be judged, will be called to the tribunal of poetic morality.

Anagnostakis’ work affords – or indeed imposes – many opportunities for reflection, and I have concentrated on just one aspect of it, though I believe it to be the central aspect. What I have attempted to illustrate is how, having at an unusually young age opened up an unusually deep vein of reflection, and an exacting sense of the responsibilities of poetry, Anagnostakis gradually came to put up the shutters on his inspiration, for reasons that will always remain in part obscure, and which certainly cannot be explained in terms of (to quote Karyotakis), “a milieu, an epoch.” As time went on, Anagnostakis’ poetry came more and more to expose or even espouse an absence; and more recent interviews with the poet reveal a sort of nostalgia which is itself close to escapism. Yet his path towards silence is carefully laid with poems which reward closer attention than space here permits.

49 See e.g. the interview, “Δέν είμαι ποιητής,” in Τό γνωρίζει (Sydney) 13 (1993) pp. 5-8.

Nature, Love and the Rhetoric of Justice in Modern Greek Literature

CONSTANCE V. TAGOPOULOS

The body is not blind unwrought material when bathed in Greek light; it is suffused with abundant soul . . .

(N. Kazantzakis, Report to Greco)

A burning problem in the hearts of men of all times is the problem of justice. In our modern societies, justice is understood, predominantly, as a socially elicited response which functions on the basis of fair laws established by society to safeguard a person’s physical integrity and well-being. In modern Greek literature, however, the concept of justice seems to transcend this narrow social dimension and to assume an ontological meaning that echoes the pre-classical emphasis on balance, measure, and reciprocity, which sustain the natural and moral order of things. In this context, nature and love come to reflect moral justice and the human soul. They become the figurative means that help the poet bring an abstraction to the level of the personal and the tangible. Through this rhetoric of justice, the poet articulates his quest for something permanent to counteract change and decay. This is a longing deeply rooted in the Greek soul and profoundly felt at times of social and moral instability.

I will look into representative works of Greek ethography, such as Papadiamantis’ The Murderess and Karkavitsas’ The Beggar, on the one hand, and poetry, mainly the work of Seferis, on the other, with the purpose of gaining insight into the way the rhetoric of justice functions, through the metaphors of nature and love, toward (a) articulating these writers’ quest, (b) bridging ancient and modern Greek thought, and (c) constituting our current sense of justice. But before turning to our authors, it is necessary to trace the evolution of the idea of justice back to its earliest conceptualization in ancient poetry and philosophy for the purpose of establishing its diachronic meaning.
The concept of justice appears to have evolved from a cosmological law to a social and moral principle. Whereas in Homeric usage the original concept of justice (dike) has a purely normative sense meaning no more than “minding your own business,” with Hesiod it becomes linked to social organization. In the Theogony, for example, Zeus takes Themis’ (Natural Law) as his wife and has three daughters with her – Eunomia (Law and Order), Dike, and Peace – who represent the ideals of human community. A moral reflection first manifests itself in Works and Days, where “dike” stands opposite two vices, “Hubris” and “Ate” and is identified with the divinities “Aidos” and “Nemesis” – the consciousness of what is just and the embodiment of moral sentiment, respectively. Justice lived upon the earth during the golden age, the age of Astraea – another name for personified Justice – but the corruption and impiety of mankind drove her away. The yearning for the “return of Astraea” has ever since become a literary topos – the golden age topos. We encounter it in Virgil’s “Fourth Eclogue” and the Eighth book of the Aeneid, Ovid’s Metamorphoses, Don Quixote’s Golden Age speech, Voltaire’s Candide, and other literary works.

A similar movement from a natural to a moral application is also seen in Pre-Socratic philosophy. Guided by scientific curiosity and the need to hold on to some unchanging truth in a restless world of transition, the early Greek philosophers see justice as a cosmic principle that governs the physical universe and preserves “cosmos.” Anaximander (610 BC), for example, believes that the opposing forces in nature are inevitably in perpetual war inflicting damage (φθορά, or decay) on one another and making recompense – paying a debt (χρέος) according to the ordinance of Time. This payment is identified with retribution, revenge, or Fate. For Anaximander, “adikia” or “adikima” is tantamount to the “wrong” perpetrated by the cosmic powers upon one another. Justice (δικαιοσύνη) and the giving of satisfaction (τίμησις) thus admit a moral dimension into the earlier purely physical correlates of the concept.

By contrast, while concurring that all things are a result of Strife and Necessity, Heraclitus (500 BC) sees strife not as “adikima,” but as the highest expression of justice, the unity that holds the universe together. This unity exists in apparent opposites. If it splits, the opposites revealed are in reality one and the same thing. The sustained unity of the world is a result of “aphanes harmonia,” or hidden harmony. Although things are changing, change is not continuous but spasmodic and everything is held temporarily in stability by virtue of “palintinos harmonia” or unapparent harmony. Stability in the world, a result of unremitting strife and tension, is only an illusion. However, provided the total metra in the world are preserved, a large number of things may and do exist for a time without changing; but eventually the tension in one direction or the other will dominate and the material composing this table will return, perhaps deviously, to the fire from which it was originally extinguished.

The balance of the underlying unity of the cosmos depends on metron – measure or proportion – which controls change. The broader aspect of “metron” is logos, the law according to which all things happen. Heraclitus’s Fragment 94 gives an example of natural and moral justice as the underlying principle of cosmos: “The sun will not overstep his measures (metra); if he does, the avenging Erinyes, ministers of Dike, will find him out.” (“Πάλας γὰρ συν ὑπερβησαίη μέτρα ἐὰν δὲ μὴ ἔργησε καὶ Δική ἐπίκουρος ἐξυμπόσσειν.” Born from the mutilation of Uranos by Cronos – the first blood crime of the world – the Erinyes (Furies) were spirits of vengeance whose

---

2 Themis” means “established right, or what is established by custom rather than by statute. When personified, Themis is the goddess of law and order.” The Presocratics, ed. Philip Wheelwright (New York, 1966) p. 328.
3 The outrage that is disregard for others, whether god or man, that results from man’s lack of regard for his own limitations.
4 The infatuated delusion that leads man to folly and self-destruction.
5 In the early fifth century B.C. the word meant “order” or “regularity.”
7 “It should be understood that war is the common condition, that strife is justice, and that all things come to pass through the compulsion of strife” [ἐξελέστηκα δὲ ἐκ τῶν πολέμων ἐννομοῦν, καὶ δίκην ἐγίνον, καὶ γνώμην πάντα κατ’ ἔργα καὶ χρείας]. Heraclitus, Fragment 80. See also: W. K. Guthrie, “Flux and Logos in Heraclitus,” The Pre-Socratics, ed. Mourelatos, p. 198.
8 Unapparent harmony is stronger that the one which is obvious: “ἀριθμοῦν ἀριθμόνων, ὀρθογένης χρείας”. Fr. 54.
function was to secure moral justice. Heraclitus, in fact, breaks away here from the old cosmological tradition and moves into the moral realm of things.\(^{11}\)

The elusive ethical dimension of the largely cosmological aspects of Hesiod and the Pre-Socratics is fully established with Aeschylus. His *Oresteia* moves away from the violence of the primitive vendetta and into the first human court of law, the Areopagus, instituted by Athena – symbolically the city of Athens. The Erinyes are transformed into spirits of love, changing their name to Eumenides, as darkness turns into light. The “Semnai,” or “humble” and “kindly,” as the metamorphosed Furies were also called, become now capable of feeling. The concept of justice in *The Oresteia* marks not only a transition from the blood vendetta to institutionalized and even humanitarian justice but, significantly for our focus, it is linked to the ability for compassion – a human attribute.

The total shift to a moral theory with the human soul as the center reaches its apex in Plato. In the *Republic* (sub-titled “On Justice”), *dikaiosyne* is described as the “reciprocal treatment” that assures that the opposite tensions of the contraries shall be held in harmony. Justice pertains to the inner action and to the elements of the self; it becomes a state of inner unity. The harmonious coordination of the different elements of character bears an analogy with the organization of the state and guarantees personal, financial, or political welfare.\(^{12}\) In Platonic discourse, Justice is one of the immutable Forms that the soul once saw when in the company of the gods and ever since longs to see again. The love and nostalgia for the Forms is the result of a remembered moment of mystical transcendence that the soul endlessly strives to recapture.\(^{13}\)

The strife of the opposites, time and decay, retribution, measure, nature as a mirror of the human soul and of the moral world, memory, love, and the movement toward light have come to constitute the rhetoric of justice that expresses, in the best of modern Greek literature, humanity’s ageless quest for permanence and equilibrium – a sense of immortality – in a decaying and unbalanced world.

With the above analogies in mind, we can now turn to modern Greek literature and attempt to show the centrality of the ancient concept and rhetoric of justice in the work of modern Greek writers.

\(^{11}\) Ibid, pp. 191-95.
\(^{12}\) Plato, *The Republic*, 443d-e.
\(^{13}\) Plato, *Phaedrus*, 254a-e.

---

**PAPADIAMANTIS**

In Papadiamantis’ *The Murderess*, Hadoula or Frankojannou, is a victim of social injustice perpetrated by a rigid and insensitive society that sees a woman as a financial burden to her family and at the same time a slave to her husband, her children, and her grandchildren. Unable to earn an income, a poor girl had to rely on her parents for a dowry that would secure her a husband. To deliver future Hadoulas and their parents from their fate, Frankojannou murders five little girls, starting with her own infant granddaughter. Found out and pursued by the police, she hides in the wilderness and ultimately dies before falling into the hands of her pursuers, while trying to save herself in a nearby chapel. She is drowned by a rising tide, in the author’s concluding words, “midway between divine and human justice.”

Although Hadoula is, by any definition of justice, guilty of an abhorrent act, her suffering and victimization by society shatter her sense of identity, confusing in her mind the criminal with the God-sent deliverer. As Beaton has put it,

*The Murderess* “can be read simultaneously as an indictment of the social and economic burdens placed on women in traditional Greek society, as a Dostoevskian exploration of the psychology of the killer, and as a Miltonic attempt to justify the ways of God to men.”\(^{15}\)

Caught, himself, “midway” between society, religion, and the nature of the human soul, the author is reluctant to act as a judge, preferring to deliver his heroine neither to institutionalized justice nor to a representative of a religion she perverts, but to the hands of Nature.

A key to our understanding Papadiamantis’ dilemma is to be found in the relationship between his heroine and nature, if this relationship is read in the light of the ancient conception of justice.

Frankojannou is, in fact, torn apart by two conflicting interpretations: justice as seen by society, and justice as felt in her tormented soul. The oxymora killer-mother and killer-doctor that describe the old woman speak eloquently enough of the clash of the opposite tensions inside her. In her confused mind, the image of reality is in-

\(^{14}\) Ibid, pp. 191-95.
\(^{15}\) Plato, *Phaedrus*, 254a-e.

---

Quotations are from Peter Levi’s translation of Papadiamantis’ *The Murderess* (London, 1983). Pages will be given in the text.

verted and things are defined by what they are not. When a little girl dies, for instance, Frankojannou finds no words to offer consolation to her parents, because her own inner world is turned upside-down: "... And grief was joy and death was life and everything was upside down. Ah, look... Nothing is exactly what it seems, anything but, in fact rather the opposite" (36). 16

This loss of a sense of proportion and balance is reflected in the changing rapport between the heroine and Nature. The latter had, in fact, spread out her abundant gifts for Hadoula – the weeds and herbs that made her a healer. The old woman was in perfect harmony with Mother Earth, whether running barefoot amid the thorns, flinging herself up steep crags like a goat, or flying like a bird over the yawning abyss of the sea; and when her pursuers close up on her, it is in the dark womb of mother Nature – its caves and caverns – she finds refuge.

But Frankojannou can no longer be protected by Nature because she has, hubristically, upset the order of things. In taking away the life of these children, the old woman assumes the destructive role of Nature which clashes with a mother’s natural life-giving qualities. "Those three little girls were her children" (95): "We are your children! – You are our mother" (μηδὲ ἐγέννησές, 120), their voices cry inside her. The moaning she hears "within her, deep in her bowels" (93) tells us that she has killed her own nature, the mother inside her. Following the murder of her granddaughter, "she did not feel she was alive any longer" (45) (τὴς ἑραίνετο ὅτι δὲν ἔζη πλέον, 60). It is for this reason that Nature refuses to continue to clasp Frankojannou to her bosom, as she had done with her "witch" mother, whom the divinities of the woods had hidden in the hollowed trunk of a tree to save her from her pursuers. Hadoula’s mother, insensitive and cruel though she is, she neither offends Nature nor upsets the moral order of the world.

The passage that most eloquently illustrates Nature’s sudden wrath toward Frankojannou comes in the description of her descent into Bad Valley and of the devil-dance of the stones – product of her agitated mind gone up in smoke from working things out too much (38): "Down in Bad Valley, in its lowest depths... the rocks were dancing a devil-dance in the night. They stood up like living things, and hunted after Frankojannou and stoned her as if they were slang-shot by invisible, avenging hands" (117). 17

The instinct striving for balance inside her turns Nature into an avenging Erynis, who seeks to bring back the “measure” that was overstepped. A few lines later, the old woman will carry out her own stoning by the hand of a personified Nature / Justice:

Now the scree was disturbed, it seemed to be angry. The stones that she shifted as she walked were a sort of base and foundation for the whole infinite heap of stones that reached to the edge of the cliff. As the first stones were displaced, other stones moved to take their places, and after them came others again. And then the whole tidal wave of the cliff would come down on her, it fell around her thighs and her legs, against her arms and against her breast. At times certain stones dropped from a height and struck with lively malice at her face. It really did feel as if an invisible hand was aiming a slingshot at her head (117-118). 18

Nature’s fury is directed exclusively against Frankojannou. As the narrator stresses, the soldiers managed to get down into Bad Valley “without worrying about the stones of the scree rising up and falling on their heads and pursuing them” (123). 19 They had to struggle neither against a confused image of reality nor the paraphasias of a

16 "Καὶ ἥ ἁλεστὶ ἦτο χαρὰ, καὶ θυσία ἦτο ζωὴ, καὶ ὕλη ἔκανε ἄλλα ἕξιν ἄλλων, Ἄι Ἴδος... Καὶ ἰσχύς δὲν εἶναι ἀνόητος δὲ ταῦτα τείνεται, ἄλλα πάντα ἄλλον τὸ ἐνεργεῖν." "Alexandros Papadimitriou, Ἡ Φόνωσα (The Murders)" (Athens, 1903) 1988) (50).

17 "Ὄρατο μὲ τὸ Ἐκατάρεια, χρυσὸν εἰς τὸ βάθος, σιίμα εἰς τὴν Σκοτεινήν Σιπλάν, οἱ λίθοι ἐξέφεραν δαιμονικὸν χορόν τὴν νύκτα, Ἀγνόθευτο, οὐκ ἔμμειγαν, καὶ καταστίμησαν τὴν Φρωτογκαλίνα, καὶ τὴν Εὐθυβοῦλλα, ὡς ἐξενειδοδότου ὑπὸ ἄλλοτος ταυροειδοῦς χάρας.” (145)

18 "Τὸτε ἡ σάρξ ἐπεφάνετο, ἑραίνετο ὡς τὸ ἀθάνατον. Οἱ λίθοι τοὺς ἄνωτος ἕξεραν κατασθάετο, ὡς καὶ τὰ βάσησαν, ήξενοι εἰς τὴν χρήσιν, τὸν ἐπιστρώνον εἰς τὸ περιστάτη τοῦ χρήσιν. Καθὼς ἐξερευνήσει τοὺς λίθους, ἅλλοι λίθοι ἔρρημεν τὸ λάβοντο τὴν θέλον τοῦς, μετ’ αὐτούς δὲ ἄλλα. Καὶ οὕτω πολλοίροι ἄλλο τοῦ χρήσιν ἐπερεύτηκαν ταῦτ’ ἐπανάλησαν εἰς τὰς σχέσεις καὶ σχέσεις, εἰς τὰς χρήσεις καὶ τὰ στέρνα της. Εὔνεια, λίθοι τείνετο, ἄτο ὄραμα καταδιείυθησαν, ἐπούλαν μὲ χρήσιν καὶ κακίαν τοῦ προϊστίου της. Τοὺς τελευταίους τοὺς ἑράτοτε πρεσβυτέροι ὡς τοὺς ἐκείνους ἀδέσποτος χείρ κατὰ της κόρας τῆς." (146)

19 "χορός ἐν ἑγκληματικό ἀπὸ τὰς χρήσεις, χορός τοὺς λίθος τῆς αἰσχοῦς να προσοδεύσατο καὶ να μηθῶν κατεπάνω τοὺς, να τοὺς κυνηγήσουσιν!" (151-152)
disturbed mind. The wrath is subsequently carried on by the sea: The waves “rose, leapt up, struck the upper lip of the cave-mouth, fell down and leapt up again, with long growls of madness ... and sometimes a groan of pain and longing” (118).20 the water “bellows” in a human voice: “Murderess! Murderess!” (Φόνισσα, Φόνισσα, 120). The wild sea, a mirror of her own soul, is described as “the dark creature (that) was disturbed” (118). The rocks dancing a devil-dance and the groan of the water are results of the strife within. Among the several images of nature than portray the murderess are the sea eagle that died without leaving any young but only an abandoned nest full of its victims’ monstrous bones (52) and, importantly for our context, the image of the river:

The old woman climbed higher up to the steep top of the valley. Below her the river cut deep through the Acheilas ravine, and its stream filled all the deep valley with soft murmurs. In appearance it was motionless and lakelike, but in reality perpetually in motion under the tall and long-presses trees (51).

Consciously or unconsciously evoked by Papadimitriou, this river passage emphasizes the duality of nature, reality and appearance, strife and metron, as expressed in Heraclitus’ “river fragments.”21 Hadoula’s failure to keep in touch with the physical world around her is paralleled with her increasing inability to keep sight of its moral and spiritual dimensions. Although she believes she is God’s angel and her suffering at times evokes Christ carrying the Cross, she fears the Archangel and in vain struggles to distinguish the faking forms of the Saints in their icons by her grand-daughter’s bedside and in the chapel of St. John-in-Hiding.

20 “Το χύμα ένωσόθετο, έπήδα, έπληττε τὴν ἄνω φλάν τοῦ στομάχιου, κατέπτατο, πάλαιν δεαθά, έπέπεμτε μαυροσό φρόνημα μανίας ... στεναγμον ἰπόνου καὶ πάθους.” (146-147)
21 The most important among them says: “Upon those who step into the same river and different waters flow” [ποταμον τοιον αὐτολιθον εμβάνουν έπορευτε καὶ έπορευτέ διάεσυν τρεχον] (Fr. 12). “These river-fragments,” Kirk argues, “show the regularity, the order, the metron or measure, which Heraclitus believed to underlie and to control natural change in all its forms. The example of the river is intended to illustrate this metron.” Two other “river fragments,” 91 and 12, express the reciprocity and quantitative balance “more unmistakably.” See Kirk, “Natural Change in Heraclitus in The Pre-Socratics,” p. 191.

By delivering his heroine to Nature, Papadimitriou evades passing judgement in the terms instituted by organized society, turning instead for an answer to the primordial self-regulating mechanism of natural justice. By identifying her with Nature, the author also throws into bold relief the duality inherent in the primordial function of the creative and destructive Mother and by extension in human nature.

Franko’s sense of alienation from the physical and moral world emanates from the absence of a caring environment and from her own inability to love. The bitterness of her last words, “Oh, there’s no love!” (Ω! γά το πρόσωπό μου!) acknowledge society’s failure to care for her and the betrayal of her own mother who cheated her out of her rightful dowry. Hadoula does not know how to love for there, where love should be, she had found betrayal. Immediately following the murder of her granddaughter, the text calls attention to betrayal, in biblical terms, by referring to “the third crowing of the cock” (38), repeated twice later (32, 113).

In writing The Murderess, in 1902, Papadimitriou was not merely recording condemnable societal practices but also describing a nation until recently under slavery and in need of reform, a nation still in search of its identity under lamentable economic and social conditions. Papadimitriou’s deep religious feeling could not conceive of God as an avenging Erinyes. In searching for a balance which his contemporary society was unable to offer, he turns nostalgically, to pagan thought, precisely, to the Heraclitean and Aeschylean concept of justice.22

KARKAVITAS

An analogous return to the ancient concept of justice defined by nature and the strife of the opposites can be seen in another naturalistic masterpiece, Karkavitas’ The Beggar.23 This is done through the combined effects of parody and naturalism – caustic irony and repulsive images of realistic descriptions – aimed at provoking the reader’s reaction by shocking and outraging him. Published in 1896, this novel was a voice of protest against the indifference of the citizens in Greek villages, after liberation from Ottoman rule; at the same time it was

20 For a discussion of Papadimitriou’s paganism, see David Hicks’s “Papadamitros, Paganism and the Serenity of Place,” Journal of Mediterranean Studies, 2, 2 (1992), 169-82.
21 Quotations from this work will be from Andreas Karkavitas, The Beggar, trans. William Wyatt (New York, 1982). Pages in the text.
an attack against the corruption and apathy of the newly established state that led, only a year later, to a humiliating war against Turkey.

Karkavitats's story unravels at Nykeremi, a Thessalian village of abject poverty which Tziriokostas, a professional beggar, chooses as the stage of his act. He arrives there armed with exceptional skills of cunning and deception, loose morality, and inability for compassion. The villagers, destitute, superstitious, and gullible become easy prey to the clever beggar who strips them of whatever little possession they have, causes the death of a pregnant woman, takes a brutal revenge on the village's customs' official, and leads the whole village to jail. From this total disaster, he himself walks out unscathed, scornful as ever, and richer. By parodying justice, the author underscores the effects of greed and ignorance and the absence of morals, love, and government care. Such phenomena were not rare in backward agricultural societies in which human beings understand and care only for their animals as they gradually become like them.

Like The Murderess, Karkavitats's novel relies on nature, love, and the rhetoric of justice. Its last chapter sardonically titled "Justice" invites a reading in the light of the ancient concept of justice. Like Papadiamantis, Karkavitats chose to end his novel with a description of the flight of his protagonist from human and divine justice:

Calm now, Tziriokostas proceeded deeper. He had secured his freak and no longer thought of anything but another journey and new trophies. With a breath of wind the branches of the plane trees drew a thick green curtain behind him as if concerned to protect him from all pursuit. The vale eagerly welcomed the beggar into its damp, soft hiding places, just as it welcomes so many harmful reptiles and parasitic creatures. Oftentimes man cannot find the reason for the existence of these things. And yet Nature clasps them to her bosom, an indifferent and unbiased divinity, displaying equal love both to the fruits of Cain and the firstlings of Abel's flock (132).24

24 "Ο Τζιρότκωτας, ήπιος τόρα, επιρροή ήραν Βασίλειο. Είχε εξακολουθήσει το παράλληλο λόγιο και δεν αποκυμανόταν πλέον πολλά νερά τού λυτές και νέα τροχαία. Στα κλαριά των πλατανιών με ένα φυσικό τού φέρνεται έριξη της παπαλαύσης προοινο και παχό κάτω τού. Ήσυχα η κατοικία ανάκλησε από κάθε κυνηγήμα. Η κουλίδα προθήμη εδήχτηκε τον άριστη τάξη ενός τόσου ελκυστήρα και παράτατον.

As with Hadoula's mother, the vale now hides the beggar. But unlike the author of The Murderess, Karkavitats ends his story with the spotlight turned on "aphanes harmonia" and with Mother Earth protecting the criminal in her "damp, soft hiding places." One would think that Karkavitats consciously resurrects the Hesiodic Gaia in the Theogony giving birth to monsters which she subsequently hides in her guts to protect them from a tyrannical father, threatening to annihilate them.

This closing passage brings into the fore the opposing forces that contrast nature with society and at the same time constitutes them as reflections of each other. The paradox of nature who is "indifferent" (αδιάφορη) — here used in the sense of unbiased or apportioning equal privileges — yet capable of loving her children is significant in this respect. The "vale" appears as a kind of paradise in which all creatures, good and evil, can survive because they can enjoy Nature's equal love (ημείς έχουμε.25) Love and protection are absent from the social environment Karkavitats describes; this absence sets nature opposite to society.

But nature is also a reflection of a primitive social organization. The vale is a postlapsarian Eden, as suggested by the inclusion in it of Cain, Tziriokostas, and the "harmful reptiles and parasitic creatures." It is a world that has lost its innocence and known suffering and evil. Such a primitive world can maintain unity and wholeness for the sake of mere survival but cannot achieve moral development and progress. For the moral component and the human factor are nowhere visible. Surrounded by "la tendre indifférence du monde" (the tender indifference of the world) as Camus has called it,26 man in a developed society can be responsible for his actions — and free, in the existential loneliness such freedom entails. But in the world of The

25 "Ο άνθρωπος παλλάξακης δεν βρίσκεται της ἐπεράξεως τού τον σκοτε. Καὶ δε ίς καταστάτης τούς κακούς τῆς ή Φοίνικα, θεώτεις αδιάφορης, διηνεκεστής, ὡς δέχονται ἀγάπη καὶ στοῦ. Καὶ τούς κακούς καὶ στα κρατούσκα τοῦ "Αμπήλα."


26 Camus, L’Êtranger [The Stranger], (Paris) p. 179.
Beggar, in which people participate in spite of themselves, no sense of responsibility is possible. Nature thus becomes a metaphor for human nature and man’s innate ability for love which, nonetheless, is stifled by the crude realities of life.

In the “paradise” of The Beggar, man turns, in fact, against nature and love. The society of beggars, for instance, maims its children for the sake of profit, turning healthy boys and girls into lame, blind paralytic beggars with deformed faces which incessant fraudulent expressions had hardened; ... crippled bodies which had been altered, not by the swift passage of the years, not by the hidden activity of disease, not by the sudden impact of the weather, but by deliberate attempt (20).²⁷

The raping of nature and the abuse of love reflect a corrupted community’s moral decline which culminates, here, as in The Murderess, in the uprooting even of the most sacred feeling – that of maternal love. In effect, the mothers, calloused and too passive to react to their husbands’ will, go along, tacitly, with the mutilation of their own children. At Nykeremi, even Tziritokostas is struck by the hatred and brutality the human heart can hatch: “Even he began to feel a spiritual dizziness in the face of such hate and the unimaginable cruelty which imperiously governed those peasant souls” (57).²⁸

The author’s accusing finger points to a society that destroys man’s natural ability for feeling encouraging instead begging, greed, dishonesty, and selfishness. It is a society that victimizes its children. External justice has no place in a world where inner harmony does not exist.

Nature is corroborated as a metaphor for justice and balance not only in the closing paragraph of the novel. The lyrical landscape passages, which form a striking contrast with the rest of the wry naturalistic narrative, bolster the same idea. The most characteristic among them deals with the description of the journey of different birds of prey, peaceful, migratory – travelling along with the snake and the mouse, on the trunks of trees that the river Peneios carries, as they seek their “longed-for place of rest.” This analogy with the human inhabitants of the area and with the journey of life toward death makes one think of the primitive cosmos which, unlike human societies, continues to survive without the need for moral laws; in a sense justice that never made the transition from the cosmological to the moral stage.

Inner strife is virtually non-existent in The Beggar, because the creative opposites in the soul have been flattened out and substituted by single-dimensional desires socially dictated, like Kroustallo’s yearning for a male child. The only glimpse the author allows into a moral conflict is seen in the example of Mountzoures’ mother, who commits suicide when she realizes that it was her husband who was mutilating their children. This is, perhaps, the only sign of sanity, the sole instance of moral revolt against a collective perversion of humanness. The villagers, “delivered over first to the necessities of life and then to the bonds of sleep, have neither longings nor dreams” (71). They desire nothing, not even their freedom, finding it easier to obey the age rather than be free (118), even after the conqueror is gone. Their hearts and spirit are numbed and the only compassion they are capable of showing is toward their animals:

“... I’ll kill my kid if it didn’t give you water; and if my mother kept oats from you, she won’t live out the year, I swear ... It kills me to see your mane chewed up by the heavy yoke ... ”' The Karagounes bends down and kisses his animal with a tenderness and love such as he did not show his wife on their wedding night” (76).²⁹

This is an example of perverting and wasting the divine gift of love – committing hubris against it and against humanity.

Unlike Papadimantitis, Karkavittas portrays justice not by arming the hand of the deity with the avenging sword of her classical representation but by denying altogether the possibility of her existence under the circumstances. Justice and moral order are not only upset

²⁷ “πρόσωπα ... ποι παραμορφωμένα ἐπέτρωσεν ἡ ἀδάκοις πλαστο-προσωπικότητα ... σακατευμένες κορμομορφοποιίες, ποι παράλληλων άκηκ τοῦ χρόνου τό γυροποϊόμενο, ὧν τῆς ἀφρόσπιτης ἡ καθημερινή ἐνέχει, ὧν τοῦ καιροῦ ἢ ζωνώση ἐπανάληψη, ἀλλά τό πέλμα ...” (38)

²⁸ “Αὐτὸς ο δάνειος ἄρα να ἀνάβαζεν ψυχικόν ἔγκλημα στό τόπο μύσο καὶ τῆν ἀφάνταστην σκληροτήταν, ποι ἐκμεταλλεύεις δεσποτικής ἐκείνης ψυχῆς” (89).

²⁹ "... σωτάνονο το πεδίο μου, ἵνα δε σ’ ἐπιτύχω καινάν τό ἀκράτα ἢ μάνην μου τασχὶ, χόρον να μην τήν ἐβιβάζο! ... Λογοποδία φλέβεσκε φαναρομένη τήν πλεξίδα σου ἀπ’ τό το βαρύ ξύργο ... Σκέφθηκε και φίλες το χτένος του τ’ Καριγουνός με τρωφοφορίαν καὶ στόροφη, διότι δεν ἐμφάνισε τή γυναῖκα τήν πρώτη νύχτα του γάμου του.” (115)
and grossly violated in *The Beggar,* they are perverted. Balance, re-tribution and revenge lose their abstract sense degenerating into the insipid materiality of a personal settlement of accounts: the beggar’s revenge for the beating Vaclavas had given him. Justice is not possible where the Erinyes are absent and from a place Nemesis and Aidos have fled. The only justice possible is a chaotic survival of the fittest. This is a frightening, nihilistic image of the world intended to shake the reader out of his complacency and force him to act, as naturalistic writings purport.\(^3\)

**Sefteris**

If Papaditzantis’ and Karkavitias’ novels encourage, as they do, a reading in the light of the ancient conception of justice, Sefteris’ writings establish the poet’s debt to Heraclitean and Aeschylean thought beyond any need for elaboration here. I will, therefore, turn directly to my themes—nature, love, justice—and the way they bring about the “miracle,” as the poet calls the manifestation of his quest in poetic logos.

Sefteris’ announced quest for love is, in essence, a quest for justice and balance and, more precisely, a quest for a moment of immortality that will counteract the ravages of Time. As a modernist poet, Sefteris, of course, had the linguistic and aesthetic means of his times and background that ethography, fifty-sixty years earlier, did not possess. This affords him, among other techniques, an intricate network of symbolism in which love, justice, balance, nature, and knowledge constantly redefine one another, as their individual inner tensions keep reshaping each one of them. Nature, justice, love, death, memory, blood, the light, the sea, the house, the angels, the swans, each one of them nests the opposite that makes it whole. A closer look into some of these concepts and symbols in the poetry of Sefteris will explain the better the duality that sustains the perpetual rhythm of strife and harmony.

**a. Nature**

Light, the sea, the snakes, the rose, are forms of nature that appear in an on-going struggle for balance. Nature is creative and destruc-

---

\(^{3}\) As Sachares has put it, “... It is clear that for Karkavitias the world has not been left to the philanthropic hand of God; desire for improvement is needed—indeed an action for its realization.” A. Sachares, Μορφές της Πειραγωγής (Figures of Prose), 1, pp. 24, 65, esp. p. 55. Quoted in P.D. Mastrodassides’ “Appendix” to *The Beggar,* p. 182.

---

\(^{31}\) “Οἱ ἐλέες μὲ τὰς γυναῖκας τῶν γυναῖκων μαζί τὸ μεγαλύτερο τῆς γυναίκας.”


\(^{32}\) “Ρόδο τῆς μοίρας, γύρων ζευγαρεία μάζας πληγαμένων μα μάζας μεταφέρεται σήμερα τὸ μουσικό ποίημα ποίησις νὰ λυτρώνει νὰ έκτισσε όραμα τὸ πρόστιμο ποὺ διάκοπτε τὸν διάκοπτε νὰ διαπεράσει νὰ έκτισσε όραμα τὸ χρησιμολογεί εν τὸν άντοθο σταθή.”


\(^{33}\) According to Heraclitus, fire is the force that holds the universe together and transforms life into death and death into new life. “The thunderbolt pilots all things,” he says: [ta δὲ πέπτει οἰκοστάσει παρακάμψεως] (Fr. 64).

\(^{34}\) “Κίνησε διά τῆς ζωῆς ποὺ δὲν πέρασαν πρέπει νὰ παρείναι τοῦτο μετεβάλει τὴν καρδιὰ τοῦ ἐκκαρπόλου φῶτος.”
Nature is life and death, stability in change, perennial renewal, and equilibrium — a reflection of balance and justice with which it is identified.

b. Justice

To compare natural and moral justice, the poet has more than once referred us to Aeschylus and the Presocratics:

I think of the mechanism of justice (Aeschylus) sets before us, which we will not find to be simply a moral law unless it is also a law of nature... (A) just man is the man who is the measure of life. Whoever goes beyond the measure is guilty of hubris and will feel the thunderbolt of ‘Ate,’ the stern fate that provides for the balance and equilibrium of the universe.  

In Seferis' integrated vision, the more recent exemplar of “just man” is the hero of the Greek revolution General Makryannis — the epitome of humility, righteousness and Greekness (Romiosyne), and the embodiment of metron.

Justice is not only a metaphor for the equilibrium of the physical and moral world; most importantly, as in Platonic discourse, it is inner harmony. In the poetry of Seferis, justice is sometimes seen as social justice, but more often it is evoked in a wider ontological context. The poet was influenced by the philosophy of Meng Tseu (Mencius), the second in importance philosopher after Confucius. Ancient Chinese thought regarding ethical and social order moved around two basic notions: that of love (jen) and that of justice (yi). Meng Tseu believed in the power of good will as the only force that can harmonize body and soul and enable love and justice to reign. If justice, or inner harmony, reigns, then love and the external order of things will be maintained. Justice, it follows, is not the achievement of an external order of things but the attainment of an inner harmony which will lead to this order. Conversely, injustice is the disruption of this balance; it is equated to the exceeding of measure that leads to hubris.  

Mencius refers to love as "the serene house of man," a phrase Seferis quotes in his Diary. In the poetry of Seferis, the house, often identified with love, is a major symbol of the quest for the self of the wanderer and the exile.

But justice, like everything else, has its inherent contradictions as its relation with death exemplifies. Death and oblivion, for example, are attributes of justice. Death "has its own justice," says the poet in "Mythistoroema 21," and in a poem that appeared only in his Diary he writes: "... And if catastrophe is to fall upon me, let it fall as it is right — in justice." Moreover, the unheroic companions of "Mythistoroema — the poet's "Elpenor" — die with the human desire to be remembered, but although

... their oars mark the place where they sleep on the shore no one remembers them. Justice.

... Τά καυτά τοῦς δείχνου τὸ μέρος πού καυμώνται στ’ ἄθορμάλ. Καίνες δὲν τοὺς θυμάται. Διαμυούν.

38 Gaston Bachelard equates the house with the topography of the inner self: "La maison, plus encore que le paysage, est "un état d’âme"... elle dit une intériorité." [The house, even more than the landscape is a psychic state... it bespeaks intimacy], La Poétique de l’Espace (Paris, 1958), pp. 77 and 18).
40 Elpenor, the youngest of Odysseus’s companions, dies unheroically when, heavy with wine and sleep, he loses his balance and falls from Circe’s roof. The collision of the literal and the metaphorical, here, points to human weakness and incapacity to keep instincts and reason in balance. Elpenor is for Seferis the "sensual" (θαυματός) Elpenor who represents scattering, loss of nostos, and man’s inability to unite the self. Pound’s "hectorism," is an epithet for his own Elpenor figure in "Maunderly IV." Elpenor illustrates the failure of the union of the striving opposites. While sympathetic toward human weakness, Seferis also holds such persons responsible for the inertness that leads to catastrophe.
"It is just that nobody remembers them," says Seferis, "they are not heroes, they are Elpenors."

On the other hand, death is injustice "when you can't any longer choose / even the death you wanted as your own" ("Santorini"); and, in the same poem,

Here we found ourselves naked, holding
the scales that tipped towards
injustice.42

So is old age, justice, yet, we long to hold on to youth and life. The only way of salvaging what was lost, is poetry:

The white sheet of paper, harsh mirror,
gives back only what you were.

Maybe you'll find there what you thought was lost:
youth's burgeoning, the just shipwreck of age.43

(Summer Solstice, 8)

While viewing death as the "debt" that has to be paid to Time, it is emotionally impossible for man to accept death without the bitter feeling of one who suffers injustice.

Death, oblivion, old age, are, after all, necessary for the new cycle of human drama that endlessly takes us "from killer to victim / from victim to punishment / from punishment to the next murder" ("Mycaeae").44 It is the drama that guarantees the continuation of life.

In perceiving death both as justice and injustice, Seferis was subscribing to the antithetic views of Heraclitus and Anaximander, who saw Strife as justice and injustice, respectively.

42 "Εδώ βρεθήκαμε γαμνοί καθούντας
tη χαμάρι που βάφανε κατά το μέρος
tής άδυσίας.

43 "Τ' ὄσπρο χαρά τικληρός καθότατης
επιτρέφει μόνο ἐκείνο ποὺ θέσαν.

44 (Mας ἀγάπης) με ἀκατέλυτο νυμφό, ἀκατάσπαστὸς σὰν τὶ
μοσχοποίη και παντοτής

για τη γεννηθήκας ἔτι γεννηθήκαμε καὶ σὰν πεθάνουμε,
αὐτὶ ἐκεῖνος, δὲν τὸ έξομοι οὕτω ἑμένεσ ὑπέρ ὅλος καινεῖς."
("Les Anges sont blancs"). The "miracle" the poet seeks to reveal is man's awakened consciousness of his own immortal potential.

The interaction of the negative and positive aspects of love is illustrated by Clytemnestra. She incarnates such polysemous concepts as mother, love and murder, revenge and sacrifice, the sea as both strife and serenity. In seeking the mother to kill her, Orestes searches for "the sea that cradled you" the sea you cannot escape, exhaust, or find "no matter how you... circle past the black, bored Eumenides unforgiven" (ὅσο καὶ να γυρίσεις μηχανότα στὶς ματίσεις Εὔμενιδες ποὺ βαρυότατα, / χωρὶς συχώσεως.) ("Mythistorema 16"). In looking for the mother, Orestes seeks love and death as living implies seeking our death. The sea stands for these conflicting ideas and emotions. It is the unattainable, unavoidable, and inexhaustible means of nostos—never achieved in the poetry of Seferis — as the examples of Elpenor and Agamemnon illustrate. Yet, the sea can keep alive the hope for the journey back where a house is waiting for the wanderer and the exile. It stands for the constant strife and balance, as in Aeschylus' Persians, a work the poet often evokes in this context.

Xerxes was defeated because he was guilty of hubris, because he performed the outrageous act of flogging the sea... this element that although always tormented, never stops striving towards a balance, towards a measure.

The sea metaphor, combining the journey, strife, and "galini" epitomizes the human predicament but also man's potential to "rise a little higher" ("Mythistorema 23"). To achieve this, like Odysseus, we would have to fight the complex monsters — hatred, selfishness, forgetfulness, betrayal — that prevent us from remembering what it means to be human, what it means to struggle, like him, with body and mind. This moment of transcendence is the "miracle which the poet has been anticipating since the last lines of "Erotopis Logos" (1935):

"Σπέρνεται τοις ύπομνημέοι τοις θαμμα πού αναγίεται η αποικία θ' αν' ε'ν δια έδατα προσιέναι τοις άγγελοι στι το πανάριο δράμα...

"Οποιος πετο τοι δεν άναπτε θ' αναπάνθι, στο φορε' και ελώ αν' ένα μεγάλο σπίτι με σολάσια άνωκτα τρέχοντας απ' τη κάμαρα αν' τη κάμαρα, δεν έχοντας άποι δια' ένα κατάλοιπο πρώτη.

The first lines are a paraphrase from the second century A.D. Latin poem "Pervigilium Veneris" ("Eve of Venus"), the rest are taken from Erotopis Logos (Books 1, 1365).

46 Clytemnestra is the wife of Agamemnon, King of Argos and Commander-in-Chief of the Greek army in the Trojan war, whom she murders on the day of his homecoming in retaliation for the sacrifice of their daughter Iphigenia. Ordained by Apollo, Orestes, their son, avenges the death of his father by killing his mother and is subsequently haunted by the Erinyes. The curse that plagues the house of Atreus is the subject of Aeschylus' Orestes. It becomes Seferis' metaphor for the endless repetition of war, revenge, and sacrifice, a circle inside which humanity is caught.

47 George Seferis, On the Greek Style, p. 58

On the stone of patience we wait for the miracle that opens the heavens and makes all things possible we wait for the angel as in the primordial drama... The "miracle" that will restore the "adikima" of decay perpetrated by profane time erupts as a hope ten years later in "Thrush" (Κήλη). This is a poem that evokes Antigone and Socrates as symbols of enduring love that defeats tyranny and death and ends with Aphrodite Anadyomene (the goddess of love in resurrection) predicting the arrival of love and of light:

whoever has never loved will love in the light: and you find yourself in a large house with many windows open running from room to room, not knowing from where to look out first.

Making the "miracle" happen is a matter of remembering correctly. "A characteristic of the Greek tradition is its love for humaneness; its rule is justice," says the poet elsewhere. If we keep these two truths in our mind, we can cope with war, scattering, and decay. We only have to keep the causes of injustice in our mind, in other words, we must learn to remember correctly what, in our human desire to avoid pain, we tend to forget. This is what the poet prays for in "Salamin in Cyprus:"
“Lord, help us to keep in mind the causes of this slaughter:
greed, dishonesty, selfishness,
the desiccation of love;
Lord, help us to root these out…”

This prayer to one’s inner self is, in effect, Seferis’s response—and in strikingly similar words—to the agonizing appeal Karkavitas addresses to the decaying society of The Beggar, in which greed, dishonesty, and selfishness have stifled love.

The mere hope for the “miracle” that “Thrush” anticipates, turns into a vision in Seferis’ later “apocalyptic” poems, most of which he wrote in Cyprus, significantly, “the Island of Aphrodite,” in 1953-1955. The poet dedicates this collection “To the world of Cyprus, Memory and Love.” The poet’s apocalyptic moment unfolds in Engomi, a Cypriot village, at the site of an excavation where archaeologists unearth a statue of Aphrodite. The moment of revelation is the emergence into the light of the indestructible monument of love:

And I looked again at that body ascending;
people had gathered like ants,
and they struck her with lances but didn’t wound her…

In words borrowed from the description of the birth of Virgin Mary in the Apocalypse of James, the rise of the statue of Aphrodite into the light is transformed into a vision of the Assumption of the Virgin:

Suddenly I was walking and did not walk
I looked at the flying birds, and they had stopped stone dead

51 “Κύριε, βοήθησέ με να ἑφημορίσω πῶς ἔγαγε τοῦτο τὸ φως
τὴν ἄγνηπτον τὸ δόλο τὴν ιδιότητα,
τὸ οπτερέμενον τῆς ἁγίασης;
Κύριε, βοήθησέ με να ἑξερωτίσωμε…”
The poet explains in a note that he took this wartime “prayer” from the ship Commander Lord Hugh Beresford, R.N., who fell in the battle of Crete, George Seferis, Ποιήματα [Poems]. See editors’ Note, pp. 345-46.

52 I have chosen “world” instead of the translators “people,” since the original word “cosmos,” meaning both, connotes more than the inhabitants of the island.

53 “Καὶ ἐξαναίσθησα τὸ σῶμα ἐκεῖνο τὸ ἀνερρίπτως ἐγνώμονε
ἐγκόψατο πολλοί, μενύγματα,
καὶ τῇ χυτοφώνει μὲ κοινάρια καὶ δὲν τῇ λαβώναν.”

54 “Άνεφαρα περιπατοῦσα καὶ δὲν περπατοῦσα
κοίταζά τα πετούμενα πουλία, τίς ἔθανα μοιραμένη
κοίταζα τὸν αἰθέρα τὸ ὀσφυόν, τίς ἔθανα θεμιτεύμενος
κοίταζα τὰ κορμαὶ τοῦ πολεμοῦσαν, τίς ἔθανεν μένη
καὶ ἀνάκητοι τοὺς ἔνα πρόσωπο τὸ φῶς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου.
Τὰ μαλακὰ μάφα ἔνοικον στὴν τραχήλη… καὶ τὰ σώμα ἐγγένει ἀπὸ τὸ χρυσόκάλυμα εξεμμενόμενο
μὲ τῇ ἄγωσι ὑμνίῳ τῆς ἡγήσιας,
χορὸς ἀνάγιτος.”

55 οὐθεὶς τῆς μοισαίας ποτὲ μένε
ἔει στὸ κέντρον σῶν ἐγκώλων
ἀμέτακτος.
Δὲν ἐναπέκτησα τοῦτο ἄνεος
οἰκείαμον κεφαλων.

According to Heraclitus, “The thunderbolt pilots all things” [τὰ δὲ πᾶντα οἰκείες κεφαλων] Fr. 64. It represents divine justice, the force that holds the universe together and transforms life into death and death into new life.
That moment signals the birth of a new consciousness:

... you suffered
the other labor, love,
the other dawn, the reappearance
the other birth, the resurrection.
Yet there, in the vast dilation of time,
you were remade
drop by drop, like resin,
like the stalactite, the stalagmite.\(^{56}\)

This is what Seferis means when he says: “Where is love that with one stroke cuts time in two and stuns it?” (Ποῦ 'ναι ἡ ἀγάπη ποὺ κόψει τὸν καιρὸν μνοκόμματα στὰ δύο καὶ τὸν ἀτοσβολόνειν,” (“The Mood of a Day”), or, “... the night that split open, a blue pomegranate, / a dark breast, and filled you with stars, / cleaving time” (η νύχτα ποὺ ἄνοιξε, γαλάζιο φόδι, / σκοτεινὸς κόρος, καὶ σοὶ / γέμισε ὀστρα / κόροντας τὸν καιρὸν) (“Thrush”). This experience is described by Mircea Eliade as the irruption of the numinous into profane time.\(^{57}\)

Influenced by Imagism, Seferis offers little images presenting a revelation. “An image,” according to Pound – the leading theoretician of Imagism – “is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time.” Only the instantaneous presentation of such complexes, Pound goes on to say, gives “that sense of sudden liberation; that sense of freedom from time limits and space limits;”\(^{58}\) The Presocratic idea of change temporarily frozen if “metra” are preserved is, in essence, rearticulated in modernistic terms.

The strife of the opposites for equilibrium cannot be achieved with-

out sacrifice – the “debt” that has to be paid by life. Among Seferis' later poems, “The Cats of Saint Nicholas” illustrates this. This poem is based on a chronicle recorded by early travellers to Cyprus: It was during the great drought in the island that millions of snakes full of poison were born. The duke of Cyprus gave a hundred cats as gift to the monastery to fight the snakes. Every night the cats, a “miracle” to look at” (“θεοῦς καὶ τῶν βλέπτων”) would go out into the battle with the snakes that left them lame, twisted, maimed. Over the years, the cats gradually annihilated the snakes, but in the end they themselves disappeared:

Poor devils, what could they do,
fighting like that day and night, drinking
the poisonous blood of those snakes?
Generations of poison, centuries of poison.\(^{59}\)

The destruction of the cats is a result of the debt they had to pay for the disaster they caused, the “adikíma” they committed. Justice, evoked, as always in Seferis, simultaneously on the personal and national level, are thus equally weighed.

Having experienced and transmuted in his poetry personal loss, nostalgia, exile, uprootedness and scattering through the Asia Minor experience, the two World Wars, the Balkan wars, civil insurrection, and the devastating effects of military dictatorship, Seferis's can offer a mirror of one of the most difficult times for Greece in contemporary history.

Love is the means of defeating change. It humanizes “indifferent” nature, empowering it with the moral dimension that transforms the Erinyes and renews the hope for the long-awaited return of Astra. It is revealed as the indestructible rhythm of life that defies death. Much like the Platonic nostalgia for the Forms that the love-inspired soul once saw and is endlessly striving to recapture through memory, the poet tries to transfix into permanence, through poetic logos, a moment of transcendence. In the poetry of Seferis, justice, love, and nature are part of the same quest for such an apocalyptic moment that

\(^{56}\) “... πονοῦσες
τὸν ἄλλο μόχθο τὴν ἀγάπη
τὴν ἄλλη σιγή τὴν παρουσία
τὴν ἄλλη γέννα τὴν ἀνάτασιν
καὶ δόμησε μεγάλη ενίατον
οὐκ ἐξέρχομαι διὰ τῆς τοῦ καιροῦ
σταθμές-σταθμών ἅμα τοῦ μεσοῦ.
τὸ σταλαχτίτη τὸ σταλαγμίτη.”

\(^{57}\) Mircea Eliade, The Sacred and the Profane (New York, 1959) p.97 et passim.


\(^{59}\) “Τὶ νὰ σοὶ κἀκοῦν οἱ ταλαίπωροι
παλαιοπόννοι καὶ πάνωποτα μέρα καὶ νύχτα
τὸ οίμα τὸ φρασικοῦ τῶν ἔρηπτων.
Ἀλλήνες φαρμάκαι γενέσθαι φαρμάκαι.”
will conquer change and stop historical time, if only for a transitory moment when clock and calendar time is replaced by time of no temporal duration. Bringing into the light of poetic language the world of the inner soul and freezing it in eternal words is tantamount to creating immortality.

The tendency of modern Greek writers to turn to the primordial sense of justice, the strife of the opposites, nature, to create a moment of eternity, also manifests itself in Kazantzakis, Solomos, and Elytis. For Kazantzakis, the image of the flying fish which “suddenly spread its little fins, took a leap and bounded out of the sea in order to breathe air,” becomes a metaphor for man’s longing to transcend his destiny to become a bird for a flash only. “But that was enough,” Kazantzakis concludes, “this flash was eternity. That is the meaning of eternity.”

In Solomos’ “The Shark” – to mention only one of his later poems written in this spirit – the moment of revelation is related to ambivalent Nature and its opposite forces and linked to sudden knowledge at the time the individual is touched by death. “The Shark” tells of a young swimmer brought to a state of mystical ecstasy as he swims in the moonlight, surrounded by the beauties of Nature. One with nature and the sense of God and in a state of bliss, he is attacked by a shark - nature in its destructive form. Freeing himself from the spell, the youth is struck, just before he expires, by the thunderbolt of self-knowledge.

Before the spirit of his great soul ceases he is filled with joy;
Light shone, and the youth knew himself.

(Πριν πάντως ἤ μεγαλύτερη πνοή χαρά γεμίζει,
 ἀποταμα γόρα κ’ ἐγνώμονον ὁ νόος τοῦ ἐσώτερο τοῦ).

61 “Χαμοματικά ἄνεμοι τοῦ ἄγιον χιονοπόδοσος ἔχει αναρατά τά πτητούς τοῦ, ἔχει δόσα ἕνα σάλκα καὶ εἶπε πετάοντος ἄκοι ἐν τῇ θάλασσα, ν ἀναπνεύον ἐνα . . . Ἀμαρτάσας να ἐπιστρατία τῇ μοίρᾳ τοῦ . . . νά γειν πολύ, Πά μιᾶν ἀποταμα μονάξα, δος μποροῦ να βαστάξα, μιδέρπεν ἢ ἀποταμα αὐτή ήταν ἡ οἰλοτόπητα. Αὔτο ἦν παν ἀληθής.”
62 Nikos Kazantzakis, Ἀναρριχάτων τοῦ Πέρσα (Report to Greco) (Athens: 1982) p. 450. Kazantzakis’ eternity is, of course, meant in the Bergsonian sense of the word, in its metaphysical context. Kazantzakis is interested in the struggle of the matter to become spirit, which takes place in the here and now.

C. V. Tagopoulos: Nature, Love and Justice

The moment of his death is the moment of self-realization, knowledge revealed in the light. As Sherrard comments,

As man frees himself from the embrace of the world of the five senses, from the mortal world, he awakes to a true knowledge of himself and experiences the touch of divinity.

The opposites are fused and transcended in a moment of wholeness and purity. “The cost of wholeness,” writes Beaton, “of transcending the divisions on which everyday life and experience are based, is invariably death.” This is a way of paraphrasing the ancient idea of exceeding the measure and disturbing the order of things, an act that entails death as retribution.

I will end this catalogue of writers, who seem to re-articulate in contemporary language the Presocratic conception of justice, with Odysseus Elytis, who identifies “justice” with a return to a primordial freedom and innocence:

I give my hand to justice
Diaphanous fountain, sublimest spring,
My sky is deep and changeless
All I love is incessantly reborn
All I love is always at its beginning.

Elytis does not refer here to social justice – an institution which subjugated and dominated man – but goes back, before history, when human freedom was unrestrained, lying beyond the knowledge of evil. This the poet calls a return to the “memory of freedom” (μνήμη τῆς ἁγίας ἀναστάσεως). “Diaphanous fountain” and “sublimest spring” express such a nostalgia for freedom from history. In his major composition “Axion Esti,” the poet appeals to Justice, which he identifies with the Sun - the wellspring of light endowed with moral qualities – for a sense of decency and “metron.” It is in the sun’s purifying light that Justice is revealed:

64 Roderick Beaton, An Introduction to Modern Greek Literature, pp. 42-43.
65 Δίκαιο τὸ χέρι στη δικαιοσύνη
Διώξατε ἄνθρωποι μην διέρχεσθε πετρήθη.
"Ο δικαστής μου οίδε βιώθης καὶ ανάλαλος τοὺς ὑμᾶς ἑγείρει οὐκ κατασκευάζει δικαίως.
"Ο δικαστής διώξατε μην διέσασθε πετρήθη τοὺς δυνάμεις γιὰ τὸν ἅρμα τοῦ πάντων.
Intelligible sun of Justice and you, glorifying myrtle, do not, I implore you, do not forget my country!64

What Elytis seeks in his poetry is the perfect balance of the visible and the invisible brought about by light which holds the landscape in cohesion. This cohesion and moment of balance he calls justice. It coincides with the transparency and absolute tranquility (αἴσθησις) of nature and is represented by the hour of perfect stillness, when the wind falls in the early afternoon and the sea, without a wrinkle, stands motionless under the scorching sun. Justice, a metaphor for the harmonized inner self, is a return to the memory of the primordial freedom, innocence, and purity that the poet reveals as a moment of immortality – and paradoxically, of death. In one of his essays, Elytis writes:

There are no clouds in the horizons of Greek death. A transparency allows us to discern the interior of the house where life stopped and, sometimes, from an opening, to see the tiny blue of Platonic immortality. In an awesome stillness, like the one that follows the thunderbolt.65

Whereas the social and historical dimension of the concept of justice is not absent from the minds of modern Greek writers, their deeper philosophical position toward life seems to concur with an older and broader understanding of Justice articulated long ago in Presocratic and Aeschylean thought. Greece’s absence from the scene of the European Renaissance allowed the constant flow of pre-classical and classical thought to remain unaffected by the expressive modes that the Renaissance bequeathed to Western Civilization. This is also the case with the concept of justice which the Renaissance emphasized as the formulation and institution of just laws which alone could lead to social progress and growth. In contrast with Aeschylean thought,

64 “Τής Δικαιοσύνης ἰδε νοστή και μυροίνῃ οὖ δοξασθαι μὴ παρακελέως μή μὴ λησθήτη τὰ τέρα ἴστα.”
65 “Δέν υπάρχουν σύννεφα στόν ουρανόν τού ἐλληνικού θρύσσου.”
Με διαφάνεια πάντοτε μᾶς ἐπιτερέοι νὰ διασώσουμε τὸ ἐσωτερικό τοῦ σπιτιοῦ ὡς ἡ συναίνεσις καὶ, κατόπιν, ὅπως κάποιον ἀνακόμψη, τὸ λίγο καθορισμένο τῆς πλαταιότητος καθαράσεως. Μέσα οἱ μὲ μικρούχημα ἡμέρα, διός ἔσται ὧν ἡ ἀκολούθη τὸν κεφαλαίου.”
Οδυσσακα Ελλής, Εὐναύξω (Λήδη, 1992) σελ. 71.

the Renaissance saw the fate of the individual more as the product of such human institutions and socially elicited responses than as Fate – the unfolding of a providentially ordained chain of events. It is this narrower aspect of justice Papadiamantis criticizes when his narrator jumps out of Frankoianou’s mind to make an authorial comment:

It was high time to breathe some mountain air, before the police could lock her up, maybe for life, in the wet and sunless dungeons of human justice (82).66

In the context of this broader understanding of justice, our modern writers personify nature and ensoul it with moral attributes. By adding to it the ability for feeling, they develop, further, the humanization of the ancient abstraction in contemporary terms, thus affecting our sense of justice. In modern Greek literature, justice becomes a claim that encompasses the entire history of Hellenism and of man. The rhetoric of justice urges us to see the idea of justice in a light that presents it not so much as a socially dictated measure of judgement and punishment enacted to secure the orderly function of an organized society, but as a lost principle of equality, wholeness, and balance which is glaringly absent from our disturbed and dehumanized world.

66 “Καίρος ὁτι ν’ ἀναπνέωθη πλέον τὸν ἄγιο τοῦ βουνοῦ, πρὶν οἱ διάκαιες χαρακτηριστικές τῆς αἰχμής, ἰδιός δέι τόῳ, ἵνα τὰ υγρά καὶ ἄνθις ὑπάρχα τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης θείας.” (105).