Three Poets from Greece: Tasos Denegris, Alexander G. Pop and Nanos Valaoritis

PANAYIOTIS BOSNAKIS

TASOS DENEGRIS


COSMOGONY

So when on the next evening after Christmas day
with those hideous electric lights lit along the street
I was observing people
Far-off images came to my mind
Images and sounds.

Basin cistern crucible
Crater of a volcano
The region a tangle of snakes.

Horizontal movement
Fixed in chaos
Mussels and Tyrannosauruses
cracks in rocks and all the time
the others keep coming:

The caste
The grazing and hunting
The bull’s horns and the crown
The idyll in the forest
The fame of the horse
The tumult of the slaughter
The monarchy of the passion
laws that fell
From heaven
The various appeals
To the king to the president
To humanity, ethos, religion
And the others keep coming.

People seem like bad copies to me
Not real
Not truly responsible
For their evil fate
As they go back and forth
Among the fir trees left on the street
Even paler than the electric lights
Which piteously illuminate
the next evening after Christmas Day.

October 1972

IMPRESSIONS FROM A READING
OF POEMS IN JAPANESE

Language of Asia from the larynx
Violence through and through
And vanity
Not like a cat
Who sees the blemishes of life and people

The host of weaknesses
As stretched out on the tiles
It has a complete view
Nor like that woman
The winter of ’48
Civil war
Raining frogs and boards
And the man’s jacket tossed
On her face old before its time.

Another sense of vanity
Nothing sweet about it
Death in advance
Like the sword that suddenly strikes the shield
And smashes it
Or shatters its point
— Neither matters —
Only the clash
Of iron and that deep despair
This, Asian tongue
Conveys.
The trees stuck to the window panes
An army dressed in rags roaming about
Proclaiming the victory of winter.

1 December 1975

ZEN
So let’s surrender
To emotions more ill-defined
To a stroll in the sky.

Clouds stationary and self-contained
Do not foreshadow anything
But rather promise and affirm
A day that started with smog
Strain, self-interest, compromise
Perhaps will end
With an absorption with nowhere
With the head
Of the Black Beast
Who for your sake
Was transformed
Into a household pet
Smiling at you.

UGLINESS OF CIVILIZATION

Darkness fell.

My voice
A shot pilot.

Then again
Another
New scene
Near the sea
Late Renaissance
Plectrum
Feasts at bursting point
Preparing a great deception.

AFTER A SUDDEN RAIN

After a sudden April rain
The green of the leaves dazzles me
Burnished and newborn.

The abandoned garden
As if by magic
Gleamed.

In the house
Young and old
Are watching animated cartoons
While the skinny
Grape-arbor looms
Against the glassed-in porch
And makes things difficult
As their imagination jars with
The watching
Of the television program

I will carry on with my work
Encouraged.

DUBLIN

A caique turned over half sunk there
On the jetty at Howth
Exalibur SO 69 its name
And the rest of the particulars
Painted a cobalt green
The wood of the hull
Prey to the sea
Which chews it up with small grunts.

But the mast
Doesn’t even care
About the water
That has come to roost
Because it
Will answer only
To the sky
only to the sky will it surrender.

(All poems were translated by Philip Ramp)
ALEXANDER G. POP

Born in Athens, Greece (1920-1990). Poet and journalist. He wrote in French, English and Greek.

THE DAY WILL COME

The Day will come
when, sitting on
the Peak
of the fabulous Himalaia,
I will look around
my Ectoplasm and
say to Humanity
how much I owe
to God and Devil
for what is
lasting
in the retrograde Mirror
of the
Ego's saturation.

The Day will come
when, the laces of my
worn-out shoes
will change into an
enormous Octopus
to strangle the
Desire,
the Passion, the
Myth of Self-control,
the Disappointment and
the Fame, the Glory and
Sickness of
Morbid
Memory.

The Day will come
when all Treasures of
All Baba's Grotesque
Cave,
will not provoke in
the Spirit,
the Inevitable Envy of him
who has violated
the Laws of Friendship
for the Lust
of Richness and for
the mediocrity of
the Golden Crown.

The Day will come
when I, in
the Still of the
starless Night, will long
for
Isolation,
and See through
White Eyeglasses
the Formulation
of the Empty
celestial Dome.

The Day will come
when,
only Love of
others will substitute
the perpendicular self-loving
Psychical
Perversion,
when
You
will be for
Me,
The Universe
and, by My Adoration,
will understand why
must I, stand Alone
on the Peak of
Fabulous Himalaya,
looking around my
Ectoplasm and
seeing only
Thee,
my beloved, covered
by Snow in form of
a White Hair's
Crown.

MY SHIP IS WRECKED!...

On the Bottom of the Ocean
lies
my wrecked Ship,
dissolved by the Force of
Waves,
of Tempests and tropical
Typhoons.
The Captain, covered with the
blue Veils of
the calm Lagoon,
stands amidst his
crew.
He stays petrified like a Statue from
classical Ages.
Corals are his Eyes and
through
fluid topaze Waters,
a silent Fish, with gracious movements
animates the Body of
the Sailor

who died on duty
in front of fulminating
Waves, Tempests and
Tropical Typhoons.
My wrecked Ship is
Ship no more although
its wooden Frame with
the mermaid's earnest Smile,
in the Prow
contradicts this
point of View.

NANOS VALAORITIS

Nanos Valaoritis was born in Lausanne, Switzerland, in 1921, of Greek parents. He has lived in Athens, Paris, and the United States. Since 1968 he taught comparative literature and poetics at San Francisco State University. He is trilingual author (Greek, English, French) and has written poetry, novels, plays and essays. One of Greece's most distinguished contemporary authors, he was twice awarded the Greek national poetry prize and once the Greek national essay prize. He has received many other distinctions and prizes. Terre de Diamant was one his earliest works written originally in French and published in Paris in 1958.

THE PALACE OF THE EYES

Two celestial bodies approach and hold themselves like a gigantic dragonfly to a flower of water, in a same distance, fragile and delicate one another. They have been created of a widespread substance in the infinite, the great Telesma. When she produces the splendor she calls herself light. This light is the common mirror of all thoughts and forms, she holds the images of all that they had been, the reflections of past worlds and by analogy the plans of worlds to come.* It is the domain of the eyes, in its absolute multiplicity, where all is received, where nothing is lost, not even the
shadow of a doubt. The polarization is perfect. Those who are observed by this miracle can feel in themselves the releasing of a delicate mechanism, that makes all lived sensations, during a life, even the most fleeting, to be registered here, in the Palace of the Eyes. These omnivorous eyes, capable to assimilate the most unnoticeable things in their calmness and complexity, this retina of the world, the first reflection of the interior world.

* Eliphas Levi, *The Key of the Great Mysteries*

**AT THE THRESHOLD OF KNOWLEDGE**

A pale blue light that transmits the astral moon and its two nortic quarters reveals the Palace of Knowledge, bathed in the millenial calmness and silence. It is the vision of a secret city, where the apparition coincides with the beginning and the end of the cycle of history. The ten-thousand years, a period of accumulation of wisdom and preparation for the knowledge, is reflected by the central eye, surrounded by a labyrinth without entrance nor exit. The two auxiliary eyes on the sides receive in their urns the residue of thoughts scattered in the world. This place without guardian, it will manifest itself, only at the beginning of the esoteric age, when the secret tradition will be revealed to the people, liberated hopefully from their enslavement to Princes of Power, to their avid power.

*(Translated from French by Panayiotis Bosnakis)*

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**Six Poems by Yannis Ritsos**

**GEORGE PILITSIS**

**Nύχτωσε**

Κι η ἀποψινή γιορτή ἀναβλήθηκε.  
Κι οὔτε που ξέραμε καθόλου  
tί θὰ πενθούσαν, τί θὰ γιόρτασαν.  
Μεμιάζει άνάξαμε τά φώτα και ἔθιμησαν.  
Ἤπε το παράθυρο εἶδας τούς μουσικούς  
πέρασαν ἄφωνοι τῇ λευφόρῳ  
έχοντας στοὺς ὠμοὺς τοὺς  
tεράστια κάλκινα δραγανά.  
Μεῖνε, λοιπὸν, ἔδω,  
κάτινος τὸ ταυγάρο σου  
μέσα σ’ αὐτή τῇ μεγάλῃ ἡσυχίᾳ,  
mέσα σ’ αὐτὸ τάθυμα-τίπτα.  
Κωφάλαλα τ’ ἀγάλματα.  
Κωφάλαλα καὶ τὰ ποιήματα. Νύχτωσε.  
Ἀθήνα, 1.1.1988

**ΝIGHTFALL**

Tonight’s festivities have also been postponed,  
without our even knowing  
the reason for their mourning, the reason  
for their celebrating.

* These poems from *Late, Very Late Into the Night*, were written in Athens and in Kalamos between January 1 and May 4, 1988. they were revised and rewritten in Krollov, Samos, between July 14 and 29, 1988. Fourteen poems were excluded. (Y. R.)