*.

"Lais": famous hetaera of Classical Corinth.

"Nikias": Athenian general; he commanded the disastrous expedition against Syracuse in 413 B.C.

"Pelasgians": in ancient times considered Greece's pre-Greek inhabitants.

"Roxanne": married Alexander in 327 B.C.

"Sthenelais": a hetaera who appears in the tenth-century *Greek Anthology*.

"Tatavla": Greek quarter in Constantinople before 1922.

"Ibycus": Ibycus of Rhegium (fl. 560 B.C.) wrote choral and lyric poetry.

"Phaestus": rich Cretan palace site from the second millennium B.C.

"The Libation Bearers": the second play of Aeschylus's *Oresteia*, in which Orestes murders his mother Clytemnaestra.

"Psara": little island near Chios, whose inhabitants were massacred by the Turks in 1823 during the War of Independence. See note to "With Both Light and Death," 19 in *The Little Seafarer*.

"Origen": subtle Christian writer and scholar (ca. 185–254) from Alexandria.

of Mytilene; Issus; Constantine Paleologus; Lais; Master Anthony; Nikias; thereof of St. Pelagia; Homer (with his complete *Iliad*); the Pelasgians; Roxanne; Sthenelais; Tatavla; Ibycus (love-maniac); Phaestus; the Libation Bearers; Psara; and Origen.

Dawn found me having run through the history of the death of History, or rather the history of the History of Death (and this is not wordplay).

SATURDAY, 18

It's still raining. As if it would rain forever. And forever I go about with an umbrella searching for a pink town filled with beautiful open-air sweetshops.

SATURDAY, 18 b

The weight of the sky's tenderness
after it thundered and the snail set out.
Bits of floating houses, balconies with flagpoles out front,
wind.

Death is an imminent event
burdened with some old happinesses
and that very well known (bleached in wild deserts) despair.

SATURDAY, 18 c

I sit for hours and watch the water on the flagstones until, at last, there is a face that looks like me and shines with all my past life.

SUNDAY, 19

Tranquility like a Sunday's when everybody is away
in a room from which I removed feelings

Some probability of sublime death
hovers with orchids cut on glass.
Buzzing at a distance of months yet, but
the red nostrils can already be seen that very much
want you not to exist any more.

SUNDAY, 19 b

Arriving the ship grew larger and blocked the harbor. No movement on the decks.
Maybe it's transporting the new midnights, compact and boxed. Maybe just one
soul, delicate as smoke and recognizable by its burnt odor.

However it may be, there are many animals that haven't yet managed to emerge from
the Ark and they are showing impatience. Even the crowd that floods the breakwa-
ter and casts uneasy glances, little by little becomes conscious that everything de-
pends upon a moment—

the moment that vanishes just as you're about to seize it.

SUNDAY, 19 c

Broken whites of the sky in the night
I go on followed by the dog of my moon.

Some unknown Gabriel signals to me
—Agreed, we shall all die; but for what?

On high I see like a star the northern window
which they forgot was open and with the light on.

The others sleep supine, either temporarily
or eternally, with faces uncovered to the sky.

I go on followed by my numbered days
—Agreed, yes; but this life has no end. . . .

HOLY MONDAY, 20

Fatigued from heavenly adventures, I went to bed in the early hours.

Through the windowpane, I was watched by the ancient Moon, wearing the mask
of the Sun.

HOLY TUESDAY, 21

Just today I found the courage and uncovered the little garden like a coffin. The
odors, lemon, carnation, rushed upon me.

Later I thrust aside the years, the fresh petals and look: my mother, with a big white
hat and her old gold watch hung on her bosom.

Sorrowful and watchful. She watched something right behind me.

I didn't turn in time to see because I fainted.

HOLY WEDNESDAY, 22

The cacti keep getting bigger and men keep dreaming as though they were eternal.
But the inner part of Sleep has been eaten away and now you can make out clearly
what that black stirring mass means

The sigh just a few days ago

And now a black century.

HOLY THURSDAY, 23

Beautiful tremulous day like a cemetery
with the chill sky's descents

Kneeling and spider-webbed Virgin

My earthen feet formerly

(I must have been very young or even stupidly handsome)

The two or three setting souls

Filled the windowpanes with sunset.

HOLY THURSDAY, 23 b

A real god. But even he drank his poison
drop by drop according to the order of things
until the big explosion was heard.

The mountains vanished. And then truly the kylix
appeared behind the huge chin

And later the dead, laid out in the mists.

GOOD FRIDAY, 24

As if I soliloquized, I fall silent.

Maybe I'm still in the state of a medicinal
herb or of a cold Friday's snake

Or perhaps of one of those sacred beasts
with its big ear full of heavy sounds
and metallic noise from censers.

GOOD FRIDAY, 24 b

In Place of a Dream

Mournful meek sky in the incense
ancient Mothers arise upright as candlesticks
rifle-bearing recruits at ease
little rectangular foxholes, sprinklers, narcissi.

As if I were, say, death itself though
still a beardless youth just setting out
who hears for the first time in the candles' penumbra
the "come and receive the last kiss."¹

HOLY SATURDAY, 25

Passing by during yesterday's sleeplessness
the little goddess with her purple ribbon
who since childhood carries my secrets about
smiled at me for just a moment.

Later she vanished sailing to the right
and went to empty my rubbish basket
—the soul's cigarette butts and rejected poems—
where the sea haughty and full
of old youth is still boiling.

HOLY SATURDAY, 25 b

Again in the sea's belly that black cloud that puffs smoke
like voices above a shipwreck

Lost are they who grasp the Ungraspable

Like me a few days ago on the very day of St. George
when I went to compete with rearing steeds and armored
soldiers
and my lovestruck soul poured out of the earth.

1. "come and receive the last kiss": conflates two phrases, one from the funeral service and one from Easter.

EASTER SUNDAY, 26

Clear translucent day. The wind in a mountain's form appears immobile there in the west. And the sea with folded wings, very low, beneath the window.

You feel like flying up high and from there to share out your soul for free. Later you'd descend and, boldly, you'd take the place in the tomb that is yours.

EASTER SUNDAY, 26 b

Little Song

Windform kore sea come-of-age
take the citron that Kalvos¹ gave me
yours the golden fragrance

After tomorrow other birds will come
the lines of the mountains again will be lightweight
but heavy my own heart.

WEDNESDAY, 29

For some nights lately I've been hearing sandals on the flagstones, fabrics rustling and unknown words that seem bitter and strong as weeds: *hyrphe saragandha tinte-lo deleana* . . . Until at last "it got to me" yesterday evening and I stood naked before the mirror.

Truly I didn't seem myself at all. My hair was thrown to the front and my facial characteristics were hard. On my middle finger I wore a heavy signet ring. And at the back of my room stood two other youths, bearded and serious.

In all other respects the landscape recalled Corfu.

So we all sank slowly like youth itself. While from the radio was heard full blast, among other old songs, "Ramona."

1. "Kalvos": A great poet (1792–1869) who wrote only 20 odes, which combine intense emotion on elated themes with original form and diction. Born on Zakynthos (as was Solomos), he lived most of his life in England. For the citron, see Elytis's quotation under "Kalvos" in "What One Loves (The Traveling Bag)" in *The Little Seafarer*.

FRIDAY, 1 M

Mayday

I hold spring carefully and open it:

Spider-web-fine warmth strikes me
a blue that smells of butterfly's breath
all the daisy's constellations but
also many crawling or flying
bugs, snakes, lizards, caterpillars and other
gaudy monsters with antennae of wire
golden lamé scales and red sequins

You'd think, all ready to go
to the masked ball of Hades.

SATURDAY, 2 M

My life (a tiny piece of my life), falling on the life of others, leaves a hole.

Someone, fitting his eye to it, could see forever, a dark sea, and a white-clad girl flying left to right, and vanishing into air.

SUNDAY, 3 M

Some trapdoor must have opened. Crowds of another race come and go with polygonal hats and foot-length attire.

Suddenly my voice is heard (though I am not speaking): you my lovely Roman ladies
*la luce, onde s'infiora Vostra sustanzia, rimarrà con voi Eternalmente sì com' ella è ora*¹

And later after some time, as an echo, the answer: *Tu non se' in terra, sì come tu credi . . . Tu non se' in terra . . . Tu non se' in terra. . .*²

1. "la luce . . . è ora": "the light, which enflowers your being, will remain with you eternally just as it now does." Beatrice says this to Dante in "Paradiso," XIV, 13–15.

2. "tu non se' in terra, sì come tu credi": "you are not now on earth, though you may think so." Beatrice to Dante, "Paradiso" I, 90.

After which cranking chains could be heard in the distance and the points of a great, unknown, revolving Zodiac began to tighten about me.

The mountains, in the distance, slowly started to dissolve and ascend as memories.

MONDAY, 4 M

You could see the house standing and shining
like jewelry two inches above the ground

Lower, a lake all pink mist

Then the Unknown from solid unburnt phosphorous
and further off "the Land" as they say "of the Lotus-Eaters."

I was a worker here in these places
for many years and I was left with burnt fingers
the moment right before I would have been able
to see from afar how the waters flower
and how Paradises, slowly walking, spread their tail.

MONDAY, 4 M b

Smooth red hills just as in my life.

There is such a resemblance, that I don't know whether that white vision of the youth who passes through the aethers, holding a small ship, and who barely touches the peaks, is true, or whether I have simply become so estranged from emotion, that the external world finds its balance again and its normal order.

THURSDAY, 7 M

Because I haven't thought anything or been moved by anything, time took courage and dismissed me in the middle of the Sea of Crete.

I became thousands of years old, and already I use Minoan script with such ease that the world wonders and believes in the miracle.

Fortunately they haven't managed to read me.

DIARY

OF AN INVISIBLE APRIL

—*Everything vanishes. To each his hour too.*

—*Everything remains. I leave. We'll see about you.*

THE LITTLE SEAFARER

Entrance

Spotlight i

To Anoint the Repast

- I One day the life I had lost
- II I resided in a country
- III Well then, I went all about my country
- IV I did not find spring
- V I want to be sincere
- VI O yes, for a thought
- VII Bitter lip

With Both Light and Death

- 1 *I turned death toward me*
- 2 Since I fell in love
- 3 *You are young—I know—*
- 4 *I await the hour*
- 5 Three hours' walk from memory
- 6 *What do you want*
- 7 *Now that mind is forbidden*

What One Loves (The Traveling Bag)

Spotlight ii

To Anoint the Repast

- VIII Naked, in the month of July
- IX "Yesterday I stuck my hand in the sand. . . ."
- X That I was able to acquire a life
- XI Truths of the imagination
- XII From the pebble to the fig leaf
- XIII On Homer's beaches
- XIV I studied my higher mathematics

With Both Light and Death

- 8 No matter how
- 9 *Have you I wonder ever pondered*
- 10 *I speak with the patience of the tree*
- 11 HALFMANKINDKILLHALFLUCKFORY
- 12 *For a short moment may you play*
- 13 *Guarded within me forever*
- 14 To the Beauty th' All Holy One

What One Loves (Aegean Route)

Spotlight iii

To Anoint the Repast

- XV My childhood years
- XVI The soul has its own dust
- XVII And look: right in the middle of misery
- XVIII From early childhood
- XIX My beautiful Archangel
- XX A small mountain of wildflowers
- XXI I express myself like a bergamot

With Both Light and Death

- 15 *This stone head*
- 16 *Where shall I say it night in the air*
- 17 Springtime came down from heaven when
- 18 *And after they annihilate you*
- 19 *The cantering of beautiful horses*
- 20 You were telling me to leave yesterday
- 21 *And most important of all:*

What One Loves (Snapshots)

Spotlight iv

To Anoint the Repast

- XXII There are times when I go out into the air
- XXIII Surely the sun must have been
- XXIV For whomever sea in sun
- XXV A transliteration of the sound
- XXVI Pronounce reality as
- XXVII It took me a long time to understand
- XXVIII We walk for thousands of years

Exit

SOMETIMES IT'S

no more than a glow behind the mountains—there toward the sea. Sometimes again a strong wind that stops suddenly just outside the harbors. And those who know, their eyes fill with tears

Golden wind of life¹ why don't you reach us?

No one hears, no one. They all go holding an icon but above it the fire. And not one day, one moment in this place when injustice does not occur or some murder

Why don't you reach us?

I said I'll leave. Now. With whatever: travel bag on my shoulder; guidebook in my pocket; camera in my hand. Deep into the earth and deep into my body I shall go to find out who I am. What I give, what they give me and left over is injustice

Golden wind of life . . .

1. "Golden wind of life": quoted from "The Free Besieged" by Dionysios Solomos. Also see "Awe and Whelming of Solomos" in *The Elegies of Jutting Rock*.

Spotlight i*

First scene: An open-air court in the ancient city of Athens. The accused arrive and proceed among blasphemies and shouts: death! death!

Second scene: A jail in the same city, below the Acropolis. Walls half-eaten away with dampness. On the ground a thin, straw mattress and in the corner a pitcher of water. On the outer wall a shadow: the guard.

Third scene: Constantinople. In the woman's section of the Sacred Palace, in candlelight, the empress throws a purse of gold coins to the chief eunuch, who bows and gives her a meaningful look. In the doorway his men; all ready.

Fourth scene: Guest room of a great monastery. An oblong table and at its head the abbot. Perspiring monks come and go bringing the news: a crowd has flooded the streets, sets fires, destroys everything.

Fifth scene: Nauplion.¹ Greeks and Bavarian officers² in the King's Adjutant's Office converse in low voices. A herald takes the message and leaves toward the stairs that lead up to Palamedis.

Sixth scene: Before an old and empty lot, in contemporary Athens, a crowd with priests and bishops jostles to throw a stone, "the stone of anathema."

Seventh scene: Low buildings of Military Police Special Interrogation. In the courtyard, drunken soldiers. Wild voices and obscene gestures. The officer who comes out of a certain cell says something to the military doctor. Behind them are heard thuds and groans.

* Examples of betrayal from the long Greek past.

1. "Nauplion": the first capital of Greece after the 1821 War of Independence.

2. "Bavarian officers": The first king of modern Greece was Bavarian.

To Anoint the Repast

This title, repeated three times below, is from “Hymn to the Whore,” by the great Byzantine religious poet Romanos the Melodist (fl. 540):

And cutting short the train of her words, the godly woman
fell silent. She took her gladdening ointment
and ran till she found herself in the chamber of a Pharisee,
like an invited guest, to anoint the repast.
But when Simon saw this happening before his eyes
he began to blame the master and the whore and himself:
the master for not knowing who was approaching him,
and the woman for being so shameless as to offer her veneration,
and himself for being so thoughtless as to entertain such types,
and above all the woman who kept crying out: “Withdraw me from the mire of my
works.” (stanza 12)

The Greek word for repast is, except for gender, the same as for excellent. The repast probably is Christ himself, and the chamber the place of the marriage feast, at which the whore becomes the spouse of Christ (see Matthew 26:6–13 and Luke 7:36–50). The whore whose bodily degradation does not preclude her essential purity is an important presence throughout Elytis’s work, e.g., “Myrto the whore from Sikinos” (“Prophetic” in *Axion Esti*).

I

ONE DAY the life I had lost I found again in the eyes of a young calf, who looked at me with devotion. I realized that I had not been born by accident. I set myself to rake through my days, to turn them upside down, to search. I was seeking to touch the material of sensations. To restore, through the hints that I found scattered throughout this world, an innocence so powerful that it washes away blood—injustice—and compels men to be to my liking.

Difficult—but how else can it happen? Sometimes I feel I am so many that I get lost. I want to be actualized even in a lifetime's length that goes beyond my own.

If there is no way even for time to vanquish falsehood, then for me the game is up.

II

I RESIDED IN a country that came from the other, the real one, as the dream comes from the facts of my life. It too I named Greece and I drew it on paper so I could look at it. It seemed so little; so elusive.

As time went by I kept trying it out: with certain sudden earthquakes, certain old thoroughbred storms. I kept changing the position of things to rid them of all value. I studied the Vigilant and the Solitary so that I might be found worthy of making brown hillcrests, little Monasteries, fountains. I even produced an entire orchard full of citrus trees that smelled of Heraclitus¹ and Archilochus.² But the fragrance was so strong I got scared. So I very slowly took to setting words like gems to cover this country I love. Lest someone see its beauty. Or suspect that maybe it does not exist.

1. "Heraclitus": philosopher of Ephesus (fl. 500 B.C.).

2. "Archilochus": the great poet of Paros (fl. 680 B.C.).

III

WELL THEN, I WENT all about my country and I found its littleness so natural, that I thought, this can't be, it must be that this wooden table with the tomatoes and the olives by the window is on purpose. So that such a feeling drawn from the plank's squareness with its few vivid reds and many blacks may go straight out into icon-painting. And icon-painting, rendering a true image, may spread itself with a blissful light above the sea until the real grandeur of this littleness is revealed.

I am afraid to speak with arguments that by right only spring has at its disposal; nevertheless thus I perceive the virginity I hold in high regard and only thus imagine its keeping hold of its secret virtue: making useless all the means that men could invent for its preservation and renewal.

IV

I DID NOT FIND SPRING so much in the fields, or, say, in a Botticelli as in a little red Palm Sunday icon. Thus one day, looking at a head of Zeus, I felt the sea.

When we discover the secret connections of concepts and we follow them in depth we shall come to another kind of clearing which is Poetry. And Poetry is always one as the sky is one. The question is from where one regards the sky.

I have seen it from right in the middle of the sea.

I WANT TO BE SINCERE as the whiteshirt I'm wearing; and straight, parallel to the lines of farmhouses and dovecotes, which lines are not straight at all and perhaps for this reason they stand so sure in the palm of God.

I tend with all my pores toward a—what shall I call it?—revolving, dazzling, *well-being*. From how I bite into the fruit to how I look through the window, I sense a whole alphabet being formed which I strive to put into action with the intention of fitting together words or phrases, and with the ulterior ambition of fitting together iambs and tetrameters. Which means: to conceive and to utter another, second world that always comes first within me. I can even call a host of insignificant things to witness: pebbles furrowed by storms, streams with something consoling in their tumbling, fragrant herbs, hunting dogs of our holiness. A whole philology, the ancient Greeks and Latins, the later chroniclers and hymnists, a whole art, Polygnotus,¹ Panselinos;² all of these are found transliterated and taken down in stenography there by the smooth, the verdant, the biting, and the ecstatic, whose only genuine and authentic reference is inherent in man's soul.

This soul I call innocence. And this chimaera, my right.

1. "Polygnotus": the first great Classical painter (fl. 475–47 B.C.).

2. "Panselinos": Byzantine icon and fresco painter (fl. 14th cent.).

VI

OH YES, FOR A THOUGHT to be really healthy—no matter to what it refers—it must endure the open air. And not only this. It must at the same time be summer in our sensitivity.

Just two or three degrees lower, “it is finished”:¹ the jasmine goes silent, the sky becomes noise.

1. “it is finished”: Jesus’ last words from the Cross, as recounted in the Gospel of John (19:30). The other three gospels go on to report that “the curtain of the temple was torn in two.”

VII

BITTER LIP whom I have as a second soul, smile!

With Both Light and Death

This title, repeated below, is from Kalvos's beautiful ode, "To Death," in which the poet's dead mother tells him not to fret over death, for the dead know peace:

My son, thou sawest me breathing;
the circle-chasing sun,
spiderlike, enfolded me
with both light and death
unceasingly.

(For Kalvos, see note to "Easter Sunday, 26 b" in *Diary of an Invisible April*.)

*I turned death toward me like a gigantic sunflower:
 Adramyttion Bay¹ appeared with the northwester's curly strewing
 A bird immobilized between sky and earth and the mountains
 Lightly set one in the other. The child appeared who ignites
 Letters and runs to turn back the wrong in my breast
 In my breast where appeared the second Greece of the upper world.*

*This I say and write not to be understood
 Like a plant satisfied in its poison until the wind
 Turns it to fragrance which it scatters right to the world's four points:
 My bones will appear later phosphorescing an azure
 Which the Archangel carries in his arms and lets trickle
 As with great strides he traverses the second Greece of the upper world.*

1. "Adramyttion Bay": a beautiful bay between Lesbos and Turkey.

Since I fell in love with these little bodies I grew thin, wasted. Asleep or awake I had nothing else in mind—just how to raise them, so one day to sleep with them. I lay in wait behind doors. I learned to catch them in air and in water. But I still don't know how to speak them.

A.¹—White or cyan, according to the hours and positions of the stars.

L.—Really wet. Like a pebble.

G.—The most lightweight; so your inability to pronounce it shows the degree of your barbarity.

R.—A child's and, certainly, almost always of female gender.

E.—All air. The sea breeze takes it.

U.—The most Greek letter. An urn.

S.—Weed. But the Greek must sometimes also whistle.

1. "A.L.G.R.E.U.S.": a made-up word that suggests to Elytis "salt: (als), "chase-hunt" (agra), and "farm-field" (agros). Elytis knew French literature extremely well and would have had Rimbaud's sonnet "Voyelles" in mind.

*You are young—I know—and nothing exists.
 Peoples, nations, freedoms, nothing.
 Nevertheless you are. And the moment
 You leave with one foot you come back with the other
 Lovelight-rent
 You pass whether you want to or not
 Piper of plants you rally the idols
 Against us. As long as your voice holds out.*

*How when you hold the virgin's cicada
 Your muscles vibrate beneath your skin
 Or when animals drink and then look about
 They quench your wretchedness: just so you
 Receive the thunderbolt from Zeuses
 And the world obeys you. Onward then
 Spring depends on you. Quicken the lightning*

Grab the ONE MUST by the T and skin it back to O.

*I await the hour when a
 Mercy-giving orchard will assimilate
 The refuse of all centuries—when a
 Girl will declare in her body a beautiful
 Revolution with tremulous voices and glisters
 Of fruit bringing history back again
 To its starting point
 in which case
 Probably even Westerners will go Greek
 Reaching all the way to the fig tree's liver
 Or the perfection of waves will be declared to them
 While asleep
 and from a breach in their thought the fumes
 Of a certain courageous lavender encountered in childhood
 Will propitiate the starry spaces full of angers.*

Three hours' walk from memory I found myself hunting in the forest of vowels.
 Marksman by instinct (and full of feeling) I strike and shoot.

emblem	Mays'	lekythos
line	sea	commander
halcyon	oranges	jewel
prey	fountain	dazzling
whisper	tassel	Syrtis
beloved-one	opinion	Marina ¹
mint	metallic	Miletus
rhythm	trickle	silver
adytum	purposely	caduceus
little	mother-of-God's	Monastery
tangerine	fold	Myrtle
Pergamum	bestarred	verdant
zone	high-noon	indolence
sunflowers	ravines	March
oracle	morning	cube
mystical	flora	gush forth
	clearing	

1. "Marina": She often appears in Elytis. See, e.g., Marina of the Rocks in *Orientations*.

*What do you want what do you look for
 where is the meaning that fell from your hands
 The music you alone hear and the naked
 Feet that shift earth like a dancer's
 While the comet of her hair tosses and a spark
 Falls before you on the carpet
 Where you watch the truth deceive you.*

*Where are you going what sorrow what burning
 Dress is this that detaches your flesh what
 Transformed ancient spring to make you give oracles
 Thus leaf by leaf and pebble by pebble*

*Youth kneeling in the transparent deep
 The more I sleep and dream the more I see you rise
 With a basket of green shells and seaweed
 Biting as if a coin the same sea that
 Gave you the very shining the very light the meaning you seek.*

*Now that mind is forbidden and hours do not turn
 From garden to garden my thought
 Timid as a novice rose bush
 Clasped by the railing
 Attempts all over again to fashion
 With shining waterdrop wedges
 The ancient greens and those golds that inside us
 Are forever of July seventeenth
 So that heard again on the stones is the water of St. Marina¹
 Sleep that smells of an embracing couple
 The voice
 a voice like the Mother's
 So that once more freedom goes out and walks
 Barefoot on the flagstones of Missolonghi
 As when the poet hailed her for our sake²—may all be well
 With him—and since then we have celebrated the Resurrection.*

1. "St. Marina": This saint averts demons. Her festal day is July 17th. See "Lesbos" in "What One Loves (Snapshots)" below.

2. "Freedom goes . . . our sake": evokes Solomos's "The Free Besieged" (see note to "Entrance"). Byron, on whom Solomos wrote a magnificent elegy, also died at Missolonghi.

What One Loves (The Traveling Bag)*

I emptied and refilled my travel bag. "Only what's necessary," I said.
And it was enough for this life—and for many others yet. So I set myself
to listing them one by one:

CRETE

Sealstone with representation of chamois (Heracleion Museum).
The Prince of Lilies (Knosos).

THERA

Kore (fresco).

EGYPT

Portrait of a Woman (Ouserat, tomb no. 51).
Young Man with Antelope (Menna, tomb no. 69).

HOMER

dark water
gleaming entry wall
an endless bright aether burst forth

ARCHILOCHUS

with their souls in the arms of the waves

SAPPHO

long night

HERACLITUS

quench hubris more than a fire
the kingdom a boy's

* The title "What One Loves," repeated with different subtitles below, comes from Sappho's song of Anactoria. The poem's first stanza is
Some say a cavalry company, some
name soldiers, some would call ships
earth's fairest thing, but I say
it is what one loves most.

"Memory reminds [Sappho] of all that she can no longer see, and she finds that her one desire is for an actual glimpse of the absent one. This somewhat surprising discovery leads her to meditate . . . what it is that one sees and why one values certain sights" (Anne Pippin Burnett, *Three Archaic Poets*, London, 1983; p. 277).

PINDAR

we are all swimming toward the illusory shore
chill flame
let him search for the bright light of manly Quietude

ETRURIA

Young Men Restraining a Horse (Tarquinia).
Flutist among birds (Three-Chambered Tomb).

ATHENS

Euphronius: Leagros on Horseback (Munich Museum of Ancient Art).
Group of Horsemen from the Parthenon frieze.
Statuette of Aphrodite (Berlin Museum).
Aphrodite with Bent Legs (Rhodes Museum).
Servant Girl Guarding Tomb (National Archeological Museum of Athens).
Amynocleia (Grave stele).

AESCHYLUS

far-traveled wanderings
dark sunburnt race
numberless laughter of the waves

SOPHOCLES

sheds fresh froth of tears
O Sleep ignorant of woe
I invoke thee giver of eternal sleep

BYZANTIUM

Fragment of the "City of Nazareth" (Kariye Mosque).
Palm Sunday icon from the Palatine Chapel (Palermo).
Manuscript of Jacobus Kokkinobaphus: Paradise. Its gate and four rivers (Bibliothèque National, Paris).
Fragment of the "Presentation of the Virgin" by Michael Damaskenos (Byzantine Museum of Athens).
St. Demetrius. Folk icon of the Macedonian School (private collection).

ANASTASIOS

tears burn us all

ROMANOS

and dark my blood, with which I dip and write
the sweet flower has become milkweed to me

DAMASKENOS¹

in ageless youth
Burial Service
O my sweet springtime

DANTE

*Lo bel pianeta che d'amar conforta
E come giga e arpa, in tempra tesa
dei molte corde, fa dolce tin tinno*

PAOLO UCCELLO

The Battle of San Romano (National Gallery, London).

FRA ANGELICO

Left side of the "Coronation of the Virgin" (Louvre, Paris).

PIERO DELLA FRANCESCA

La Natività (National Gallery, London).

Section of the "Flagellation" (Galleria Nazionale delle Marche,
Urbino).

EL GRECO

Left side of the "Jesus on the Mount of Olives" (Museum of Art,
Toledo, Ohio).

VERMEER

The Atelier (Vienna, State Museum).

The Music Lesson (Buckingham Palace).

Sleeping Woman (Metropolitan Museum, New York).

VIVALDI

Concerto in C Major for recorder, strings, and cembalo, PV 79.

Largo from the Concerto in D Minor for viola d'amore, strings and
basso continuo, PV 266.

1. "Damaskenos": St. John Damascene (fl. 730) was a Byzantine religious poet and composer.

BACH

Suite no. 2 for flute and strings (BWV 1067).

Concerto in F Major for oboe, strings and cembalo (BWV 1053).

HAYDN

Trio in A, H.XV 18.

MOZART

Allegro from the Divertimento in E-flat for violin, viola, and
violoncello, K. 563.

Allegro from the Concerto for piano and orchestra no. 15 in B-flat
major, K. 450.

Andante from the Concerto for piano and orchestra no. 21 in C major,
K. 467.

BLAKE

wash the dusk with silver

BEETHOVEN

Sonata for violin and piano no. 2 in A major, op. 12

Sonata for violoncello and piano no. 5 in D major, op. 102, 1.

HÖLDERLIN

Ein Räthsel ist Reinentsprungenes. Auch

Der Gesang kaum darf es enthüllen

Denn schwer ist zu tragen

Das Unglück, aber schwerer das Glück

NOVALIS

Sie wissen nicht, dass du es bist der des zarten Mädchens

Busen umschwebt und zum Himmel den Schoss macht

Jahrtausende zögen abwärts in die Ferne, wie Ungewitter

KALVOS

The circle-chasing sun

enriches the sea

with the scent

of golden citrons

SOLOMOS

for some affairs of the soul

And he in the aether's star-abundance

In her sleep she was murmuring the turtledove's weeping

NERVAL

Mon front est rouge encore du baiser de la Reine

MALLARMÉ

Et j'ai cru voir la fée au chapeau de clarté

PAPADIAMANTIS¹

of the old oak tree, where with the cymbal-striking petals of her *leaf-raging* boughs she narrated the memories of the centuries

Then, through the open window I saw a star shine in the little house's interior

RIMBAUD

Je pisse vers les cieux brune, très haut et très loin,

Avec l'assentiment des grand héliotropes

CAVAFY

In the month of Athyr Leucius fell asleep

a Mrs. Irene Andronicos Asan

YEATS

the moonless midnight of the trees

BAUDELAIRE

Nous aurons des lits pleins d'odeurs légères

L'homme y passe à travers des forêts de symboles

MATISSE

Still Life with Oysters (1940; Kunstmuseum, Bâle).

Plum Branch (Private collection).

Papier Coupé gray and blue (Éditions Verve).

1. "Papadiamantis": modern Greek literature's greatest fiction writer (1851–1911). See note to Psalm XI in *Axion Esti*.

KLEE

Goldfish (1925–26; private collection, Holland).

Traces of an Aquatic Plant (collection Lyonel Feininger).

PICASSO

Circus Horse. Drawing (Museum of Modern Art, New York).

Woman with Fan (collection Averell Harriman).

Woman, Child, and Centaur. Drawing (Musée d'Antibes).

BRAQUE

Still Life (1934; Kunstmuseum, Bâle).

JUAN GRIS

Vial of Banyuls (collection Hermann Rupf, Berne).

Still Life with Roses (private collection, Paris).

ARP

Tears of Enak (1917; private collection).

Torso with Flowerhead (private collection).

ELUARD

Une sublime chaleur bleue

D'une écriture d'algues solaires

LORCA

Silencio de cal y mirto

UNGARETTI

Astri Penelopi innumeri

EZRA POUND

You are violets with wind above them

DALI

Nostalgic Echo (private collection).

ROTHKO

Untitled (1951; collection Mr. Gifford Phillips, New York).

THEODORAKIS¹
The Myrtle Tree
On the Secret Seashore
Gloria from the *Axion Esti*

HADJIDAKIS²
Birds
A Virgin Mary

MOUSTAKI³
The Immigrant

G. GUSTIN-M. TÉZÉ
Monsieur Cannibale

1. "Theodorakis": a great contemporary composer, who has set much poetry, including Seferis's "On the Secret Seashore" and Elytis's *Axion Esti*.
2. "Hadjidakis": a great contemporary song composer.
3. "Moustaki": a contemporary Gallo-Greek songwriter and singer.

Spotlight ii

First scene: Bedridden, with gangrene of the leg, Miltiades¹ has been carried to Court and there, with amazement and extreme disheartenment, hears his condemnation.

Second scene: With resignation, after his ostracism by the Athenians, Aristides² boards the ship which will take him away from his country.

Third scene: Phidias,³ thrown into jail like a criminal, slowly dies from old age and sorrow.

Fourth scene: The agents mobilized by the Thirty throw themselves into slaughter and plunder.

Fifth scene: On the jail's poor mattress, Socrates, after being condemned to death, calmly drinks the hemlock and expires.

Sixth scene: Alexander the Great, outside his tent, gives the order to exterminate his devoted general Parmenion.

Seventh scene: Amid the general uproar, Phocion⁴ and his friends, without being able to defend themselves, are condemned to death.

1. "Miltiades": the great Athenian general (ca. 550–489 B.C.), who won the battle of Marathon (490), saving Greece from the Persians.

2. "Aristides": a great statesman and soldier, called "The Just," ostracized 489 B.C.

3. "Phidias": the greatest Classical sculptor (b. 490 B.C.).

4. "Phocion": a great Athenian general and statesman; by misjudgment, he let the Piraeus fall and so was executed by the restored democracy in 318 B.C.

To Anoint the Repast

VIII

NAKED, IN THE MONTH OF JULY, high noon. In a narrow bed, between two thick drill sheets, with my cheek on my arm which I lick and taste its saltiness.

I look at the whitewash opposite on the wall of my little room. A bit higher the ceiling with its beams. Lower the chest in which I have laid all my possessions: two pairs of trousers, four shirts, some underwear. Next to it, the chair with the huge straw hat. On the ground, on the black and white tiles, my two sandals. By my side I also have a book.

I was born to have just so much. Extravagant speech makes no impression on me. From the least thing you get there sooner. Only it is harder. And from the girl you love you get there too, but you have to know to touch her when nature obeys you. And from nature—but you have to know to pull out its splinter.

IX

"YESTERDAY I STUCK MY HAND in the sand and held hers. Later all afternoon, the geraniums in the courtyards gave me meaningful looks. The boats, hauled ashore, took on something familiar, recognizable. And late in the evening, when I took off her earrings to kiss her the way I like, with her back leaning against the churchyard wall, the sea thundered and the Saints came out holding candles with light for me."

Doubtless for each one of us there is a separate, irreplaceable sense which if one does not find it and isolate it on time and cohabit with it later, so as to fill it with visible acts, one is lost.

X

THAT I WAS ABLE TO ACQUIRE a life of acts visible to everyone, and consequently to earn my own transparency, I owe to a kind of special courage that Poetry gave me: for me to become wind for the paper kite and a kite for the wind, even when there is no sky.

I am not playing with words. I speak about the movement that one discovers being marked at the "moment" when one manages to open it and give it duration. In which case, really, Distress becomes Grace and Grace an Angel; Happiness a Nun and the Nun Happiness

with long, white folds above the void,

a void filled with waterdrops of birds, breezes of basil, and whisperings of faintly heard Paradise.

XI

TRUTHS OF THE IMAGINATION decay with much more difficulty. Rimbaud survived the Commune the way Sappho's moon will survive Armstrong's moon. Calculations of another kind are needed.

The clock that concerns us is not that which counts the hours but that which allots the portion of things' decay and indestructibility, in which, anyhow, we participate, as we participate in youth or age. Maybe that's why death always frightened me less than illness; and a tender body dazzled me more than the most tender emotion.

The sun bursts within us and we hold our palms over our mouths in terror.

The wind rises. The divine triumphs.

XII

FROM THE PEBBLE TO THE FIG LEAF and from the fig leaf to the pomegranate, as from the Kouros to the Charioteer¹ and from the Charioteer to Athena.

I dream of an Ethic whose ultimate anagoge would lead to the consubstantial and indivisible Trinity itself.

1. "Charioteer": the famous bronze statue (ca. 470 B.C.) in Delphi.

XIII

ON HOMER'S BEACHES was a bliss, a grandeur, which reached our days untouched. The soles of our feet, digging the same sand feel it. We walk thousands of years, the wind continually bends the canebrakes and we continually raise our faces. Whither? Until when? Who are in charge?

We need a body of laws that develops form like our own skins as we grow up. Something both youthful and strong, like the "therein were everflowing waters" or the "shedding a copious tear."¹ So that what man gives birth to may surpass man without suppressing him.

1. The quotations are from *Odyssey* XIII, l. 109, and *Iliad* VI, l. 496 or XXIV, ll. 9 and 474.

XIV

I STUDIED MY HIGHER MATHEMATICS in the School of the sea. Here are some operations as example:

- 1) If you take Greece apart, in the end you will see remaining to you an olive tree, a vineyard, and a ship. Which means: with just so much you can put her back together.
- 2) The product of fragrant herbs times innocence always gives the shape of a certain Jesus Christ.
- 3) Happiness is right relation between acts (shapes) and sensations (colors). Our life is cut, and should be cut, to the same measurements Matisse cut his colored papers.
- 4) Where fig trees are is Greece. Where the mountain extends beyond the word mountain is the poet. Sensual pleasure is no subtrahend.
- 5) A late afternoon in the Aegean includes joy and sorrow in such equal doses that only truth remains in the end.
- 6) Every progress on the ethical level can only be in inverse proportion to the ability of power and number to determine our fates.
- 7) An "Anchorite" for half the people is, by necessity, "He Who Comes" for the other half.

With Both Light and Death

No matter how in a kiss's century
I can't catch you Fortune
you I ap in a shed
ankles Parian stone in the veins
when the mast points fore
striped the sky a peacock
Rays with upper clouds white on the hill
In green gold and birds' foliage that
Regards the water through the reeds
uninhabited soul whence
Single swallow you brought me a tear.

mourning
 With fres slow
 And en
 Dream gir like an island by waves and there
 At the shore's edge
 Moon-salved like Aethiops aloft
 homeless families of and maps of stars
 That angels paint with an invisible right hand
 Sle sently as always.

* The fragmentation imitates the mutilation suffered by poems on papyrus strips. Many in Sappho and Archilochus.

*Have you I wonder ever pondered
 The grape the moment when love forms you
 As time forms the stalactite? And have you
 Seen the orange stir in your dreams
 One Mary—two the new moon
 The leafage still all dark
 Heavy with death that failed to thin out?*

*What does it mean
 To be from a fine house as the cicada from a pine axe
 How equally insignificant and ready for loss
 And ready for duration within the golden time are you?*

*Child—you're calling me one! Play if you dare
 Make like a plant—coil me the wind
 Enter the sleep of a virgin and bring me her dress
 In your teeth like a dog. Or if not, then
 Bark bark after your shadow
 As I have all my life amid noons.*

*I speak with the patience of the tree that rises
Before the window just as old
Whose shutters the wind has dilapidated
And keeps pushing it open and getting it wet*

*With water of Helen and with words
Lost in the dictionaries of Atlantis
I alone—and Earth from the opposite place
The place of destruction and of death.*

*The tree that knows me says “hold on”
Gathers clouds and keeps them company
As I do the white paper and the pencil
Through nights that have no clock to look at*

*What does it mean “you mustn’t,” “that’s not suitable.”
I have seen virgins and have opened
Their downy shell to find the inner place
The place of destruction and of death.*

HALFMANKINDKILLHALFLUCKFORY
 OUGREEKSYOUNGKORECOMESSUNFL
 OWERINHANDSEEKINGJUSTICEAND
 ITNEVERSHOWSWHICHMOUNTAINLI
 NEINYOUROPENPALMISTHEWAYWIT
 HWINDINHERHAIRANDSEAWATERSV
 OICESHEFILLSHERREEDBASKETWH
 ERENOSTRANGERKNOWSTOHELPWIT
 HHISTHUNDERBOLTSALWAYSALONE
 THEWRONGEDLIKETHEWELLBENEAT
 HTHEANCESTRALSTONETILSOMETI
 MEWHENTHETIMESRIPEYOUHAVECL
 EARLIGHTPOUROERYOUWITHPOWER

* This imitates the appearance of Classical inscriptions—no space between words and no punctuation.

*For a short moment may you play on your guitar
The names of the Virgin¹ and you will see*

Oh oh Goldenhaired
Oh oh Goldenstaired

*The mountain with the white house on its slope
The horse with two wings
And the wild sea-strawberry jump forth*

Gleaming one my Kanala and my Paraportiani

*You'll see the pitching green fishing rowboat vanish in cornstalks
Mitsos with his chest hair and a little chain around his neck*

Oh Lady of Wellsprings
Oh Lady of Abundant Water

*You'll see him blaspheme and unknowing raise in his nets
Four or five ancient Greek things
The τέλλεσθε and the νηυσί, the μελέα and the κρίναι σὰ*

Karystiani and Akleidiani
Lady of Daphne and of Argos

*Which for a moment you play on your guitar
And from the kindled sea opposite you hear*

Hey Lady of Crystal hey Lady of Dew
Hey Virgin of Victory

1. The epithets for the virgin are current and local. The poet writes, "most are from islands" and reveal an "unimaginable richness." Paraportiani, for example, is a splendid small church on Mykonos; the name means "postern-gate." The ancient Greek words that Mitsos the fisherman drags up mean "arise," "to ships" (Ionian dialect), "limbs" or "melodies," and "judge your."

*Let the veil of the sky be rent in two
And let a very old ephebe identical with you
Descend—look:
Upright on the waves with a harpoon and glide upon the foam*

Lady of the Cave and of Myrtle and Seamaid hey! .

*Guarded within me forever
 At anyone's disposal: the northern boulder
 Rushing but motionless
 The solitude of the sacred waves
 And earthborn sleep four times
 Stronger with his own Zeus who hurls thunderbolts
 Onto an unseen white seashore.*

*Signs in the air: l—i—v—e
 (Signs high the moment that at great depth
 A Sikinos passes foaming)
 Signs everflowing to broadcast that
 Mistakenly pain echoes in the body
 And as for danger—you've only got to be a skillful
 Helmsman or to be Ictinus¹
 and right away you pin it down.*

1. "Ictinus": architect (fl. 450 B.C.) of the Parthenon and the temple of Apollo at Bassae.

To the Beauty th' All Holy One the star with twofold ploughing
Who holds a male dove in her grasp and lo! her hand is shining.

What One Loves (Aegean Route)

When I opened my guidebook, I understood. Neither plans nor anything. Only words. But words to guide with precision to what I was looking for. So, bit by bit, turning the pages I saw the place take on form like the tear from emotion. And I in it.

Alexandra	bride	crab
All Souls' Day	bridle	crazyman
anchovy	broom shrub	crickets
anemone	bucket	cross
anise	bushel	cuttlebone
Anna	butterfly	cyclamen
ant		cypress
arch	cabin boy	
ardor	cage	daisy
August	caïque	dandelion greens
awning	calm seas	desert isle
	canary	dew
bar lock	candelabra	dirge
barrel	candle	dittany
basil	candlestick	dolphin
basket	captain	dome
beach	cardamom	donkey
bee	castlehill	door bolt
bell	caulking	doublemint
bergamot	cemetery	dovecote
besom	censer	dragnet
birdsong	chamomile	dropline
bitter orange	chapel	
bittersea	chicken soup	echo
blanket	cicada	eggplant
blite	cistern	embers
bluing	citron	etesian wind
boat	cobble street	eucalyptus
bolt	codfish	
bougainvillea	coffeehouse	family wash
bouillabaisse	combs	farmhand
boulder	cork	fern
breakwater	courtyard	feta cheese

fiancée	grandmother	jump rope
figus	grape	
fig tree	grapefruit	keel
fireplace	grape-must	kerchief
fisherman	grass	kilim
fish hook	grasshopper	kiln
fishing gear	gravel	kiss
fishing nightlight	gray mullet	kopanisti cheese
fishing rod	grouper	
fishline	gunwale	lane
fishnets		lantern
fish spear	harbor	lateen sails
flat	hare	leeward
flat roof	headland	lemon geranium
flowerbeds	hedge	lemon tree
flowerpot	Helen	lentisk
flowerwater	helm	levanter
foam	high seas	lighthouse
foreign lands	hold oars	limpet
fountain	holy bread	little bridge
fresh olive	holy water bless-	little stairs
Froso	ing	lizard
frost	honeysuckle	lobster
fruit market	house garden	locust
funeral	hyacinth	loom
		love
gamay	icon	lure
gamin	incense	
garfish	isthmus	magic spell
gecko	ivy	main
geranium		Manto
ghost	jacks	marble
girl	jasmine	Marina
glade	jellyfish	marzipan
glowworm	jib	mast
glycine	jonquil	mastic
goat	joy of dawn	medico
goldbug	jug	melon
goldfish	jujube	minium
gold florins	July	mint
gooseberry	June	monastery

moon	passion flower	reef
motorboat	pebble	reel
muleteer	pebblestones	resin
muscat	Penniless Saints	riddles
mussels	perch	rockfish
mustard plant	petal	rockpool
mute	petticoat	rockrose
myrtle	phantom	rosemary
Myrto ¹	philodendron	rubble wall
	Photeine	ruins
nercid	pina clam	
nightshade	pine tree	saddle
northeaster	pistachio	sage
northwester	pitcher	sail trim
northwind	pitchpaint	Saint John's day
noon	plane tree	fortune
nun	plank	Saint Mamas
	Pleiades	Saint Marina
oars	plum	Saint Paraskevi
ocher	point	salt
octopus	pomegranate	Salutations ²
old man	tree	scaffolding
oleander	popular	schooner
olive oil lamp	poppy	scorpion
olive press	prickly pear	sea
olive tree	priest	sea bird
orange	promontory	sea breeze
Orion	prow	sea cave
osier	psalter	sea daffodil
ouzo	pumice	seadepts
oven		seagull
	ravine bed	seamint
palm frond	red clay	seal
passage	red mullet	sea rock

1. "Myrto": a girl's name that appears often in Elytis, often as *myrtle*; in *Axion Esti* she is "young Myrto, the whore from Sikinos."

2. "Salutations": The Acathest Hymn, an elaborate poetic composition addressed to the Mother of God. The tradition is that it was sung standing (acathist) by the people of Constantinople in thanksgiving after a joint attack of Avars and Persians had been averted by a storm which sank the hulks transporting the enemy in ca. 620.

seashell	stopper	Virgin Mary
sea urchin	storm	Virgin's pony
seaweed	stormjib	
September	strait	water hole
sesame	straw hat	watermelon
sheepskin	sun	water spout
shell	sunflower	wave
ship's hold	sun glitter	weaving
shrimp	surf sound	well buckets
shroud	swallow	wellspring
sideboard	swordfish	westwind
silver bream		whitebait
silvering	talisman	white bream
sirocco	tangerine	who-sees-spirits
sleep	tar	wild dove
snowdrop	tassel	wild goat
sour cherry	Taxiarch	wild pear tree
southwester	tholepin	windgust
southwind	three-master	windmill
sparrow	threshing floor	windowpanes
spearmint	tomato	windward
squash	tomb	
stalactite	tramontana	xebec
stall	trawler	
starfish	turpentine	yellowtail
starlight	turtledove	youngberry
stone bench		
stone boat	unspeaking water	zephyr
stone wall	urn	zucchini

Spotlight iii*

First scene: The first Christian emperor, Constantine,¹ gives the order to arrest and put to death his own son Crispus.

Second scene: Heraclius² men have led his nephew Theodorus and bastard son Adalarichus to torture. They cut off nose, hands, and right foot.

Third scene: After having blinded her underage son Constantine, Irene the Athenian³ proclaims the eunuch Staurakius Most High Chancellor.

Fourth scene: Theofano⁴ secretly leads her lover John Tsimiskes to the conjugal chambers of the Palace for him to murder Nicephorus Phocas.

Fifth scene: In church, during the memorial service for the Emperor Theodorus Lascaris,⁵ Michael III Paleologus⁶ murders the underage John IV and takes his place.

Sixth scene: At Christmas matins, Michael the Stutterer,⁷ helped by six other conspirators, kills his benefactor Emperor Leo V.⁸

Seventh scene: Andronicus I Comnenus⁹ strangles his nephew Alexius and marries his widow, thirteen years of age.

* Examples of betrayal from the Roman-Byzantine world.

1. "Constantine": (ca. 285–337) restored Roman political vigor.

2. "Heraclius": (r. 610–41) successfully reorganized the empire. His conquest of Persia was the last great eastward expansion before the Moslem onslaught.

3. "Irene the Athenian": acted as regent for her son Constantine IV, whom she blinded in 797; she thus became Byzantium's first female ruler. She was deposed before she could answer a marriage proposal from Charlemagne.

4. "Theofano": a princess on whom imperial descent depended; she murdered her husband Nicephorus Phocas in 969 and married John Tsimiskes.

5. "Theodorus Lascaris": emperor of Byzantine Nicaea (r. 1254–58).

6. "Michael III Paleologus": crowned co-emperor with Theodorus Lascaris's son John IV in 1259.

7. "Michael the Stutterer": Michael II the Amorian was a rough soldier who became emperor in 820.

8. "Leo V": (r. 813–20), called the Armenian.

9. "Andronicus I Comnenus": became emperor by strangling the legitimate successor; a bloody ruler, he was torn to pieces by a mob (1185), angry at his suppression of the circus.

To Anoint the Repast

MY CHILDHOOD YEARS are filled with canebrakes. I spent much wind to grow up. But only thus did I learn to distinguish the faintest rustlings, so to speak with precision amid the mysteries.

A language such as Greek where agape is one thing and eros another; desire one thing and yearning another; grief one thing and marasmus another; guts¹ one thing and entrails another. I mean to say: Such clear tones are—alas—less and less perceived by those who more and more move away from the meaning of a heavenly body whose light is our assimilated toil, such a toil as does not cease to revert back again every day all dazzle so as to reward us.

Willy-nilly, we constitute not only the matter but also the instrument of an eternal exchange between what preserves us and what we give it so that it preserve us: the black, which we give, so that it be given back to us as white, the mortal as everliving.

And we owe to the duration of a flash of light our possible happiness.

1. "guts": The Greek equivalent is a rich word that could, for example, be used to address affectionately one's child.

XVI

THE SOUL has its own dust, so woe if wind rises in us. Vehemences strike the windows, the panes shatter. Few know that the superlative in feelings is formed by light, not by force. And that a caress is needed where a knife is used. That a bedchamber with the mysterious mutual understanding of bodies follows us everywhere and conveys us to holiness without concessions.

Ah! when the moment arrives for us also to sit on the stone bench of some church of St. Prekla¹ amid wild fig trees, mulberry trees with crimson fruit, in a deserted place, a precipitous coast, then little Button candle in her hand will rise on tiptoe and reach up high to all the flammabilities in our sighs: passions, spites, cries of rage, myriads of little colored insects so that the landscape light up!

1. "St. Prekla": a conflation, it seems, of the names of Pontius Pilate's wife, St. Prokla, and the first female martyr, St. Thekla.

XVII

AND LOOK: RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE OF MISERY, from the excavations of Santorini, from beyond despair—at last: a Kore Therasia arrives holding out her hand as if to say “Hail Man Full of Grace.”

I am not a painter, Kore Therasia.¹ But I shall utter you with whitewash and sea. I shall extend you with what I write to what I do. I shall offer you a life (the life I was never blessed with) without policemen, without dossiers, without cells. With only a white bird over your head.

I shall plant grapevine-words. I shall build a Palace with what you give me to love. From Hegeso² I shall arrive at St. Catherine. I shall bring earth and peace.

1. “Kore Therasia”: suggested by a fresco from Thera, she also appears in “The Garden Sees” (*Three Poems*) and (before the fresco was unearthed) “Ode to Santorini” (*Orientations*).

2. “Hegeso”: a lovely girl from a Classical gravestone (ca. 400 B.C.) in the National Museum of Athens.

XVIII

FROM EARLY CHILDHOOD, they stuffed my head with the image of a death hooded in black, who held life like a mousetrap and offered it to us open, and in it the lure of sensual pleasure. Permit me to laugh. He who chewed bay leaf¹ said something else. And it is not by chance that we all revolve around the sun.

The body knows.

1. "who chewed bay leaf": like the oracular priestess at Delphi.

XIX

MY BEAUTIFUL ARCHANGEL hello, with pleasures like fruit in a basket!

-

A SMALL MOUNTAIN OF WILDFLOWERS, just as unspoilable and unwithering as in our thought, trembles every time that we manage to become air. And the thing is, given that we all want it, we *are able*. The way that we are able to reach to all the infinite square meters of ethics, which are spread beyond the one and abominable, alas, where a very ancient stupidity, strong in endurance, has pinned us down.

I EXPRESS MYSELF LIKE A BERGAMOT in the morning air. The filtration, understood by no one else, is what is important. Amid social struggles, the longing for justice and freedom, the inalienability of the individual: a fragrance!

Man is never so great, or so little, as the concepts he conceives, starting from Angel on to Demon. He is equal to the part that remains when the two opposing forces neutralize each other. If I like to rise to a tree's nobility or to convert solutions into an enigma, here is why. To become the child I was and to have at my disposal again, completely for free, that infinite visibility, more powerful, more enduring than any other kind of Revolution.

I was looking at the place that could fit through the big square window: a few burnt shores and a dark blue strip of wave. In my sleep, later on, at three in the afternoon, I saw Hermes descend from on high, one leg bent, holding in his arms a little girl head down with her hair flowing in the wind.

With Both Light and Death

*The girls' songs full of earth
Where tears shine like The Bear
And the superabundant grass of the sky on which you trod
Once and it forever exists
Annexed to your own Greek dominion
If you are he who truly lives and lives opposed
To superfluous things and days
The left-handed Jesus¹ oh
then you shall understand me.*

THE LITTLE SEAFARER

*Where shall I say it night in the air
 To the stars' medlars to the blackness smelling of
 The sea where shall I speak the Greek of grief
 With trees for capitals where shall I write it
 That the sages know to decipher
 Between the second and third wave
 Such an anguish heavy with stones that did not sink*

*Saint Sozon¹—you who watch over storms
 Raise me the eye of the sea
 That I go miles in it to the green translucence
 That I arrive there where the sky's masterworkers dig
 And may I find again the moment before I was born
 When the violets were fragrant when I didn't know
 The way the thunderbolt doesn't know its lightning
 But doublestrikes you—all luminous!*

1. "Saint Sozon": The Cappadocian saint (fl. 288) is popular with mariners because of his name: saver.

Springtime came down from heaven when
 Winnowing out myriad sprinklings of rays
 Thou camest gray-green in thy epiphany

And with a vial of sleep advancing
 Onto a glissading hillslope of stars
 Thou didst trample the idle-chatterers

Down to the ground and gavest out vapour.
 Garrisons of glacial rosemaries
 Were furnishing the mountains

And vying with them abounded
 Poppies of the night until
 Frisky words of thy lips

Myriad-wingèd wholly
 Now were turning back again truly
 The sea travelers' dreams

Once carried away as spoils in time past.
 Thou as a goatherd's hermitage hast lighted
 Our soul in the pit Kore.

* This poem includes words from Papadiamantis, who wrote in a lyrical purist Greek known to the educated. Greek readers familiar with the ceremonies of the Orthodox Church would recognize the allusion to the three greatest feasts of the Christian year. At the Epiphany on January 6th, the waters of seas and rivers, gray-green at that season, are blessed and the priest sprinkles the congregation with holy water, using a characteristic gesture, like a man winnowing. The word *trample* in line 6 echoes the Easter anthem "Christ rose from the dead, trampling down death by death. . . ." "Gavest out vapour" in line 7 is surely an allusion to Pentecost, where (see Acts 2:19) St. Peter quotes Joel 2:30. "Thou" (line 17) refers to Kore the Maiden who is also Persephone, Queen of Hades, and the Virgin Mary, Queen of Heaven.

*Real in place of the one they took from us
Will still beat and a gratitude
From the trees you touched will canopy us*

O loosed lightning and how they rebind you

*That I no longer have air nor an animal's company
Nor even a woodcutter's lost thunder-axe
I hear waters running*

*(And I blaspheme) or are they from the mouth
Of some monastic who approached the peak's Mystic Keys
And opened them*

therefore I address Thee

*Holy Tuesday Evening¹ with opposite me the unprecedented
Sea—that you may tell it good-bye and thanks.*

1. “Holy Tuesday Evening”: The Greek Orthodox service for the evening of Tuesday in Holy Week contains this poem on Mary Magdalene, the whore turned saint, by Cassia (ca. 840):

Lord, the woman who fell into many sins,
and felt thy divinity,
and has taken up with the ointment-bearing order,
weeping brings thee ointment at thy entombment;
“alas!” she says, “what night is upon me,
murky and moonless of licentious madness,
eros of sin;
accept my wells of tears
thou who conductest through clouds the water of the sea;
incline thou to my heart’s moans
who madest thy sky bow with thy inexpressible emptying;
much I shall kiss thy immaculate feet,
and wipe them dry again
with the tresses of my head;
whose footfalls Eve heard in late afternoon in Paradise
and hid in fear;
who will trace out my multitude of sins and the abysses
of thy judgments, my savior of souls?
Do not pass by thy slave
in thy boundless mercy.”

*The cantering of beautiful horses will help me
To say my prayer before I sleep
On the straw mat—as when I was born—with a few sun
Freckles on my brow and the ancient heart
That knows all Homer and so yet endures*

*Striking to exhaustion into the black rock
Of Psara¹ I bring in my open fist a light full
Of veneration for you future Greek daisies
Who threw a sugar-almond² to Hades*

*Boldly I speak a bit of gold
Upon the portals just as the birds know how
To leave an idea of joy and afterwards to die*

*Good-bye and my open fountain drop by drop
Again fills azure time*

Which is innocent and without measure.

1. "Psara": The inhabitants of this tiny island were massacred by the Turks during the War of Independence. Solomos wrote this famous poem about it, "Glory," which, among other things, proved the demotic could rival the grave brevity of Simonides:

*On the deep black ridge of Psara
Glory walking in solitude
meditates on the bright young heroes
and on her hair she wears a wreath
woven of the scanty grasses
remaining on that desolate land.*

2. "sugar-almond": distributed at baptisms and weddings.

You were telling me to leave yesterday the most heartrending
 Sea we took the church candelabrum
 With the Blueberries

 thirteen I am
 Or even if you come roof-high with below

Words of Homer read on your body

Wave-turned mirages
 Airy Poseidon all carnations
 Of signs because dewy I was until.

*And most important of all: you will die.
 The other Golden Horn will open
 Its mouth for you to pass with white face
 While the music continues and on the trees
 Which you never turned to see the hoarfrost will release
 One by one your works. Oh what then*

ask yourself

*Whether from now on the truth gives off
 Drops whether the Milky Way widens
 In actuality then wet gleaming with your hand upon
 Noble laurel you leave even more Greek
 Than I who blew for you the propitious wind in the strait
 Who packed in your luggage whitewash and bluing
 The little icon showing gold July and August
 And you know I being a lost
 Voyager when you will give me hospitality
 Setting on the tablecloth
 The bread the olives and the consciousness
 Day first for us in the second homeland of the upper world.*

What One Loves (Snapshots)

Precision above all, I said. And I was careful to keep the f-stop narrow. When I got it developed I saw clearly: I had caught certain moments, or, say, "snapshots" that, once they existed, nothing ever again could destroy.

i

CORFU

A spring night in a distant country cemetery. That luminous cloud of fireflies moving faintly from tomb to tomb.

LESBOS

In Mystegna, morning, going up the olive groves to the chapel of Saint Marina. The burden you feel lifted from you like sin or remorse and that is digested by the thick earth, as if drawn by the magnanimity of ancestors.

SKIATHOS

The hour when the little boat enters the sea cave, and after dazzling light you suddenly find yourself closed inside a freezing blue-green mint.

ANDROS

Strapouryies. Moonlight on the flowering cliffs, all the way to the fragrant sea, endlessly.

MYKONOS

A little terrace. Among the flowerpots of geraniums, a rose-colored dome, white arches, masts weaving the sky, Delos.

PAROS

The "Eletas" farm. Late afternoon. Ducks and geese. Someone, on the threshing floor, fallen asleep, with a huge straw hat on his head and half-parted legs.

KYTHNOS

The spine of "Piperi" islet, an asymmetrical triangle, as it appears at late afternoon from Kanala.

SERIPHOS

Sailing along the island at high noon. Your naked arms burn on the gunwale. And continually, the little scallop-coves unfold one after the other until finally the big cove with the white crown at its head spreads before you.

AEGINA

Eleven o'clock, winds blow on the slope of Paliochora. Deserted.

SPETSAE

Hagioi Anargyroi. In the shallows the transparent seafloor all little holes and up above the pine trees, aged, broken, spilling fragrances as if to pay back an old debt.

HYDRA

Good Friday. Priests and boys, in boats, carrying Seraphim-icons on poles. The crowd with lighted candles. "O my sweet spring. . . ."

PATMOS

Light-hued the tremulous waves and dark, heavy, opposite the conical boulder. A motor-caïque's putt-putt is heard as unseen it passes by.

RHODES

In the old Greek quarter. What catches your eye from half-open doors: barefoot infants and huge banana leaves. In the distance, spread out laundry and a cat.

CYPRUS

At "Sultan Teke" a little outside of Larnaca. The shadows of leaves that shift rhythmically with the wind and look like a winnow-sieve that works ceaselessly exactly like consciousness.

AIX-EN-PROVENCE

Suddenly spring. A girl's head peering in bewilderment through a railing with wisteria.

ST.-JEAN-CAP-FERRAT

The seaside path that leads to Beaulieu. At left, a boundless garden with successive levels and a high-bodied dog who stares arrogantly. At right, the sea almost white. It smells of fresh-cut clover.

PALERMO

A church interior as it appeared to me in my sleep. Reddish frescoes and on the floor black and white tiles. Heat.

AMPURIAS

An autumn afternoon among the ruins. You watch the sea dull under the drizzle and you ponder a lost Greek empire. For the sake of language, if for nothing else.

CORDOBA

A tiny patio in a poor neighborhood. A little fountain, arches, openings in the distance with bead screens. Two short-haired boys who abandon their game and watch the stranger with curiosity.

CONSTANTINOPLE

From the deck of the "Felix Derzhinsky": on the jetty a crowd with fierce faces. Far off, among the points of the minarets, Saint Sophia.

CAIRO

In the dust and crowd of a working-class district. A funeral with Coptic priests who advance whispering incomprehensible words at high noon.

ii

AEGINA

A blend of lemon geranium and jasmine, at midnight.

SPETSAE

A prow beating against the waves. With the dipping of the boat, spindrift in the face.

ZAKYNTHOS

Late afternoon in Akrotiri, at the old house of Dionysios Solomos. In front of the large, round, stone table in the garden. Awe and silence. And also a muffled, strange consolation.

LESBOS

A spoonful of sour-cherry preserves after the afternoon siesta.

CHIOS

Pyrghi. From the heavy heat outside, into the damp coolness of the church. In one's whole body the sensation of whitewash with its half-effaced frescoes.

SIPHNOS

A roof with undulations. The naked body fitted in it, you might say, when you were born in the reliquary of the sun.

KALYMNOS

A silver bream grilled with choice olive oil and lemon.

ANNOULA

The hour when she washes herself, after finishing the laundry, in the great stone washbasin. White luminous body.

ALEXANDRA

Who studies for the university entrance examination while absently caressing her left breast and who, at a certain moment, rhythmically pokes her left nipple with the pencil she holds.

SPERANZA

As the moon advances and overpowers her from the feet up. She floats supine in the light and from her bare breasts, rising and falling, an orchard's and a sea's fragrance arrives.

DEMETRA

High at the roof chimney. The wind snatches her hair, her skirt. She glows from her own skin and turns right and left like an inexplicably happy bird.

BILIO

Who lets her nightgown drop, raises it again, finally tosses it away and stays opposite the balcony door with her brassiere open at the back.

INO

Before she goes to sleep at night. She waters the flowerpots and, in the veranda's strong light, the outline of her body shows through her spiderspun nightgown. You cannot tell her from the flowers.

POPI, ANGELA, CHARICLEIA

Who are sound asleep: one with her buttocks this way; the other supine with one hand on her naked breast; the third with her right leg bent and her arms up behind her head. While from the door's opening a breeze arrives of crushed violet and lemon tree.

Spotlight iv*

First scene: Odysseus Androutsos¹ gives the order to arrest and execute the delegates of the Supreme Court, Noutsos and Panourgias.

Second scene: A special committee formed for Court Martials condemns George Karaïskakis² as a “malefactor and traitor to his country.”

Third scene: Condemned to death, Theodore Kolokotronis³ is thrown into jail.

Fourth scene: Sunday morning, Nauplion, outside the church, Governor John Capodistrias⁴ falls to the bullets of the Mavromichalis family.

Fifth scene: Coming out of the Gare de Lyons, in Paris, after the signing of the Treaty of Sevres, Eleutherios Venizelos⁵ is shot at by two Greek officers.

Sixth scene: During the German Occupation, the Greek Popular Liberation Army kills Colonel Psarros, who was struggling for exactly the same cause as the head of an independent partisan group.

Seventh scene: In Cyprus, men sent by the dictatorial government of Athens lay an ambush—with intent to kill—for President Makarios, who barely manages to escape.

* Examples of betrayal from the post-1821 Revolution world.

1. “Odysseus Androutsos”: (1790–1825) a hero of the War of Independence; after victory he was, in internecine rivalry, tortured and murdered by his enemies.

2. “George Karaïskakis”: (1780–1827) a hero of the War of Independence; he was arrested, then freed, and was killed in battle.

3. “Theodore Kolokotronis”: (1770–1863) the most renowned hero of the War of Independence; he was sentenced to death then pardoned by the subsequent Greek-Bavarian monarchy.

4. “John Capodistrias”: (1776–1831) a Russian diplomat of Corfiot origin; he was elected governor of Greece in 1827, and organized the new country.

5. “Eleutherios Venizelos”: (1864–1936) the greatest statesman of modern Greece and a friend of Elytis’s family.

To Anoint the Repast

THERE ARE TIMES WHEN I go out into the air as if I were reading the Iliad. I take the path that leads aloft over the houses, and as the coves and capes change shape in the course of my ascent, so the sentiments within me change position and form: the identity of the heroes, the wild satisfaction of saying *no*, the direct, the gleaming, the never twice the same.

A swarthy adolescent whose pants they lowered remains handsome with all kinds of blues and blacks. Difficult to discern in Christianity; not found in Marxism; a little Alexander the Great above the Aegean which he incarnates and whose wave never ends.

XXIII

SURELY THE SUN must have been a drop of clear water in its childhood. The way he shines on eyelashes, and the cool shade he keeps on the walls with sacred paintings at high noon in July, come from this.

Not to mention the transparency. So that if by luck you happen to love a girl, you see inside her: as in poems.

If there is a way to die without disappearing—it is this: a transparency in which your ultimate components—dew, fire—become visible to all, and one way or another, you too shall exist forever.

FOR WHOMEVER SEA IN SUN is "landscape"—life seems easy and death too. But for whomever it is a mirror of immortality, it is "duration." A duration whose blinding light alone does not let you conceive it.

If there were a way for someone to be, at the same time, before and behind things, he would understand to what a degree time's opening, that simply devours events, loses its meaning; exactly as in a poem. And then—since the poem is an expansion of the instantaneous, or contrarily, a contraction of the unending—he can win his freedom without any recourse to gunpowder.

If he could only become conscious of one thing: that the living do not keep hold of everything.

A TRANSLITERATION OF THE SOUND made by small lapping waves, the moment that the moon moves away and the house approaches the seashore, could uncover for us many secrets. About the senses' peaks first of all. Where nobility tripping up power always arrives first: a blue pistachio that gleams, an ignited pebble, solitary footfalls of the wind in the leaves. Or otherwise: a metope, a dome, which make nature a line the way that surf-sound makes the Greek language universal.

Learn to pronounce reality correctly.

PRONOUNCE REALITY as a sparrow pronounces the dawn. And approach it as a ship approaches Seriphos or Melos. Where the mountains unfold one from within the other until the superb cone with white houses appears; one island divides into two or three; and the vertical boulder seems, up close, to hold the most virginal white embrace. Penetration to a great depth into the senses and at the same time a continuous overturning of every conception of usefulness about the nature of the material world.

Nowhere else have I felt my life so justified as on a ship's bridge. Everything in its correct place: screws, sheet iron, pipes, wire cords, exhaust tubes, navigation instruments; and I myself record the continuous change remaining in the same place. A complete, self-sufficient and coherent world that responds to me and to which I respond and we enter together as one body into the danger and the miracle.

My country an enduring ship.

IT TOOK ME A LONG TIME TO UNDERSTAND what humility means and they are to blame who taught me to place it at the other pole to pride. You must tame the idea of existence within yourself so as to understand it.

One day when I felt completely abandoned and a great sadness fell slowly upon my soul, as I was walking in the fields with no salvation in sight, I pulled a branch of an unknown bush. I broke it off and raised it to my upper lip. Right away I understood that man is innocent. I read this so intensely in its scent acrid with truth that I set off in pursuit of it with a light step and a missionary heart. Until I became profoundly aware that all religions were lying.

Yes, Paradise was not a nostalgia. Nor, even more, a reward. It was a right.

WE WALK FOR THOUSANDS OF YEARS. We call the sky “sky” and the sea “sea.” Everything will change one day and we shall change along with it. But our nature will be irreparably engraved on the geometry that we disdained in Plato. And within this, when we bend over, as we sometimes bend over the waters of our island, we shall find the same brown hills, bays and capes, the same windmills and the same lonely chapels, the little houses leaning one against the other, and the vineyards sleeping like little children, the domes and the dovecotes.

I don’t mean these themselves. I mean the same natural and spontaneous movements of the soul that give birth to the material element and set it in a certain direction; the same upheavals, the same elevations toward the deepest meaning of a *humble Paradise*, which is our true self, our right, our freedom, our second and real ethical sun.

BUT INCOMPREHENSIBLY

no one hears. The burning bird of Paradise goes ever higher. And all the silver Virgins count for nothing. The voice was turned elsewhere and the eyes remained unmiracled.

Helpless are the eyes¹

One among thousands of murderers, I lead the innocent and powerless. I wrap myself in an ancient cloak and again descend the stone stair beckoning and exorcising

Helpless are the eyes, that you beckon to

Centuries now above the blue volcanoes.² Far into my body and far into the earth that I tread I went to find out who I am. I stored up small happinesses and unexpected meetings, and here I am: unable to learn what I give, what they give me and left over is injustice

Golden wind of life . . .

1. "Helpless are the eyes": from Solomos's "The Free Besieged."

2. "blue volcanoes": quoted from "The Gloria" in *The Axion Esti*: "the islands with the drinkable blue volcanoes."

THE ELEGIES OF JUTTING ROCK

"Jutting Rock" translates the Greek name Oxopetra, a deserted rocky promontory in the island of Astypalaea; Elytis has in mind the sound and image, rather than the place, which he never visited.

Of the Harmless, the Hopebearer, the Unhindered

Now, I look forward to the boat that, even if you get in it,
Will arrive empty at a long sea Kerameikos¹
With stone Korai holding flowers. It will be at night and
August
When the constellations' guard duty changes. And the
mountains lightweight
Filled with dark air stand a little higher than the horizon
line
Here and there odors of burnt grass. And a sorrow of an
unknown generation
Which from on high
forms a rivulet on the sea that fell asleep

What I ignore glows in me. Nonetheless it glows

Ah beauty even if you were never delivered entirely over
to me

I managed to steal something from you. I say: it's that
green of an eye's pupil that first

Enters into love and that other golden one, which
wherever you place it it's July.

Pull the oars O you seasoned by hard work. To take me
where the others go

Is impossible. I was born to belong nowhere
Meant to have the sky for fief there I seek to be
reestablished

According to my rights. The wind says so too
*The miracle is a flower from childhood and when it grows
up death*

Ah beauty you will deliver me up like Judas

It will be at night and August. Huge harps will be heard
now and then and

With my soul's small cyan the Jutting Rock will start to
emerge

From the blackness. Little goddesses, pre-eternally young

1. "Kerameikos": The splendid cemetery of Classical Athens, now a splendid ruin.

Phrygians or Lydians with silver wreathes and green fins
will gather singing around me
When everybody else's troubles will be cashed
Into a bitter pebble's colors: so much all your loves with
fibulae of pain: so much
The boulder's peat and the horrifying rift of your
unfenced sleep: twice as much

Until, at a certain point, the seafloor with all its luminous
plankton
Will turn over above my head. And other things so far
unconfided
Will become manifest as if seen through my flesh
Fish of the aether, wave-driven goats with slim bodies the
bells of the Myrrh-Exuding¹ chiming

While deep in the distance the earth will keep turning
with a boat black and empty lost in its seas.

1. "Myrrh-Exuding": undoubtedly a chapel of St. Demetrius, whose corpse, like that of many saints, gave off sweet odors.

The Icon

The rock stays the same and the waves walk
In the dark all godliness. Asphodels
And narcissi both offspring of the imagination
Of the dead go according to clouds and sleep

I proceed by instinct not knowing which day

Smells of the nobility of old wood
Or of a humbled animal. And of course
I must have existed somewhere here; so fast
Day breaks and I find you again
O my sacred troubles grass-grown brick red houses in the
 lemon groves
Arcs, arches where I stood and running fountains
Where could the angel have touched? What could have
 remained? Who now?

Half-extinguished I arrive from the city's places
Like an icon saved from a church fire
Flame red and demon black
Which gradually dissolve
 in the morning dew

The wall ravaged and scratched, with the words "I love
 you" still
Distinct! And the stairway's handrail also
Unpainted and smooth from the many gentle palms that
 ran over it!
Laden with old age and youth I again climb up
Knowing where the old flooring will creak, when
Aunt Melissini will look at me from her picture frame
Whether it will rain tomorrow

Perhaps I claim something belonging to me from the
 beginning
Or maybe simply a place among Things to Come,

Which is the same; a garment made of chill fire
Of copper green and of the Virgin's deep cherry red

I stand with my right hand over my heart
Two or three candlesticks behind me
The little square window facing the storm
Things Beyond and Future Things.

"Cupid and Psyche"*

The life of others strikes me like
A wild black sea. Whatever you assert in the night
God alters. Gently the houses go
Some get as far as the quay with the lights on
The soul of the dead (as they say) goes

Ah what are you that you're called "soul"
For wind in its passing neither managed to give you
matter
Nor ever took featherdown away from you
What balsam or what poison do you pour so that

In ancient times the noble Diotima
Inwardly singing was able to change
Man's mind and the flow of Swabia's waters¹
And so those in love can be both here and there

Of the two stars and a single destiny

The earth seems unsuspecting but
It isn't. Sate with diamonds and coal
It still knows how to speak from where truth comes

* *Cupid* in Greek is *Eros*; *Psyche* is the word for soul. The story of Cupid and Psyche was probably first told in Apuleius's Latin romance *The Golden Ass* (after A.D. 125). After the young Psyche lost her god-lover by looking at him, Venus set her many tasks, one of which was to bring back from Persephone a box containing Beauty; opening it, Psyche found nothing. Cupid eventually married her.

1. "Diotima . . . Swabia's waters": In Plato's *Symposium*, Socrates says that the priestess of Mantinea, Diotima, taught him his metaphysics of eros. The disastrous end of Friedrich Hölderlin's love affair with Susette Gontard (whom he called "Diotima") upset his fragile psyche; when he heard of her death in 1802, he went mad. Hölderlin was Swabian.

At this point in the text, Elytis appended the following footnote: "Although once a child of Zeus he / Was struggling in the Harpy's claws / And was very piously signing his name: 'Scardanelli.' Caught permanently in the 'Harpy's claws' of madness, Hölderlin often signed his name thus.

With subterranean drums or wellsprings of great purity
It comes to confirm for you. Which? What?

The only thing you assert and which God does not alter
That unascertained something existing
Nonetheless within the Futile and the Nothing.

Elegy of Grüningen*

In memory of Friedrich von Hardenberg

Rhineland forests stilled within me long ago
And again now as if coming from a hunting horn
Coats of arms and genealogical trees which at twelve years
old I discovered unwillingly

Es war der erste einzige Traum

Söffchen I mean you

As though I still saw you sauntering along tree-lined
boulevards

Or sometimes carefully lifting into the light
A bluish chunk of stone whose streaks are visible, and then
All the year's iridescent hours begin with a buzz
To whirl around your head (My eyes
Ceaselessly fixed on the luminous centerpoint)
So that today becoming and being
March nineteenth of seventeen-ninety-seven

This the first daring. And the second: to depose you from
night's numbers

- 9: he who will put the angel to sleep in your heart
arrives on horseback
- 10: with myriads of purple flower cups the vine
completely covers doors and windows
- 11: the heavy sky fallen even lower than the chimneys
- 12: your bed tilts to one side
- 13: destiny makes a third wave
- 14: even without you chthonic Spring gives a push to her
fruit trees

* While visiting Grüningen (in Thuringia), the German Romantic writer Friedrich von Hardenberg (1772–1801), whose pseudonym was Novalis, fell in love with the twelve-year-old Sophie von Kuhn ("Söffchen"), and they were engaged. After she died, on March 19, 1797, he wrote *Hymnen an die Nacht*; Elytis quotes from the third hymn—"es war der erste einzige Traum," "it was the first unique dream." In Novalis's work, night symbolizes the inner world of the spirit, and Sophie divine love. The ten numbered verses are the dates of her last ten days. The "ides of May" is when Novalis visited her tomb, and felt joy in her presence. Elytis also mentions Novalis in "The Odyssey" (*The Light-Tree*) as among "the seven wise men of the world" and mentions Sophie in "Eye of the Locust" (*Maria Nephele*). Mixed in with the Novalis material is a memory of a visit that Elytis, aged 12, made to the Rhineland.

- 15: how the waters pursue one another beneath the grass!
16: listen,listen to the beauty! Look, look at this too!
17: through a crack in your soul the tomb looks prettier
now
18: at any moment the blackest strong wind of Isis' hair
will arrive
19: so big the sky and so small the earth for only two
persons

Little golden flying babies of your breath still
Come and go on the stone and at night they play moon
But he who like a sculptor of sounds composes music
from distant constellations
Works day and night. And what dark gray dos and what
purple sols ascend
Into the air. That even the rocks more priestly venerate
such weeping
And the trees more birdlike utter syllables of
uninterpreted
Beauty. For love is neither what we know nor what
magicians assert
But is a second life unwounded forever

Come Spring. Since you are an accomplice. Look:

What deep green covers her shoulders
And how he gazes at her! How, after it struggled to come
out
From the flowerbeds a mauve dazzle snatched them up a
little higher than the ground
That's what the gods willed on the ides of May
And more of which I am ignorant. But though the course
of things was unfortunate
From that time on the lesson was most important.
Because
From the age of twelve as soon as I made your
acquaintance you became for me
Rhineland forests valley rivers coaches horsemen
courtyards with fountains and pediments

The daily first page of meta-death.

Awe and Whelming of Solomos*

The city half emerged from sleep. Bell towers' points
Flagpoles and a hint of emergent rose
At the marble sill of your little window—still lit up—
Ah if I could only leave there for you
A bough with laurel berries as a good morning
Because such a night you spent awake. And I know it
On white papers more impassable than the slate of
Missolonghi.¹

Yes. Because God once needed you he gilded your lips

And what a mystery that as you talk your hands open
That even the stone longs to be the cornerstone of a new
temple
And that the coral makes for smooth shrubs to imitate
your chest

Handsome face! Burnt in the sunglare of the language
you first heard now inexplicably
Become a second soul in me. At the moment that my first
soul
On an earth violet blue with wild manes of tempest
Was busy polishing shells and other findings of the sun
As if the molds of your mind had not already given out
Nature that passed through all the flashes of the gods'
anima
Or as if for a little while thanks to your grace
The Unlooked-at had not remained half-open in me!
But the lion passes like the sun. Men either ride on
horseback
Or go on foot; until they are lost in the night. Just so

* Visiting Solomos's house in Zakynthos, Elytis writes (in "What One Loves (Snapshots)" from *The Little Seafarer*) that he felt "awe and silence." Dionysios Solomos (1798–1857) is the founder of modern Greek poetry; Elytis considered him his master and the renewer of Homer's language. See following note.

1. “Missolonghi”: In Solomos’ masterpiece, “The Free Besieged,” the starving Greeks of Missolonghi heroically resist the Turks during the War of Independence. See the first poem of *The Little Seafarer* and the second and third Psalms of *The Axion Esti*.

Those which I bent over my desk sought to rescue but it
was
Impossible. How else. Since your thought alone long ago
having become sky
Your thought alone burnt all my manuscripts
And a joy that my second soul took by killing the first
began to leave with the waves
I was unknown let me become again unknown
Fiercely quarreling the winds
While the sun's lance as I was writhing on
The sponged floor
was finishing me off.

La Pallida Morte*

Scentless is death yet
The nostrils catch it like
A flower. Silent square buildings with boundless
Corridors interfere but the scent
Insistently penetrates creases of white sheets or cherry red
Drapes along the whole room.
At times a sudden reflection of light
Later again only the wheels of carts
And the old lithograph with the image
Of the Annunciation seen in the mirror

And then, with an extended arm He
Who as He announces is silent, who as He shares out
 takes back
Pale with a guilty air (as if He didn't want to but had to)
Sets himself to erasing one by one my red
Blood corpuscles. The way the sacristan does the candles¹
 when,
After all the prayers
For mild weather and for the whole world or
Chiefly for what each man has in mind,
The congregation disperses

 Oh don't I have! But how what way
Is it possible for the "not said" to become manifest
So that while Mays speak sweetly with irises and
 windweed
And go with green grass straight to the sea
Just when it keeps confiding in a whisper
Something of its ancient secrets, man remains speechless
 Only the soul. She
Like a mother of hatchlings takes wing when danger nears
And from within storms she patiently gathers
A few crumbs of calm; so that tomorrow and tomorrow

* As widely reported in Greek newspapers, Elytis spent part of the winter of 1989–90 in the Evangelismos (Annunciation) Hospital in Athens, suffering from anemia.

1. "sacristan . . . candles": Orthodox Greeks usually light a candle before they pray in church; after they leave, the sacristan collects it for reuse.

Those you have in mind with new brilliant plumage
May take off into the aether and so what if the gates of
 heavenly dwellings
Vainly open and close

The Angel knows. And timidly withdraws his finger
And so the gold again becomes cyan and a fragrance
Of burning myrrh ascends to the rose dome
All at once the candles ignite on all the candelabra
Then everyone follows. Footprints on the wet leaves
Because men also love tombs and with piety heap
 beautiful flowers there
But of these men, death, nobody knows anything to say
Except the poet. Jesus of the sun. Who then rises every
 Saturday
He. The Is, the Was, and the Coming.

Past Midnight

Past midnight in all my life

My head heavy as if in a lowered Galaxy
Men sleep with silver faces; saints
Emptied of passion whom the wind keeps blowing afar
To the Cape of the Great Swan. Who was fortunate, who
not
And then?

We all terminate equally and remaining at the end
Are bitter saliva and on your unshaven face
Incised Greek characters which strive to fit
Themselves to one another so that
If the one word of your life . . .

Past midnight in all my life

Fire engines pass by, and no one knows
For what fire. In a room four by five the smoke thickened.
Only the sheet of paper
And my typewriter protrude. God
Strikes the keys and troubles are countless up to the
ceiling
It's nearly dawn
for a moment seashores appear
With dark and mauve mountains vertical on them. It
seems to be true that
I live for when I shall not exist

Past midnight in all my life

Men sleep on one side, the other side stays
Open so you can see life rising in wave
After wave and so your arm is extended
Like a dead man's the moment that the first truth is taken
from him.

Friday When It Always Rains

What, older than time, probably shone
Like gold ore in your mind's mud so that
The unsent and intangible now become visible
And without colors or odors having a year
It seems your life begins, look:
Saturday Sunday Monday Tuesday

But azure is the most affecting, Wednesday Thursday
The sound arrives from the animals who drink well into
the gold
There a Mycenaean God shoots
A fire of white beauty after the Heroes leave
And relentless notes arrive
Saturday Sunday Monday Tuesday

Medusa and Gea of the heavenly Verdancy
Love trembles like a spindle of flowers
In the waves of musical voices
The one or two that are lost and the wind remains
ineffective
Before in a scarlet furnace is heard
Saturday Sunday Monday Tuesday

Yet the oracles, Wednesday Thursday, act with the silver of
Mary and shells
At night when senses are let loose
You think that they are the same as the laws of the
universe
Here or there the great head of the Priest and then
The moon's bell above the railings
Omicron alpha and epsilon of the Eternal.

Unmarked

The precipitous eleventh of August and no man
Or house. Only rumblings, rumblings and a
Hungry sea that pounces to eat up depression from your
old mines
Those of the yellow times with the big black dog

Bark and love; bark denial; bark Mary and the
Adoration of the Magi; bark all your belongings
Born? In? Year? Religion? Blank.

While

Beneath the vertical walls like ancient palimpsests
Where two or three escutcheons still can be discerned
Hugues pass by with their Augustines¹
With their hunting bells and other village toys
To the sound of the flute. And then, a vast black army
Sirens. The ambulance. And far off to the right a
Big oil tanker with a forest of cranes
Sailing away into the west

We too somewhat like this. And others return. But
Nobody's soundless body with all the touchings
That he saw crowd together inside him becomes manifest
For the truth

to fall at once

the way evil falls

But it seems that the divinities, as if detached
From the hollows of the ancient dead, are dark
Even if they bear light
And no man (like lovers their eyelashes touching
Who thought for a moment they saw the weaving of fate)
Was ever given something to discern
Beautiful and filled with ruins like first love

Ah what can you say since even if
You open a single sigh the wind will knock you down

1. "Hugues . . . Augustines": The palimpsest of Greece bears many remains ("escutcheons") of the Frankish conquest of 1204, during the Fourth Crusade.

Bark and love; bark Judas with his glance of escape
Bark the whole world's distances and longest times
Nothing any more is heard. What God wanted
My soul, eternal for a moment, felt
And again the dog found the meaning of its barking

Here are the shores returning
Bit by bit. Men acquire substance
The lighthouse begins flashing at its old place

And the delayed red house
Stands ready off the cape with its lights on
The orchards chew dark grass
And you see in the aethers the turbid woman called
Serenity
Descending with a tray of trembling freesias.

Lost Commagene*

Changing side in my sleep I seemed to hear
Discordant trumpets of other times
Suddenly sound as if in a movie
In which cavalry some with spears
And some flourishing triangular pennants
Go galloping

 In the filth
In summer's scorching heat and in manure
Pre-Christian angels
 laid birds arcades and palm trees
On the sand; knowing all these to be a dream
I'll have some day when tired and extremely desperate

Yet it is not always in dream that
From one generation to another we all seek the amber
That made men's connections meek
Seek mind's unknown gray matter that knew
How to formulate transparent laws; so that with bare
 head
One could stare inside oneself at another's valleys
Either covered with clouds or exposed to the sun

Yes, nobody knows. Everything is a hypothesis and excuse
 me
But many years after men came to dwell together
We are still in bonds. The beams slant
Through the eyelashes and form a rainbow
On the salty tear. From there comes the Magi's light
And to there the journey where the Adoration is able
To acquire another meaning

Let others search for remains and let them try
Shoveling in the dirt of history. Reality
Pays if it is subsequent. But the previous, the idol, only
 this
Signifies; so time can't get at it

*"Commagene," founded in 162 B.C., was a small Hellenistic kingdom in north Syria, later annexed to Roman Syria by Vespasian.

Ah women slippery as fish and silver if
They love you. Adolescents with blond curls who
Give joy to others by right. Shady rooms
Where virgin forests used to be

Stones and other matter

It's possible for the soul, like Eupalinus, to found a
Small state beyond pain, small as
Ancient Commagene.¹ Soul lost
Like Commagene and inapproachable.

Small state beyond pain. Lost as it is
And inapproachable

The Solitaries come first and with them, behind them
For centuries nations and races sally forth for the
Unattainable

With reflections of metal on their tyrannized foreheads
Reflections the sun thrice magnifies. Ceaselessly
The defenseless run they run
And directly invade death
Knowing they'll be lost but that somewhere—

Then cavalry was heard. And then trumpets
And all together deep in the distance they sounded sonde
sond son so so.

1. "Eupalinus": Eupalinus of Megara built the underground aqueduct on Samos—a remarkable engineering feat—during the reign of Polycrates (d. 522 B.C.). Possibly the association between Commagene and Eupalinus was triggered by the name of the founder of Commagene's capital (in 150 B.C.), King Samos.

Here's Kimmoni! Here's Liyino!
Little Trident! Anti-Hypnos! Stablehand!
Lovely-eyed! Witch!¹
A dazzle! As I hear mauve and everything becomes
Rosy with the fabric of aether rustling
Against my flesh

I weep; as it is given to me
To step on superb brown earth surrounded by sea
Like that of my mother's olive groves while
Evening falls and an odor
Of burning grass rises but
The wild seagulls leave screeching
With bits of oyster shells in their beaks

Saint Symeon on the hilltop
Cloudboats a little higher
And even higher the Archangel with his deep gaze all
forgiveness.

1. "Kimmoni . . . Witch": islands of Elytis's celestial archipelago.

July Word*

Men have a finite place
And the same space is given to birds but
Infinite!

Infinite the garden where, just detached
from death (before disguised it touches me
Again), I played and everything came easily to hand

That sea horse! And the *pllp* of the bubble breaking!
The little blackberry boat in deep currents
Of foliage! And the forward mast all flags!

For now they came to me. But I existed like yesterday
And later the long long unknown life of the unknown
So be it. Even when you say things nicely you're spent;
Like the flow of water that soul after soul connects space
And you are found walking a tightrope from one Galaxy to another
While beneath your feet the chasms rumble. And you either make it or you don't

Ah first ardors faintly impressed on my sheets. Oh female angels
Who signaled to me from on high to advance fearlessly into the thick of things
Since even if I were to fall from the window, the sea
Would be my horse again
The huge watermelon wherein I once dwelled unsuspecting
And those young servant girls, whose loose hair knew
With the intelligence of wind how to unwind over the chimneys!
Such truly amazing adjustment of yellow to blues
And the writings of birds that the wind pushes through the window
While you are sleeping and watching things to come

The sun knows. It descends into you to see. Because outside things
Are a mirror. Nature dwells in the body and takes revenge from it
As in a holy wildness like a lion's or Anchorite's
Your own flower grows
which is called Thought

* Elytis also published this poem separately, in a little book that included many of his childhood photographs.

(No matter that, by studying, I have arrived where
I always used to arrive by swimming)

Wise men have a finite space
And the same space is given to children but
Infinite!

Infinite is death without months and centuries
There is no way there to come of age; and so
To the same rooms to the same gardens you will turn again¹
Holding the cicada that is Zeus and from one
Galaxy to another he takes his summers.

1. "to the same rooms . . . turn again": Elytis's wording recalls and transforms Cavafy's famous poem "The City" (the first in his *Poems*):

No newlands will you find, you'll find no other seas.
The city will follow you. To the same streets you will
turn again. And you will age in the same neighborhoods;
and in these same houses you will grow gray.

Verb the Dark

I am of another language, unfortunately, and of the
Hidden Sun so that
Those unaware of celestial things know me not. Hard to
discern
Like an angel on the tomb I trumpet white fabrics¹
That snap in the wind and then snap back
In order to show something, perhaps my digested beasts
so that at last
A seabird is left an orphan above the waves

As indeed happened. But for years now hovering in mid-
air I got tired
And have need of earth which stays closed and locked
Latches doors eavesdroppings doorbells; nothing. O
Believable things, speak to me! Korai who sometimes
appeared
From within my breast and you old farmhouses
Spigots left running by mistake in sleeping gardens
Speak to me! I have need of earth
Which stays closed and locked

So now accustomed to make iotas smaller and omicrons
bigger
I contrive a verb; like a robber his passkey
A verb with a proper ending
Something that darkens you on one side
Until your other side appears. A verb with very few
vowels
But many rusted consonants kappa or theta or tau
Bought for bargain prices from the warehouses of Hades
Because, from these places

1. "Angel . . . white fabrics": as on Christ's tomb. In Matthew 28, Mary Magdalene and "the other Mary" go to Christ's tomb and discover there an angel, whose "countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow." He instructs them to announce that Jesus is risen.

You slip in more easily like Darius' ghost¹ to terrify the
living and the dead

Let heavy music be heard here. And the now lightweight
mountains

Be transposed. Time to try my key. I say: *katarkythmevo*²

A strange wildness appears disguised as spring
With sharp rocks and pointed shrubs everywhere
Then plains riddled with Zeus and Hermes
Finally a mute sea like Asia
All ripped seaweed and Circe's eyelashes

So then, what we called "sky" is not; "love" is not;
"eternal" is not." Things do not

Obeys their names. Near the killing
Dahlias are cultivated. And the delayed hunter returns
With his prey of an ethereal world. And it is always—
alas—early. Ah

We never suspected how earth is undermined
By divinity; what eternal rose's gold it needs to
counterbalance

The void we leave behind, all we hostages of another
duration

That the mind's shadow conceals from us. Let it be

Friend you who hear, can you hear the distant bells
Of the citrons' fragrance? Do you know the garden's
corners where

The dusk wind lays its newborn? Have you ever dreamt
Of a boundless summer where you could run
No longer knowing the Furies? No. That's why I

katarkythmevo

That the heavy creaking bolts give way and the great gates
open

Into the light of the Hidden Sun for a moment, so our
third nature can become manifest

1. "Darius's ghost": In Aeschylus's tragedy "The Persians," the ghost of King Darius, summoned from the tomb to prophesy, warns that, in fulfillment of an oracle of Zeus, King Xerxes' hubris would be punished at Salamis, and that the Persians must never again attack Greece.
2. *katarkythmevo*: Elytis's new-coined verb.

There's more, but I shall not say it. Nobody gets the free
things

In bad weather you either get lost or calm ensues

These in my own language. And others other things in
other languages. But

Truth is given only in exchange for death.

The Last of Saturdays

Ssh . . . nothing anymore; nothing white or smooth
 anymore nothing
Intoxicating, melodious, nothing; no cloud illumined on
 its other side
Or at least men's company
Something mournful that makes you feel faint when the
 day of the Passion
Began to stoop and slowly sink on one side

*I wonder what soul is leaving and the air
Smells so strong and I can't bear it any longer*

Ssh . . . in the dark no one knows; except,
Listen, otherworldly thuds against the riverstones like
 fishermen's or
Like bodies' that enter into one another while the aether
 trembles
All soul
 and a star unexpectedly finds the courage to touch
 upon your forehead

*All mistakes I go away kisses that remained on me
And how beautiful the cypresses on the height*

How lovely that celestial events again begin to acquire
Another identity. The stars' multiflora, the sorrows, the
 odors
And the other old senses that you lost on the sky's matter
Here they are now described: the stone and the tomb and
 the soldier¹
The women's white veils and the long procession of the
 unjustly lost

*O times that orphaned me long before
My parents and I found support nowhere else*

1. "the stone and the tomb and the soldier": as in icons of the Resurrection.

Ssh . . . but no one, no one knows. Not even a wind
If that is what maddens you when you ponder. You
become believable on your own
Because
your hands were used to orchards wherein
The sea enters and pulls back filled with little flowers
It blows, it blows and the world grows less. It blows
It blows and the other grows bigger; death the glaucous
and infinite sea
Death the sun without sunsets.

WEST OF SORROW

A little rain nearby with all the close relatives

And children of the still uncut fruit trees

With their mauve flowerbeds all turned

West of sorrow

These poems were written in the summer of 1995 in Porto Rafti, Attica.

Of Ephesus*

Vineyards run free beside me and the sky
Remains unbridled. Conflagrations exchange pinecones
and an
Ass departed goes high up the hill
for a bit of cloud
Something must be happening on Saint Heraclitus' day
That not even noses can diagnose
It is the tricks of the unshod wind who hangs on to the
edge
Of fate's nightgown and is about to leave us exposed in
the chamois's open air
Secretly I leave with all my stolen booty in my mind
For a life unsundered from the start. With no candles
with no chandeliers
With only an anemone in place of a golden wedding ring's
diamond
Where groping is it going? And seeking what? The half
shadow of our moon
It is absolutely necessary for you to reassure even the
graves
Whether or not they're all your countrymen's. What
counts most is
For the earth's scent of heather maples and onions lost
even by hounds
To be restored to its idiomatic tongue
Well what! Peasant of the night's green, a word suffices for
you to fit into:
Ephesus! The fourteenth generation of grandfather of
uncle and of phosphorous
In the golden orange orchards and the chisel's bordering
words
Awnings before they are spread and others afloat
suddenly the colt-trotting
Of lost poles. Preachings of the sea bays opposite

* Heraclitus of Ephesus (fl. 500), Elytis's favorite pre-Socratic philosopher, thinks in images, not in abstractions. The poem's last line comes from fragment 93: "Time is a child playing draughts; a child's kingship."

Double scythes of floors for temple or theater
Verdant meadow waters and curly “gar” and “ara”¹ waters
Purling. If ever wisdom drew circles
Of clover and wildweed then it would become
Different as before your fingertips’ imprintings
There will be letters. Men shall read and history
Again shall grasp its own tail. As long as the vineyards
gallop and the sky
Remains unbridled as children want it
With roosters and with pinecones and with cyan-blue
kites flags
On Saint Heraclitus’ day
a child’s kingship.

1. “gar” and “ara”—ancient Greek words, meaning “because” and “therefore,” used here as pure sound.

Rhodamos and Hebe*

Humanity says Balthus is ready to commit suicide;
and no one is eager to listen to Mozart
The old and completely useless armed forces ascend
And are deployed in dense phalanxes marching in place
Cut as many laurels as you want there can be
No wreath. There is time for the rooster to give his battle
cry before the slaughter knife
And for colts all at once to strike a horseshoe on naked
Stone. Who is the one of the many and what is the lot of
the one?

He who resides at the corner of Rhodamos and Hebe
knows something
It is our olfactory dog that May trains
And it is little breasts barely thirteen years old that the
future has. But
The water needs a sleeve so they can dress you in it
And you need a Hellespont to sail through like a
sleepwalker or like Amphion¹
(Some go in for the inapproachable and some for a little
bay's rocks
As well as those who at great length pursue only speed
But he who I am frequents the pudenda
Of soft hills and he ties the extremity of extreme hearing
to Mozart's skippings

Thus with something mauve and something cypress
green
It is possible for future things to reach whither neither the
northwind of the angelic nor the southwind

* The frightening approach of death contrasted with beloved youth. The title's street names are coined by Elytis. *Rhodamos* comes from *rhodon*, or rose, so perhaps blossoming branch or rose garden. "This intersection is our earth and soul, eternal adolescence, spring" (letter from Ioulita Iliopoulou to Jeffrey Carson, May 1996).

1. "Amphion": son of Antiope by Zeus; dragged from his mother and exposed on Mt. Cithaeron; he avenged her, built the walls of Thebes, and became king. His harp music moved stones into place.

Completely prospers.) With a kinyra's flowings¹ and
percussive pebbles

Noon becomes

Judgment hour: Either the bronchus of minus or
The little pipos branch ascending the scale of green
Little Hermes advance guard of the summer harvest casts
two or three

Dovecote breezes and a sound of sibilant length arrives
from those

You already have regarded as heirlooms as when
A little boy's one year takes in two or three centuries

So he who resides at the corner of Rhodamos and Hebe
spoke rightly
The fate of nations veers like that of individuals
And it is written on a different music staff with lightnings
speaks the unripe
And with woodbine the upper lip speaks before the kisses

The painter follows a sculpted sea anemone and a host of
cicadas.

1. "kinyra"—ancient Hebrew instrument with ten strings.

For a Ville d'Avray*

It is a bad minting
But like coin redeemable. Which assonantly in a foreign
tongue declares
A tomorrow if not loud lowings of a bull
Girl bicyclists go down wide avenues evanescent and
Many of them go to repeat their lessons in a little odeon
for
Greedy lips. A half-covered shin has fleeting fine weather
as does the mind
Flesh becomes more delicious before taking the
communion of the petticoat-edge's
Swish and little combs slide diagonally across the
untouched sheets
To the last moment. A deception forever overcome
By sleep and it can no longer com-
prehend itself

You girlfriends of the smallest chapel have you known
The birds' visit? They are pink and have jasmine speckles
beneath their down
Readable fluff and apex of vapors are shifted by the open
room's draught
As it passes. O sweet little whisperings
Sudden cries and again calmed sighs moans
Of one time and many-pulsed cherry red "ohs" which
The wind swallows. Something like a throb which before
you feel it
Has already distributed a shiver to the finger the same
shiver a thousand times though uncounted

A city functions like a spinning mill whose inhabitants
Cut the thread with their teeth at the right moment
The touches walk on silk and the jasmine walks on the
white armpit's little ribbon
And moistens imperceptible touching like summer's little
watering can

* Antonis Decavalles suggests the title is a version of the Greek "*mia poli tis avrion*," or "a city of tomorrow," "another version of his expected paradise" (letter to Jeffrey Carson, May 1996).

It is a brief ten-violet interruption which is valid forever
And as a key to pleasure it becomes an inviolable
condition:

It's that the dog wants its master on his knees and
The little girl wants her beekeeper as a drone
If piety had been baptized with another name and the
church bells gave off doves
Then the captives would have been set free and
kidnapped by the clergy of air
And taken to chambers of soft caresses

This is what John the younger in the circle of his square
Was seeking. That those who as Aiantes¹ or as Bishops
enter
Striking the floor with their cothurni and claiming the
specialness of mystic joy
Silver tassels mildness of verdancy's darkness breasts of
superb skin
I have lived in your own city myself

The instincts slide dizzily and whirl on the eighth color
Just like leaves which were forbidden yellow and
Bum around in a drizzle until on the curly and salty
They pour mystic chlorophyll from sparrow to lily flower
Thus
tomorrow's breeze wafts
Spring's little spring has no end.

1. "Aiantes": collectively the two heroes called Ajax (Aias).

Towards Troy

Strong Kissavos blows and the land fills with comeliness¹
The hills exchange places with one another but the sea's
Powerful one leaves an unspun cloudlet on Myrina's
 heights²

For the travelers to learn whose fate is engraved in gold
And whose in brass. Because the two are not two
It is the one of how many and it is the which one of the
 other

Peaks seek pure snow and the Centaur seeks
A stream that lost its way
The mind can hold a whole life of minds
 and a still unthrown thunderbolt
Is it because the southwind planted its storms elsewhere?
Or because the plains took the wave of floating wheat?

Dejected as always Thessalians got hungry for an island.
 From there
They set off for the area of Troy; the aims of the water's
 horsemen succeeded
The first olive tree plighted troth to the second and the
 fields lit up as at Easter
Gentle downslopes and then heights of waters again
Stone-built children of churches who still continue the
 game
At a little corner forgetting some small invisible
 monastery

Genoese women put the child to the breast. And ulema³
Proceed in white Turkish trousers
And with heavy red-on-skyblue collars
 Years which seem endless
 Even if you were born yesterday
The less the master lasts the more the slave lasts
Yet ambrosial water flows from one kylix to another

1. "Kissavos": or Mt. Ossa, near Mt. Olympus.

2. "Myrina": an oracle on the coast of Asia Minor.

3. "ulema": in the Ottoman empire, scholars or men of authority.

And from a light like a lonely little monk in the sky
 A wide dome opens for the vineyard to fit
 Its star-cluster in. So the seers once were right:
 Bite with diamond teeth the sea's second hovering myrtle
 and Amphitrite's fourth and you too!
 The seabream is caught in air with its patronymic if not
 The seafloor with its sparse beard
 Houses with yards and closets lean to one side
 Like boats and a power through lineage slowly erases
 The imprints of smell left on our ancestral olive presses
 By the fingers of the tough hands of Yera¹
 I speak of the truth that the wind of Myrina brings down
 to
 The waters of Krategos. Winnowed disyllables which you
 either read
 Or they loudly memorize you
 Kiss me O sea 'fore I lose you
 A key turns both ways either you are locked in
 Or you are opened to all. With open windows and sails
 Towards Troy.

1. "Yera": a port town of Asia Minor; also a bay in Lesbos.

In Ioulita's Blue*

What I mean can be found both in Briseis's¹ shard
And in Euripus's² shell. August must have been wildly
hungry in its calm
So to want summer wind; so that it may leave a bit of salt
on
The eyebrow and a blue in the sky whose name you can
hear sounding sublime among the others
But at bottom it is *Ioulita's blue*
As if a passage of an infant's breath went in advance
So that you can quite clearly see the opposite mountains
approaching
And an ancient dove's voice crossing the waves and
vanishing

And if it is holy it is returned to goodness
Through the air. Comeliness multiplies so much through
her
Own children and man grows before sleep
Depicts him two or three times
In its mirror. Picking tangerines or philosophers' streams
if not a
Moving town of bees on the pubis. So be it
Grapes make a black sun and the skin whiter

Who other than death claims us? Who for pay commits
injustice?
Life is a chord
in which a third sound interposes
And it is this sound that actually says what the poor man
throws away
And what the rich man collects: caresses of a cat well-
woven osiers
Wormwood with capers evolutionary words with one of
their vowels short

* The poet Ioulita Iliopoulou was the companion of the poet's later years, and is the recipient of his estate.

1. "Briseis": Achilles' beautiful prize, whom Agamemnon takes and returns.

2. "Euripus": The channel between Boeotia and Euboea; it has strong currents.

Kisses from Cythera. So with such things ivy
Takes hold and the moon grows bigger for lovers to see
In what *Ioulita's blue* it is possible for you to read the
gossamer of fate

Oh! I have seen many sunsets and walked along the
diazomata of many ancient
Theaters. But O beauty time was never lent to me
For it to win a victory against blackness and to prolong
the extent of love so that
Our inner lark can warble more brilliant more euphonic
From its own pulpit
A scowling cloud which a bare "no" lifts as if it were fluff
And then it falls again and you get your fill fill fill of rain
You become the same age as the untouched without
knowing it and
You and your girl cousins continue tickling one another
in the garden's untrodden depths
Tomorrow a passing musician will sprinkle us with
nightflowers
But nevertheless we shall remain a bit unhappy
as usually with love
But an heretical taste ascends from the mastic of the
earth's clay
Half of hatred and dream half of nostalgia

If we continue to be perceivable as men who
Dwell beneath domes speckled all over with emerald
tritons then
The hour will be half a second past noon
And the absolute perfection will be
completed in a garden with hyacinths
Whose withering was removed forever. Something gray
Which a single lemon drop clears up in which case
You see what I meant from the beginning being engraved
With distinct typeface
in *Ioulita's blue*.

The Marble Table*

All around the four then
The three the two and the one *l'unique le solitaire*
Le marié à la vie a sa cigarette in front of a porch on the
Mediterranean
And with a cup of difficult and savory concepts *come i*
fichi la mattina
What remains counts. The same as can never be found in
the sum
The Meridian can be drawn with straight lines but
The truth always with crooked lines
The second and the third hypostasis inside us is
Less of mind and more of soil

Festive lights of New Orleans all drums
And multicolored voices; different ones of Odessa before
or after the Wanderer sets out
With sailing elevated flammable clouds on the unburnt
sky
The well-shaded fugitive of sounds is disturbed even if
The Meridian is compelled to obey him
Blue smoke gives off rosy rings
And memory and goodness are confounded at the same
height
Ah you roosters of my awakening and wild doves
Of white surprises. It's not I but the things I love that walk
me from Venice
Cordoba to Famagusta Alexandria Cairo
All over the world
With verbs of the sea fished at high noon

All pass except the weight of soul. Where and in what way
It is possible for you to change its place. And the way the
lithe cat
Removes its litter from one house to another gently
Biting them by their tender napes; so I hasten to
unknown small or big refuges of different places

* In the Greek original, "all around," "all over the world," and "west of sorrow" are in English.

With my layette of sorrow to end up in
And I am self-pursued by terrible cries of the killed and
clanging of weapons
Invisible to mortals soft weeping of a maiden who didn't
chance to draw the desirable lot
In every language the "impossible" endures

West of sorrow the knitting of all meanings ceaselessly
Is completed; without one's being able to decipher
Even the writings of a dreambook
Or to dominate a tempest's two or three waves even in
light
Even in the middle of the earth with or without a cloud's
eyelid

Suddenly the soul becomes wrinkled as when the
westwind starts up
Si piega il tavolo di marmo da una parte. Cloudiness will
come
Passing more easily than sorrows or will be
dissolved
When cut by the full moon's glass
You feel stopped but your road rushes you on
And your heartbeat outruns the hour-hand. So
You reach Avignon and Nice and Cap-Ferrat Menton
Lausanne. For
It is possible for time to subtract things for your sake and
still remain intact
The clock the gardener the scythe the rake the
Watering can the ploughs. I want to reveal the secrets of a
multinational hand-fishnet
We arrive like a locomotive continually decelerating
momentum until
The marble table is ripped out *plein de mots lancés au
hasard* and until
They get on better together by means of the unrelated
the four the three the two the one.

As Endymion*

Sleep has gentle valleys exactly as does
The upper life. With little churches that graze air amid
grass
That continually ruminate until they become paintings
Erasing one another in a church-music hypo-mode.
Sometimes
Two or three moons go touring. Soon however they
vanish
Beauty where it became immobile lasts like another
heavenly body
Matter has no age. It only knows how to change. Take it
from the beginning or
Take it from the end. The return calmly rolls on and you
watch it seemingly indifferent
Yet you pull the rope in a deserted cove of the Myrtoon
Sea¹
And not even one olive tree is absent
Ah Sea how everything renews itself upon your waking!
As children how we petted one another and played our
ancestors like jacks!
Look how strongly the Sirocco of sleep heaves an
upheaval in the undisturbed; and how then it splits
them in two!
I wake on one side and weep for the toys they took from
me
And on the other side I sleep
The moment that Eleutherios leaves and Ionia is lost²
A soft-curved hillock can barely be discerned covered by a
curly pregnancy cap
With strong buttresses opposite
So that you are protected from all eventualities; while
refugee bees

* Endymion was a beautiful youth with whom Selene, the moon, fell in love. He sleeps eternally, and she visits him by night.

1. "Myrtoon Sea": off the western Peloponnese.

2. Eleutherios is Eleutherios Venizelos (1864–1936), modern Greece's greatest statesman and a friend of Elytis's family. Ionia was lost in 1922, after his 1920 reelection attempt failed.

Buzz in swarms and a grandmother in her fish-catch of
misfortune manages
To draw out children and grandchildren from her gold
jewelry.

Danger that you yourself once wanted to ignore
Rolls you along on your side unloaded and ignores you
These of course in the lies of the garment you wear
without your turning its lining inside out
Where soot and golden coins came into contact
Like the detestable and the sacred

It's strange

How incomprehensibly we live but from this we are
suspended

Verdant little dove of basil kiss which I gave you in my bed
And in my writing three and four misspelled winds
So that the sea may become dizzy and yet
Every boat follow its route filled with mind and
knowledge

Facts wobble and in the end they fall even before men
But darkness has no storm lantern

Where is Miletus where is Pergamum where Attaleia and
where

Constan Constantino tinople?¹

From a thousand sleeps only one emerges awake one
forever.

Artemis Artemis hold the moon's dog for me
It bites a cypress and the Eternal Ones worry
He who has been sprinkled all over by history sleeps more
soundly

Go on ignite it with a match as if alcohol

What remains

Is Poetry alone. Poetry. Just and essential and straight
The way the two first-created might have imagined it
Just in the garden's acridness and infallible in the clock.

1. "Miletus," "Pergamum," "Attaleia," and Constantinople were great Greek cities, now in Turkey.

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Open Papers

- 1 To be Greek means to feel and to react in a certain way, nothing else. It is a function directly connected to the drama of Darkness and Light we all act here in this corner of the globe. Whether one is young or old born here or there, with meaning ethnic or universal, is another question entirely.

A “frozen” truth for Greece, for example, is her history as official Greeks interpret it. Another “frozen” truth is her history as Europeans present it. I believe the living truth is still found in her history as you discover it emerging within you from your personal experience and which the events or monuments of art simply annotate or illustrate.

Greece, I long ago concluded, is a concrete sensation—it would be worth finding a linear symbol for this—whose analysis, the finding of correspondences to all aspects, reproduces, automatically and at every moment, her history, her nature, her physiognomy.

- 2 Greece in my youth was a dazzle. I have been neither patriot nor nature worshipper, and so when I saw these attributes ascribed to me I was much surprised—as someone would have been in olden times had he suspected electricity in storms, and those around him had called him an autumn romantic. I proved to be quite incapable, it seems, of separating sensation from its object, and of showing the spirit all sensation’s derivatives.

- 3 In Greece light and history are one and the same thing—meaning that in the final analysis the one reproduces the other, the one interprets and justifies the other, even the void which is blackness; for this country, by

offering equality of ethical and physical values, does not happen to know any other chiaroscuro.

- 4 Being in the least degree poetic, I loved to the greatest degree Poetry, in the same way that, being in the least degree "patriotic," I loved to the greatest degree Greece. Anyway, it is not from awkwardness that I become *another* when I take up my pen. The truth comes out molten like a newly cast statue only from within the limpid waters of solitude; and the pen's is one of the greatest of solitudes. Contrary to those who try hard a whole life long to "construct" their literary likeness, I mean to destroy it at any time and at any moment: giving heed to the prototype alone which by its nature is to be shaped continuously, and being ready to begin it again exactly for the sake of the unity of life and art found, I think, much before or much after the doings of salons and cafés.
- 5 A rung higher than the perception that Poetry is a simple confession, I could see change the horizon and the entire landscape, exactly as from the peak of one of our own islands, where familiar shoreline prominences suddenly change shape and where unsuspected coves and capes, distant ridges of other islands, a new world broader and richer in its multiformity, are revealed to you. And the sifter of consciousness rejects and holds, holds and rejects, until one day you feel yourself clean and transparent, the way all your secret inclinations wanted you and the way all conditions around you conspired to alter. So very difficult to let your epoch stamp you without counterfeiting you.
- 6 The love of poetry came to me from afar, and, if one may say this, from outside literature. I became aware of this one day when, going through the rooms of the British Museum, I found myself in front of a greenish papyrus with, if I remember well, a fragment of Sappho inscribed quite clearly on it. After the heap of Latin manuscripts which I took in during those years, I felt a real relief; it seemed to me that the world straightened out and assumed its proper place. Those slender compact capital letters formed a graphic picture both limpid and mysterious, which gave me a friendly signal from the centuries. As if I were once more on a beach in Mytilene and heard our gardener's daughter singing.¹

1. "As if I were once more . . . gardener's daughter singing": The word for daughter is *kore*. Compare "Seven Days for Eternity" (*Six and One Remorses for the Sky*): "The moment when, secretly in the backyard, the gardener's daughter is kissed, and from her extreme delight a flowerpot falls and shatters. / Ah, could I but save that sound!"

Surrounded by a nature I had never experienced before but felt my ancestors had bequeathed me and which circulated in my blood, I began again to experience the same curious emotion: two streams that began in widely distant springs and came to cross in me. One stream brimmed with Sappho's ancient voices, with the right of the little herb and of the great moon within us, with the white stone fountain monument, with something simple but filled with wisdom that "stands" outdoors as the olive tree stands, and lastly, with feeling and sensation in equal parts and a kind of self-sufficiency without cultural influences—if this may be said. And the other stream: a common desire—come as if from a bar found in any country of Europe, with the same disheveled girls, the same sharp-sounding music, the same great longing—to erase everything and rewrite from the beginning; for love to be love true and free, above the mixed-up sheets of religion and fatherland, when the moon slipping out at night lights up a strange landscape of broken panes, trampled codices, and little phosphorescent animals.

Thesetwo vigorous streams struggled to bear me off. I was ready for them both, born for them both, so that as soon as I was in one I felt a traitor to the other; and this little cross had to change shape within me, because it was not the zodiac sign of torment I felt attract me but the sign of the interminable and flaming arrow.

The grip of childhood is, in the area of sensitivity, a demonic machine whose disconnection, when the moment is ripe, leaves us dazzled. We come gradually not to believe in ourselves for the sake of those who don't believe—who don't want to believe—in their own selves. But then why write? Why make poetry? I ask in the same way I would ask: why make love? As with a girl's cheeks or as in verses of a poem, between sender and receiver nothing ever interposes. The translation happens without interpreter and the gold dust that remains on our fingers appears sufficient. But if the wind blows it again, all nature will be inhabited by thousands of secret signs, and the insatiable ghost that lies in wait within us will open its mouth wanting more and more.

Here's why I write. Because Poetry begins there where death has not the final word. It is the end of one life and the commencement of another the same as the first, except it goes very deep, to the extremest point that the soul can track, to the frontiers of the contraries where Helios and Hades touch. The endless course toward physical light which is the Word, and the Uncreated light which is God. For this I write. Because it fascinates me to obey him I know not, who is my entire self, not a half-self that

goes up and down the streets and “is registered in the records for males of Town Hall.”

It is right to give to the unknown the part that belongs to it; here’s why we must write. Because Poetry unteaches us the world, such as we found it: the world of deterioration, wherein a certain moment comes for us to see that it is the only road surpassing deterioration, in the sense that death is the only road to Resurrection.

10 Primitive peoples, poets before the age of poems, not having mirrors at their disposal (literally and metaphorically) to admire themselves, overturned evil by pronouncing words terrible and incomprehensible. Thus, until just a few years ago, our island nannies with extreme seriousness drove the demonic away from our cradles by uttering meaningless words, holding a humble herb leaf that assumed who knows what unknown powers, merely from the innocence of its own nature.

This leaf, with its unknown powers of innocence and the strange words that accompany it, is, precisely, Poetry.

11 My eyes were dazzled, at high July noon, by the sun’s infinite gashes in the waves, so that even if the olive groves had not yet existed, at that moment I would have invented them—as would a cicada. Rather like this, I imagine, the world came into existence in another time. And if the world did not become better, it is of course from man’s fear of looking at himself and accepting who he is before speaking. I speak. I want to descend the steps, to fall into this verdant fire and then to ascend like an angel of the Lord. . . .

12 When for the first time I was given the opportunity to be on a ship’s deck sailing south of Santorini, I had the feeling of a landowner looking over his ancestral estate, just before inheritance. These expanses curly with waves were the arable lands where only cypresses remained to plant as landmarks. I measured my flocks, I set in order my granaries, my winestampers, my sheds. Neither did I lack boats. Here was the little monastery on the hillside, there two or three cottages on the edge of the rocks, and dovecotes and windmills. I felt a boundless familiarity already there in me, which made me exchange attributes and characters in things with the greatest ease and which beautified everything the Atlantis of others did not manage to carry off into the depths.¹

1. In Interview (p. 641), Elytis recounts: “In my youth I travelled southward for the first time to the island of Santorini, to the center of the Aegean. I had the feeling of being someone who

13 If there existed a way for someone to transcribe in visual symbols the kinetic phenomena that I felt obtaining all around me in that blinding cyan-gold space, he would watch, in cycle, the course from the sun to the roots of plants and from the roots of plants to the sun, the exchange between the properties of herbs and the impulses of men, the analogy between the impulses of men and their everyday objects, houses, boats, tools. And these with such clarity, consequence, frugality of means, that he would very soon be persuaded that their exact moment could be nothing else but the only and ideal justice; because justice is an exact moment and nothing else.

14 Things began to approach me with confidence, like birds. Smiling, I won over the most refractory of them. I made familiar a whole world, and I determined to train, to mold, and to assign to it what sleep had taught me in bitter hours.

A sick child made me experience for the first time how shells are planted. I took courage and built a little chapel out of seawater. It smelled like a cave and near the altar lilies immediately spread open. And from grasses I fashioned names and from names women whom I embraced and felt their waists emit a trembling and a coolness like running water. In the end, I only had to ponder something to see it be inscribed in capitals on stone. A great weight left me, as if prisons and hospitals had suddenly emptied out.

The winds came, which I catechized and scattered. They knocked on the boys' window shutters, and when the boys turned over on their other side, naked girls tossed their loosened manes blond with thousands of glittering droplets. Just this counterbalance was my longing for centuries. I took joy and revenge.

15 I would then see pomegranate branches sprout from the iconostasis and the wind chant at the little window when the southwind, stronger, would help the wave mount the low stone parapet. On such a bench naked I touched myself once, and felt my innards become clean, as if the whitewash with its disinfectant properties had penetrated my heart leaf by leaf. So I never feared the wild gaze of the Saints, wild, surely, like everything that attains the Unattainables. I knew that this gaze exactly

had inherited all these seas as his personal domain. I have had this feeling since my earliest years. When I happened across the theory that Atlantis, a sort of lost paradise, may have been Santorini . . . I could believe it. That's the location of the Atlantis of which Plato speaks as a kind of paradise. Yes, I find even in the depths of the sea the kind of paradise which I seek!"

sufficed to decipher the Laws of my imaginary republic and to reveal that this is the seat of innocence. May no one take this for arrogance; I do not speak about myself, I speak for whoever feels as I myself but has not sufficient naïveté to admit it.

16 A metaphorical summer awaited me, unchanging and eternal with the creaking of wood, the odors of wild grasses, the figs of Archilochus, and the moon of Sappho. I traveled as if walking in a transparent depth; my body shone as green and blue currents passed through it; I caressed the speechless stone female forms and I heard in the reflections the warblings of gazes by the thousands; an endless row of ancestors, grim, much-suffering, proud, moved my every muscle. Oh yes, it is no little thing to have the centuries on your side, I said continuously, and proceeded.

17 But nevertheless, *from what is to what can be*, you cross a bridge that takes you, indeed, from Hell to Paradise. And most strangely: a Paradise fashioned from exactly the same materials as Hell. What differs is only the perception of these materials' arrangement—to understand this, imagine it on the architecture of ethics and feelings—which is, however, enough to define the immeasurable difference. If reality, which men form with half the dynamic of their senses and feelings, does not now and may never permit the *other architecture* or *revolutionary resynthesis*, the spirit remains free and, as I perceive it, the only thing that can undertake it.

18 I saw the phenomenon of language take dimensions I never suspected. I was interested in the mystery of the birth of things through their baptism in that rejoicing of soul which is sound. The word polished like a stone on the lips of the people. On the lips and teeth, something identical with what urges you to fight or fall in love *thus and not otherwise*. You and the men from the group you belong to. All. Believers, who can't help it, in these trees, these waves, this light, this history.
Oh yes, in the final analysis, language was *ethos*.

19 The day I became conscious of the fact that *in the Greek language chiaroscuro does not exist*, I understood how reasonable is our inability to accept the Renaissance and I saw leave the last obstacle to my perception of the profound unity of art in ancient Greece, in Byzantium, and in the modern period.

20 This instrument very often directs the concepts it expresses more than it is directed by them.

Here is something that explains, no matter how absurd it may seem, the peculiar course that Greek thought takes in its expression, chiefly when the psychical side takes precedence, either in periods when this thought bears the whole weight of civilization or, on the contrary, in periods when it suffers pressure from the weight of a whole culture foreign to its nature. From there comes the right—or whatever—or the demand or the illusion “that the Greek constitutes the exception.” For example, I want to say why nature can’t not have a place in Greek poetical expression, as happened in other Western countries. Why “anxiety” or “demonism” cannot, in my opinion, work in the tree of language. Why Greek poets, no matter to what generation or epoch they belong, always deal with their land. And this phenomenon has induced the confusion of foreign scholars—and of thoughtless Greeks.

21 Someone, I’m afraid, in order to understand what I want to say, must be persuaded in advance that the psychical workings required to conceive an angel are much more painful and terrifying than those that manage to bring to birth demons and monsters.

I spoke about a clarity whose metaphysical sense is placed exactly above the moral, and this exactly above the aesthetic, this sense which we know and which was given to us like a simple, I would almost say *movement of the hands*, familiar to Greeks from the beginning, either those named Phidias and Ictinus, Anthemius and Isidore,¹ or anonymous seamen and craftsmen from the years of slavery. Also, this movement’s spectrum is so extended as to cover the range from sensation to idea, or more precisely, from confidence in the material world to confidence in the “divine.” Thus is the “Theophany” of Dionysius or Maximus² regarded from a sunworshipper’s point of view, completely outside ordinary easypantheistic solutions.

1. Phidias and Ictinus were sculptor and architect of the Parthenon; Anthemius and Isidore were architects of the Cathedral of St. Sophia.

2. The first name probably refers to Dionysius of Fournia (1667–1774), a monk, icon painter, and writer of an influential book on painting; the second probably to St. Maximus the Confessor (580–622), the great Byzantine thinker who worked out much of the theology of church architecture.

But the poetic condition is, someone must repeat even it if appears self-evident, a *third condition* which is not subject to the contradictions and discriminations of daily life. It is a musical notation notated in words but interpreted in the soul as vibrations whose extensions reach very far, sometimes (and they are then nearer to their ultimate target) to something that no longer has any connection with the original meaning of words. The sun has no connection with sunshine, nor the sea with boating, nor death with the zero, nor the firmament with the infinite; in other words, nature has no connection with nature worship nor the revolutionary with revolution, because that is how a persistent, permanent, and incurable way of thinking came in our epoch to perceive things. It's the same way of thinking that did not hesitate to attribute weight to poetry or not according to the darkness or the lightness of its texture (the light considered from the first as anodyne in Greece, how curious!), to mention the most typical instance.

You can catch birds with a lime-wand, but you can never catch their warbling. A magic wand is needed; and who, lacking the gift from the start, can manufacture it? It's good it exists! When this wand touches things—the words and their ordering—the real night falls and the real sun rises and all likely illegalities cease being a simple arbitrary act—as a simple man sees them. They tend to take their exact place in the texts that we write today as orthodoxies used to take in the classics. These illegalities' justification is the regaining of virginity. To say it differently: the splendor of youth and error.

As a group, poets, musicians, artists, for all their great differences, sometimes thanks to them, do nothing in the breadth and depth of centuries but construct the second condition of the world. It is open to all, and no military genius has yet been found able to cut off the narrow passes. It is just that the grosser human stupidity the more difficult the access. No one is obliged to be interested in Poetry, but once interested, he is obliged to know how to go over to this second condition, to walk through both air and water.

In Painting, we find it very natural to be led from certain shades of gray to slate, and from this to the profoundest structure of plastic truth that is Greece. In poetry, something analogous is impossible. The interposition of language, which happens also to be the means of our daily intercourse, confounds the two levels to such an extent that we come to believe that our finger, bleeding from a knife cut, drips even into the poem. No, Gentlemen! First, in order for the blood actually to drip, the knife itself must be in the poem; and second, it is not from blood that

we judge whether man's presence is painful or not. We all seek the "human landscape" to compare it with the "natural"—such awkwardness!

- 24 In Poetry, man is neither heathen nor Christian, neither heretic nor orthodox, neither communist nor fascist, to mention only a few of those who fight each other—right or wrong it doesn't matter—on the near side of Necessity. In poetry man is on Necessity's "far side"; his true characteristics, "those eternity shall establish as definite," are now equally found in a stone or a cloud, in a chance gaze or a cry that has nothing to do with you.

We do not eavesdrop enough at the doors of the mystic conversation of things—that's our trouble. Hence when a phrase, realistic in heaven, strays to our lips, we take it for an imaginary thing, and, head down and feet in the air, we exorcise the phantasm of reality to permit its reversion. But it is always late in our thought when the sun rises in our imagination; and death has no days and nights.

- 25 A few verses and one place remain always of every poet. When you turn a flashlight on them, what you took for trees and mountains and rivers you slowly see move about, change shape, dissolve, become what they were in the beginning: simple, condensed sensations. This bay is a shiver, this shadow a constriction in the throat, the running water a solace. The emotion quickly comes to substitute for the sensation. Later—if the attachment continues—the analogues by association come to substitute for the emotion, with a multitude of images in which the individual life of everybody, without knowing it, plays the life of other men. The metamorphosis of "natural landscape" into "human" is confirmed thus, as in a theorem. One needs only to walk this road in reverse to perceive in what way and to what degree the poet counterbalances the minus of death. And as for the sensations . . .

- 26 It is a pity, but it seems the contemporary poet cannot find his St. Sophia, not to speak of his Paraportiani.¹ I mean the tints of sensitivity that make even folk artists understand entirely differently the concept of a "fountain" on the mountain or near the sea. How, after these things, can I speak of solar metaphysics? Everyone, without knowing it, struggles today in the "popular market" of emotion to form an esperanto. And they have made so much progress that my style, my concerns, my impulses, appear as far off and inconceivable as Chinese.

1. Paraportiani is a famously beautiful church in folk style on Mykonos.

- 27 Beyond that point, we can say that the sun's position in the ethical world plays the same role as it plays in the nature of things. But the poet is the cutting edge for the ethical and the real world. That part of darkness neutralized in him through awareness is measured in light; then the light shines back on him so to make ever clearer his image, the image of a man. I believe that only thus can the humanistic aspect of Art's mission, if there is one, be conceived. Like an invisible facsimile function of a mechanism we name Justice; and I am not speaking, naturally, of court justice but of the other Justice which is realized slowly and with equal pain in the teaching of mankind's great leaders, in political struggles for social emancipation, in the highest poetic accomplishments. From such great effort, drops of light every so often fall slowly into the great night of the soul, like drops of lemon into polluted water.
- 28 Human monads are like chemical elements. From their amalgamation come unforeseen powers able to alter or to corrode whatever up to that moment was considered unassailable—in such degree that one becomes optimistic that sometime progress in ethics, as today in science, will succeed in solving the problem of the world. Alas. In this case and despite deterministic theories, the great Chemist remains invisible, irascible, irrational. And just when you think that here is the moment for him to discover the secret gunpowder of the soul, he strikes out and overturns all the sensitive instruments, shatters the glass tubes, mixes up the formulae so that no one else can continue his work. And so begins "the game for the sake of the game" all over again. Let the wretched fellow await his salvation. It's gone, it's finished, hydrogen stays hydrogen and oxygen oxygen. They don't turn into water.
- 29 Thus, I passed through the indifferent "great public" and the "hostile authorities" as through the Symplegades.¹ That there is no Golden Fleece is a lie. Each of us is his own Golden Fleece. It is sheer deception that death does not let us see it and recognize it. We must empty death of all it is crammed full of and bring it to absolute clarity, so that the true mountain and the true grass, the justified world filled with dewdrops gleaming clearer than the most precious tears, can start to be discerned within it. This is what I await every year, one wrinkle more on my brow, one wrinkle less on my soul: complete antistrophe, absolute transparency. . . .

1. The Symplegades are the Clashing Rocks, which Jason and the Argonauts had to pass through on their way to the Golden Fleece.

The poet must be generous. Not wishing to lose even a moment from your supposed talent is like not wishing to lose even a drachma from the interest of the small capital given to you. But Poetry is no Bank. On the contrary, it is that concept antithetical to a Bank. If it becomes a written text, communicable to others, so much the better. If not, it doesn't matter. What must happen and happen uninterruptedly, unendingly, without the smallest pause is the anti-servile, the irreconcilable, the independent. Poetry is the other face of Pride.

Chronology of the Life of Odysseus Elytis

- 1911 Odysseus, the sixth and last child of Panayiotis and Maria Alepoudhelis, both from Lesbos, is born November 2nd, in Heracleion, Crete, where, in 1895, Panayiotis set up a successful soap factory.
- 1914 Panayiotis moves his family and business to Athens. The family summers in Lesbos. Eleutherios Venizelos, the great statesman, is a regular guest of the family.
- 1916 Odysseus is enrolled in the Makris private school and studies there for seven years.
- 1918 Anna Keller is governess to the children and remains till 1926; she has a strong influence on Odysseus. On December 31st, the eldest daughter, Myrsini, dies, and the family is plunged into deep mourning.
- 1919 The family begins summering in Spetses. Odysseus's first experience of the archipelago will permanently affect his poetry. The Venizelos government falls, and Panayiotis is arrested for political reasons.
- 1922 The Alepoudhelis family shelters refugees from Smyrna.
- 1923 The family tours Venice, Lausanne, Belgrade, and several German cities.
- 1925 During summer in Spetses, Panayiotis dies of pneumonia.
- 1927 Odysseus suffers a nervous breakdown and spends three months in bed, which shatters the athletic ambitions he had held. Subsequently, he turns definitively to literature.
- 1928 Receives high school diploma. Suicide of the poet Kariotakis. Summer in Lesbos for his brother's wedding. In Kaufman's bookstore in Athens, reads Paul Eluard's volume *L'amour la poésie*, which shocks him into poetry.
- 1929 Writes his first poems, imitating Cavafy. Becomes interested in Surrealism.

- 1930 Subscribes to the *Nouvelle Revue Française*. Enters law school. Briefly becomes a Marxist; translates Trotsky.
- 1933 At university, meets the poet George Sarandaris, who greatly influences him. Cavafy dies. After the failure of a profound love affair, returns to poetry.
- 1934 Destroys his old poems and writes "First Poems."
- 1935 Becomes friends with the Surrealist poet Andreas Embeirikos, who greatly influences him. While frequenting the circle around the periodical *Nea Grammatika*, which publishes several of his poems, he becomes friends with Katsimbalis and Seferis. Chooses the name Elytis as pseudonym.
- 1936 Death of Venizelos. Publishes more poems, also translations of Eluard. Meets and becomes lifelong friends with the poet Nikos Gatsos. Interrupts law studies to join the army.
- 1937 Attends officers school in Corfu, where he corresponds regularly with Seferis and meets Lawrence Durrell.
- 1938 Becomes active in literary circles. Travels to Paros and Naxos on the ship of the poet Antoniou.
- 1939 Abandons law studies. New poems and translations. Meets Henry Miller. *Orientalisms* published.
- 1940 The critic Karandonis writes an article on him. A few of his poems appear in French translation. Serves as a second lieutenant under fire on the Albanian front.
- 1941 In hospital in Ioannina, deathly ill with typhus. Seferis lectures on *Orientalisms*. Writes most of *Sun the First*.
- 1943 Attends funeral of the great poet Palamas, where he is embraced by another great poet, Sikelianos. *Sun the First* published.
- 1944 Writes prose for *Nea Grammatika*. An attempt by an armed gang to kidnap him is foiled by his brother. Embeirikos arrested; Elytis, warned, hides. Writes "The Girls" (prose).
- 1945 A book of his poems published in French. *Song Heroic and Mourning* published.
- 1946 Meets Eluard in Athens; Sikelianos and Seferis join them on a trip to Salamis. Publishes a long essay on the poet Kalvos.
- 1947 Publishes parts of a long poem, "Goodness in the Wolfpasses," which he elects not to publish in full or republish in part. Translates Lorca.
- 1948 Finally having acquired a passport, travels to Paris and meets Breton, Reverdy, Jouve, Char, Ungaretti, T. S. Eliot, and others. Becomes lifelong friends with the cultured Lesbian publisher Tériade, who introduces him to Picasso.

- 1949 Meets Matisse, Léger, Giacometti. Athens does not renew passport, but he remains in Paris.
- 1950 Meets Sartre and Camus. Visits Spain and London. Starts *Axion Esti*.
- 1951 In London meets Steven Spender, Rex Warner, and others. Gives four talks for the BBC. Death of Sikelianos. Returns to Athens. His essay "Equivalences chez Picasso" published in *Verve*.
- 1952 A selection of poems published in Italian.
- 1954 Much work on *Axion Esti*. Active in Greek cultural affairs.
- 1955 Writes much of *Six and One Remorses*.
- 1956 His translation of Giradoux's *L'Ondine* performed. Meets Salvatore Quasimodo.
- 1957 His translation of Brecht's *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* performed.
- 1958 Meets Genet in Athens. With the novelist Myrivilis and the poet Ritsos, goes by invitation to Czechoslovakia.
- 1959 *Axion Esti* and *Six and One Remorses* given to the publisher.
- 1960 His brother Constantine and then his mother die. A selection of poems published in German. Wins the Government Prize for Poetry. *Six Poets of Modern Greece* (trans. Edmund Keely and Philip Sherrard, London: Thames and Hudson) introduces him to English-speaking readers.
- 1961 While aboard ship on the way to the United States as a guest of the State Department, writes the song cycle "Little Cyclades," later set to music by Theodorakis. Visits many American cities and records poems at Barnard College. Meets Yves Bonnefoy and Allen Ginsburg.
- 1962 Publishes part of a long poem, *Albaniad*, which he later rejects for further publication. Invited to the Soviet Union; meets Yevtuchenko.
- 1963 Seferis wins Nobel Prize.
- 1964 Theodorakis's setting of *Axion Esti* first performed and recorded, to thundering and enduring success.
- 1967 Visits Egypt. Unable to work on poems and prose after the military coup; takes up tempera and collage.
- 1968 His translation of Gide's *The Slaves* performed. A selection of his poems published in Italian.
- 1969 Unable to compose under the junta, goes to Paris, where he writes much of *The Light-Tree* and "The Death and Resurrection of Constantine Paleologus." *Axion Esti* published in German.

- 1970 Writes the libretto *The Sovereign Sun*. Spends four months in Cyprus.
- 1971 Returns to Athens. Death of Seferis. *The Light-Tree* and *The Sovereign Sun* published in Athens.
- 1972 Refuses the junta's award of Greece's lucrative Grand Prize of Literature. *The Rhos of Eros* (songs) and *The Monogram* published.
- 1974 Works hard on *Maria Nephele*. Spring in Corfu. Fall of the junta. *Axion Esti* and *The Sovereign Sun* (selected poems) published in the United States. *Stepchildren* and *Open Papers* published in Athens.
- 1975 Travels in France and the Cyclades. Embeirikos dies. *Books Abroad* devotes an issue to him.
- 1976 In hospital for two months with slipped disk. *Second Writing* (translations) and *The Magic of Papadiamantis* published.
- 1978 *Report to Andreas Embeirikos* and *Maria Nephele* published. Death of Katsimbalis.
- 1979 Wins Nobel Prize; goes to Sweden to accept it. Lots of media attention follows.
- 1980 Translations into many languages. Honorary doctorate from the Sorbonne. Exhibition of collages in Athens. Two weeks in Spain as guest of Prime Minister Soares.
- 1981 Elytis chair founded at Rutgers. *Maria Nephele* published in English and German. Several new books written on him. Receives honorary doctorate from the University of London.
- 1982 *Three Poems under a Flag of Convenience* published.
- 1984 *Sappho* (translations) and *Diary of an Invisible April* published. Elytis's dear friend and publisher, the poet Nikos Karydis, dies.
- 1985 *Revelation* (translation) and *The Little Seafarer* published. Gatsos dies.
- 1986 *The Room with the Icons* (collages by Elytis, text by Eugenios Aranitsis) published.
- 1987 *Krinagoras* (translations) published.
- 1988 *The Little Mariner* published in United States.
- 1990 *The Public and the Private* and *Private Road* (both prose) published. Long stay in hospital for anemia.
- 1991 *Elegies of Jutting Rock* published.
- 1992 Exhibition of artworks at Andros's Museum of Modern Art. *In White* (collected prose) published.

- 1995 Summer in Porto Rafti with his companion, Ioulita Iliopoulou. Writes seven poems, published in December as *West of Sorrow*. Also publishes a book of prose pieces, *The Garden with the Self-Deceptions*.
- 1996 March 18, dies in his apartment in Athens. Greece goes into mourning.

Nobel Address

Delivered in French; translated into English from the author's Greek version by Jeffrey Carson and Nikos Sarris

Speech to the Academy of Stockholm

Members of the Academy,
Ladies and Gentlemen:

May I be permitted, please, to speak in the name of luminosity and diaphaneity. Because these qualities define the place in which I was destined to grow up and to live. And I gradually felt them become identified in me with the need for expression. It is right to bring to one's art those things that personal experience and the virtues of language dictate. This is even more so when times are dark and thus oblige one to widen one's vision as much as possible.

I do not speak of the physical ability to conceive objects with all their details but of the metaphorical ability to catch their essence and lead them to a clarity that also intimates their metaphysical semasiology. The way sculptors of the Cycladic period handled matter, so that they went beyond matter, shows this clearly. Or the way Byzantine icon painters succeeded with pure color in suggesting the "divine."

All high poetry, I believe, has invariably attempted such a penetrating and also transforming intervention into reality. Not to be content with the "here and now" but to expand into the "what can be achieved." And this, it is true, has not always been valued. Perhaps because collective neurosis did not permit it. Perhaps because utilitarianism did not let men's eyes open sufficiently. Or because beauty and light were considered *passé* or painless. Nevertheless, the process required to reach an

Angel's shape is, I believe, much more painful than the process that brings to being Demons of all kinds.

Of course the enigma exists. Of course the mystery exists. But the mystery is not a stage setting that exploits the play of shadow and dark merely to impress us. It continues to remain a mystery even in absolute light. And then it acquires that splendor of attraction we call Beauty. Beauty that is a road—perhaps the only road—toward the unknown part of ourselves, toward what goes beyond us. Because this at bottom is poetry: the art of leading you toward what goes beyond you.

It is the art of composing words out of myriads of secret signs that bestrew the world and constitute myriads of syllables of an unknown language, and from the words phrases whose deciphering brings you closer to the deepest truth.

Where then is truth found in the final analysis? In the deterioration and death that we ascertain about us every day or in the propensity that impels us to believe that this world is indestructible and eternal? It is prudent, I know, to avoid grandiose expressions. Cosmological theories throughout the ages have made use of these, have come into conflict with one another, have flourished, have passed away. But the essence remained, remains. And Poetry, which arises at the point where rationalism lays down its weapons, takes them over and advances into the forbidden zone, for it just so happens that Poetry is least affected by deterioration. Poetry rescues permanent, living elements in their pure form, which are as hard to discern in the dark of consciousness as seaweed in the depths of the sea.

This is why we need diaphaneity. In order to discern knots along the thread which, stretched through the centuries, helps us to stand upright on this earth.

From Heraclitus to Plato and from Plato to Jesus we discern the "bond" which reaches our days in various forms and tells us almost the same thing: that the other world, the "beyond," the second reality set over the one in which we live against nature, is contained within this world and is recomposed with this world's elements. It is a reality which we deserve but, owing to our impotence, do not receive.

It is no accident that in healthy eras the Beautiful is identified with the Good, and the Good with the Sun. To the extent that consciousness is purified and filled with light, the dark markings retreat and are effaced, leaving voids whither their opposites—exactly as with natural laws—come to fill their place.

And this occurs in such a way that the created result depends finally upon both sides. I mean the "here" and the "beyond." Has not Heraclitus

already spoken of “the most beautiful harmony from what draws apart”? Whether it is Apollo or Aphrodite, whether Christ or the Virgin who embodies and personifies the necessity for us to see in material form what in certain moments we intuited, is not important. What is important is the breath of immortality that they permit us. Poetry, in my humble opinion, is obliged to permit this breath from beyond specific dogma.

How can I not refer at this point to Friedrich Hölderlin, the great poet who in this very spirit turned toward the Olympian gods and toward Jesus. The solidity he attributed to a kind of vision is invaluable. And the extent he revealed to us is great—is, I should say, terrifying. This as it were is what made him exclaim, when the evil that afflicts us today was just commencing, “*Wozu Dichter in dürrfziger Zeit!*” Times alas have always been proved *dürrfziger* for man. But poetry has always kept functioning. Two phenomena destined to accompany our earthly fate, one counterbalancing the other. How else, since it is for the sun’s sake that both night and stars become perceptible. Except that the sun, according to the saying of the ancient sage, ends up as “hubris” if it oversteps its measure. We must be at the right distance from the ethical sun, as our planet is from the physical sun, for life to be possible. We once used to blame ignorance. Today we blame great knowledge. I do not put this forward in order to be counted among all those who censure our technological civilization. A wisdom ancient as the country that reared me taught me to accept evolution, to digest progress with all its consequences, no matter how unpleasant these may be.

Then what about Poetry? What does it stand for in such a society? I answer: it stands for the only space where the power of number does not count. And this much is evident: your decision to honor the poetry of a small country, in my person, shows harmonious correspondence with the concept that art is the one remaining opponent of the increasing tendency of our times to reckon value by quantity.

It is, I know, improper to refer to one’s personal circumstances. And even more improper to praise one’s home. But sometimes it is necessary, when it helps one to see more clearly a certain situation. And this is the case today. It was given to me, dear friends, to write in a language spoken only by a few million persons. A language that has, however, been spoken for two and a half thousand years with no interruption and with few alterations. This seemingly illogical contradiction also corresponds to the material-spiritual essence of my country, which is small in extent of space but infinite in extent of time. I do not at all mention this in order to boast, but rather to point out the difficulties the poet confronts when he employs for the most beloved things the same words

as, for instance, Sappho and Pindar did—without their limitation as to the extent of humanity's civilization. If language were simply a means of communication, there would be no problem. But it happens to be an implement of magic and a bearer of ethical values. Through the centuries, language acquires a certain ethos. And this ethos gives birth to obligations. Let us not forget that for twenty-five centuries, there was not one century, I repeat not one, in which poetry was not written in Greek. Such is the great weight of tradition that this medium bears. Modern Greek poetry evinces this in sharp relief.

The sphere, one could say, formed by modern Greek poetry, like any sphere, has two poles: north and south. At one pole resides Dionysios Solomos, who, from the expressive point of view, succeeded with utmost concentration and seriousness in inscribing—before Mallarmé's appearance in European letters—the concept of pure poetry with all its consequences: the subjection of feeling to intellect, the ennoblement of expression, and the mobilization of all the possibilities of the instrument of language in the direction of the miracle. At the other pole resides C. P. Cavafy, who, like T. S. Eliot, arrived at the utmost frugality and greatest possible exactitude of expression, eliminating inflation in the formulation of his personal experiences.

Between the extremities of these two poles moved our other great poets, Andreas Kalvos, Kostis Palamas, Angelos Sikelianos, Nikos Kazantzakis, and George Seferis. This is a ready and extremely schematic cartography of modern Greek poetry. The problem for us who followed was to shoulder the lofty lessons that they bestowed and, each of us in his own way, to adjust them to contemporary sensibility. Beyond the bounds of technique, we need to reach a *synthesis* which on oneside can redigest the elements of the Greek tradition and on the other can express the social and psychological demands of our era. In other words, we should put forward the type of the "European-Greek." I do not speak of successes but of attempts. The way forward is what counts for the student of Literature.

But how can this way forward develop freely when the conditions of life in our day are devastating to the creator? And how can a community of sensibility be formed when impenetrable obstacles of language block the way? We come to know you and you us by the 20 percent or perhaps 30 percent that remains after translation. And all of us who come from a specific tradition and strive for the miracles of the word, we especially remain dumb and incommunicable at the point where the spark flashes whenever two words are properly placed. We suffer from the lack of a common language. And the repercussion from this lack—

if we ascend the scale—leaves its mark even in the political and social reality of our common homeland, Europe.

We say, and we ascertain daily, that we live in an ethical chaos. And this happens the moment that the distribution of the elements of our material existence acquired, as never before, so much system, so much military order as it were, so much implacable control. The contradiction is instructive. When one limb is overfed, the other is underfed. The praiseworthy tendency of Europe's peoples to unite into a single unit stumbles today into the impossibility of the coming together of the overfed and underfed limbs of our civilization. Not even our values make for a common language.

For the poet—it may sound strange but it is true—the only common language that he feels remaining to him is the senses. For thousands of years, the way two bodies touch each other has not changed. Neither has it led to any conflict in the manner of the scores of ideologies that shed our societies' blood and that left us with empty hands.

But when I speak of the senses, I do not mean their first or second accessible level. I mean the very farthest. I mean "analogies of the senses" in the spirit. All the arts speak in analogues. An odor can be either mire or purity. The straight line or the curved, the soprano or bass sound are translations of a certain optical or acoustic contact. We all write poems good or bad according to the extent that we live and think in either the good or bad sense of the term. A sea image from Homer reaches our days intact. Rimbaud refers to it as *mer mêlée au soleil* and identifies it with eternity. A girl who holds a myrtle sprig from Archilochus lives in a Matisse painting and makes the Mediterranean sense of clarity more palpable.

It would be worth considering here how even a virgin in Byzantine iconography is not much different. Often, with just a slight twist, natural light turns supernatural and vice versa. A sense that was given to us by ancient men and another one by medieval men came to give birth to a third sense that resembles the first two as a child his parents.

Could poetry follow such a road? Could the senses reach purity through their incessant cleansing? Then their analogy will return to the material world and will influence it.

Daydreaming in verse will not do. It is too little. Talking politics will not do. It is too much. At bottom the material world is merely a heap of stuff. The final result that we shall build will, depending on whether we are good or bad architects, be Paradise or Hell. If poetry grants an assurance, especially in these *dürftig* times, it is this exactly: that our fate in spite of all these things is in our own hands.

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