

identity we will not survive in the Anglo American world as a dynamic and vibrant community in the twenty-first century and beyond. Greek culture and civilization are the basis of our Western and American culture. By being Western and American we are also Greek. We must strive to maintain our Greek heritage and culture as much as we can. In order to accomplish that we must develop bridges between Greece and the Greek communities in the diaspora, between the *autochones* and *heterohtones*. We must develop within our Greek American communities (and outside) cultural and educational institutions including institutes of modern Greek studies at American universities. We must go beyond the Greek school, the annual festivals (panygyria), and the colorful parades. We must look at the substance and the Apollonian aspects of our heritage more than the Dionysian and external materialistic aspects of Greek American ethnicity . . . or, at least, maintain a balance of the two. We must stress modern Greece and modern Greek culture and avoid a sterile total subservience to the glory that *was* Greece. Americans know more about the classical part of our history than the Byzantine and modern components of our Greek civilization. Very few Americans know the struggles and tribulations of Greece as a new emerging nation in the middle of the nineteenth century. If we do what we must do as Greek Americans, then I am optimistic for the future of our Greek American community in the twenty-first century.

Blackened Clay Pot by Yannis Ritsos

GEORGE PILITSIS

LIKE MANY OF RITSOS' NARRATIVE COMPOSITIONS OF THE early period (1930-1951), the *Blackened Clay Pot* is a long poem of some three hundred lines written in free verse and narrated in the first person singular. The poem, as the date of the composition at the end of the poem indicates, was written in February 1949 in the Kontopouli prison camp on the island of Lemnos where Ritsos had been incarcerated along with other political prisoners. The reason for this as well as other subsequent incarcerations in various concentration camps, was the poet's affiliation with the resistance forces of the EAM/ELAS who fought against the Germans in World War II and later in the Greek Civil War.

Like the *Epitafios* (1946) and *Romiosini* (1945-1947), the *Blackened Clay Pot* is one of Ritsos' better known and well loved poems, especially after some of the verses were set to music. The popularity the poem enjoyed in Greece after its publication is also due to the poet's ability to articulate with great compassion not only the hardship and suffering he and his fellow prisoners experienced within the prison walls, but also their heroic endurance and determination to survive the harsh conditions of the time and place. In spite of those conditions, however, the poet never allows bitterness or resignation to cloud his verses.

Although political in its dramatic context and approach, the poem should not be viewed as raw political propaganda for communism, as it has been suggested. Rather, in its quiet assertiveness, the poem is an expression of hope and belief in the indomitable nature of the human spirit, and in the human spirit's ability to endure without surrendering to adverse and oppressive forces. Thus, the *Blackened Clay Pot* is not a poem of theory but a work of experience; one that not only documents conditions of a certain historical period in Greece, but one which also documents the physical abuse and mental anguish in the life of political prisoners.

There is another aspect to the poem, however, that requires a brief

comment here. It is the insight this poem offers with regard to Ritsos' view of the role of the poet and poetry, a view often expressed in many of his subsequent compositions. In this poem Ritsos alludes to his vision of his poetic mission by identifying himself with a clay pot that

"is boiling, boiling and singing
boiling on the fires of the sun and singing."

" . . . a wide clay pot
that has gone many times into the fire
that has cooked thousands of times for the poor
for the fieldhands, for the ferrymen,
for the workers and their embittered mothers,
for the hungry sun, for the world, — yes for the world
— a poor, soot-covered, blackened clay pot that
does its work well . . . "

Poetry, as Ritsos has stated in a 1976 interview, fulfills the poet's profound duty and responsibility,

which is to bring together fraternally human
strengths and to organize them against tyranny,
injustice, and vileness. Such a mission always leads
the true poet. And the greatest honor for such a poet
is to carry his social responsibility on his shoulders to
the end. It is in this way that the masses find worthy spokesmen
and leaders.¹

By subordinating himself to the masses, therefore, the poet becomes a vehicle by which the individual and ultimately the world finds its voice. Thus, as Ritsos makes clear in "Thoughts on the Poetry of Paul Eluard" in *Studies*, "The entire world begins to speak through the poet's mouth. That is why the voice deepens, widens, and strengthens."

Throughout his long and extraordinarily productive career, and until his death on November 11, 1990, Ritsos remained true to his conviction and responsibility as a poet whose verses articulate the dreams and hopes of man for brotherhood, love, freedom, and justice.

¹Yannis Ritsos, quoted by Kostas Myrsiades in *Yannis Ritsos: Selected Poems* (Brockport, N. Y. 1989), p. 455.

Blackened Clay Pot

by

YANNIS RITSOS

Translated by

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Blackened Clay Pot

YANNIS RITSOS

THE ROAD has been long so far. Very long, my brother.
The handcuffs weigh our hands down. On those evenings
when the small light bulb shook its head saying "The hour
has passed"
we read the history of the world in the small names,
in some dates scratched by fingernails into the walls
of the prison
in some crude sketches of men on death row
—a heart, an arrow, a boat that with confidence defied time,
in some verses that were left unfinished so that we might
finish them
in some verses that were finished so that we might not be finished.
The road has been long so far—a difficult road.
Now that road is yours. You hold it
as you hold the hand of your friend to take his pulse
on the mark left by the handcuffs.
A regular pulse. A sure hand. A sure road.

THAT maimed man next to you takes off his leg before he goes to sleep
and leaves it in the corner—a hollow wooden leg—
you must fill it as you fill the flowerpot with soil to
plant flowers
as the darkness is filled with stars
as poverty is filled little by little with thought and love.

We've made the decision that one day all mankind should have two legs
a joyful bridge from eye to eye
from heart to heart. And so wherever you sit

Καπνισμένο Τσουκάλι

ΓΙΑΝΝΗΣ ΡΙΤΣΟΣ

ΕΙΤΑΝ μακρὺς ὁ δρόμος ὥς ἐδῶ. Πολὺ μακρὺς, ἀδελφέ μου.
Οἱ χειροπέδες βάραιναν τὰ χέρια. Τὰ βράδια
ποὺ ὁ μικρὸς γλόμπος κουνούσε τὸ κεφάλι του λέγοντας «πέρασε
ἡ ὥρα»
ἐμεῖς διαβάσαμε τὴν ἱστορία τοῦ κόσμου σὲ μικρὰ ὀνόματα
σὲ κάποιες χρονολογίες σκαλισμένες μὲ τὸ νύχι στοὺς τοίχους τῶν
φυλακῶν
σὲ κάτι παιδιάστικα σχέδια τῶν μελλοθανάτων
— μιὰ καρδιά, ἓνα τόξο, ἓνα καράβι ποῦσκιζε σίγουρα τὸ χρόνο,
σὲ κάποιους στίχους ποὺ ἔμειναν στὴ μέση γιὰ νὰ τοὺς τελειώ-
σουμε
σὲ κάποιους στίχους ποὺ τελειῶσαν γιὰ νὰ μὴν τελειώσουμε.
Εἶταν μακρὺς ὁ δρόμος ὥς ἐδῶ — δύσκολος δρόμος.
Τώρα εἶναι δικός σου αὐτὸς ὁ δρόμος. Τὸν κρατᾷς
ὅπως κρατᾷς τὸ χέρι τοῦ φίλου σου καὶ μετρᾷς τὸ σφυγμὸ τοῦ
πάνου σὲ τοῦτο τὸ σημάδι ποὺ ἄφησαν οἱ χειροπέδες.
Κανονικὸς σφυγμὸς. Σίγουρο χέρι. Σίγουρος δρόμος.

ΔΙΠΛΑ σου αὐτὸς ὁ ἀνάπηρος πρὶν κοιμηθεῖ βγάζει τὸ πόδι του
τ' ἀφήνει στὴ γωνιά — ἓνα κούφιο ξύλινο πόδι —
πρέπει νὰ τὸ γεμίσεις ὅπως γεμίζεις τὴ γλάστρα μὲ χῶμα νὰ φυ-
τέψεις λουλούδια
ὅπως γεμίζει τὸ σκοτάδι μὲ ἀστέρια
ὅπως γεμίζει λίγο — λίγο ἢ φτώχεια στοχασμὸ κι ἀγάπη.

Τόχουμε ἀπόφαση, μιὰ μέρα ὅλοι οἱ ἀνθρώποι νάχουνε δυὸ πόδια
ἓνα χαρούμενο γεφύρι ἀπὸ μάτια σὲ μάτια
ἀπὸ καρδιά σὲ καρδιά. Γι' αὐτὸ ὅπου καθήσεις

among the sacks on the deck as you go in exile
 behind the iron bars in the deportation station
 close to death that doesn't know "tomorrow"
 amid thousands of crutches from bitter, crippled years,
 you say "tomorrow" and sit, quiet and confident,
 as a just man sits before mankind.

THOSE red spots on the wall could also be from blood
 —all of the red in our days is from blood—
 it could also be from the sunset that strikes the opposite wall.

At every sunset, things turn red before they vanish
 and death moves closer. Beyond the prison bars,
 the voices of children and the whistling of a train.

Then the cells become narrower
 and you must think of light in a wheatfield
 and of bread on the table of the poor
 and mothers who smile in the windows
 so that you might find room to stretch your legs.

At times like these you grasp the hand of your comrade,
 a silence grows, filled with trees,
 a cigarette, cut in half, makes its rounds from mouth to mouth
 like a lantern that searches for the forest—we have found the vein
 that reaches the heart of spring. We smile.

WE SMILE within. We hide that smile, now.
 An illegal smile—just as the sun has become illegal,
 the truth also illegal. We hide that smile
 as we hide the photograph of our sweetheart in our
 pocket,
 as we hide the idea of freedom deep in our heart.
 All of us here have one sky and the same smile.
 Tomorrow they might kill us. That smile and that sky
 they cannot take from us.

WE KNOW that our shadow will remain on the fields
 on the brick fence of the shanty house,
 on the walls of the large houses that they will build tomorrow,
 on the apron of the mother who cleans fresh string-beans

ανάμεσα στα τσουβάλια του καταστρώματος φεύγοντας για την
 έξορία
 πίσω απ' τὰ σίδερα του τμήματος μεταγωγών
 κοντά στο θάνατο που δέ λέει «αὔριο»
 ανάμεσα σὲ χιλιάδες δεκανίκια ἀπὸ πικρά σακατεμένα χρόνια,
 ἐσὺ λὲς «αὔριο» καὶ κάθεσαι ἥσυχος καὶ βέβαιος
 ὅπως κάθεσαι ἓνας δίκαιος ἄνθρωπος ἀντικρυ στοὺς ἀνθρώπους.

ΑΥΤΑ τὰ κόκκινα σημάδια στοὺς τοίχους μπορεῖ νᾶναι κι ἀπὸ
 αἷμα
 — ὅλο τὸ κόκκινο στὶς μέρες μας εἶναι αἷμα —
 μπορεῖ νᾶναι κι ἀπ' τὸ λιόγεμα ποὺ χτυπάει στὸν ἀπέναντι τοῖχο.

Κάθε δεῖλι τὰ πράγματα κοκκινίζουν πρὶν σβήσουν
 κι ὁ θάνατος εἶναι πιὸ κοντά. Ἐξω απ' τὰ κάγκελα
 εἶναι οἱ φωνὲς τῶν παιδιῶν καὶ τὸ σφύριγμα τοῦ τραίνου.

Τότε τὰ κελλιά γίνονται πιὸ στενὰ
 καὶ πρέπει νὰ σκεφτεῖς τὸ φῶς σ' ἓναν κάμπο μὲ στάχυα
 καὶ τὸ ψωμὶ στὸ τραπέζι τῶν φτωχῶν
 καὶ τὶς μητέρες νὰ χαμογελᾶνε στὰ παράθυρα
 γιὰ νὰ βρεῖς λίγο χῶρο ν' ἀπλώσεις τὰ πόδια σου.

Κεῖνες τὶς ὥρες σφίγγεις τὸ χέρι τοῦ συντρόφου σου,
 γίνεται μιὰ σιωπὴ γεμάτη δέντρα
 τὸ τσιγάρο κομμένο στὴ μέση γυρίζει ἀπὸ στόμα σὲ στόμα
 ὅπως ἓνα φανάρι ποὺ ψάχνει τὸ δάσος — βρίσκουμε τὴ φλέβα
 ποὺ φτάνει στὴν καρδιά τῆς ἀνοιξῆς. Χαμογελάμε.

ΧΑΜΟΓΕΛΑΜΕ κατὰ μέσα. Αὐτὸ τὸ χαμόγελο τὸ κρύβουμε
 τώρα.

Παράνομο χαμόγελο — ὅπως παράνομος ἔγινε κι ὁ ἥλιος
 παράνομη κ' ἡ ἀλήθεια. Κρύβουμε τὸ χαμόγελο
 ὅπως κρύβουμε στὴν τσέπη μας τὴ φωτογραφία τῆς ἀγαπημέ-
 νης μας
 ὅπως κρύβουμε τὴν ἰδέα τῆς λευτεριᾶς ανάμεσα στὰ δυὸ φύλλα
 τῆς καρδιάς μας.

Ὅλοι ἐδῶ πέρα ἔχουμε ἓναν οὐρανὸ καὶ τὸ ἴδιο χαμόγελο.
 Αὔριο μπορεῖ νὰ μᾶς σκοτώσουν. Αὐτὸ τὸ χαμόγελο
 κι' αὐτὸν τὸν οὐρανὸ δὲ μποροῦν νὰ μᾶς τὰ πάρουν.

ΞΕΡΟΥΜΕ πὼς ὁ ἴσκιος μας θὰ μείνει πάνου στὰ χωράφια
 πάνου στὴν πλῖθινη μάντρα τοῦ φτωχόσπιτου
 πάνου στοὺς τοίχους τῶν μεγάλων σπιτιῶν ποὺ θὰ χτίζονται αὔριο
 πάνου στὴν ποδιά τῆς μητέρας ποὺ καθαρίζει φρέσκα φασολάκια

in the cool dooryard. We know it.
 Blessed be our bitterness.
 Blessed be our brotherhood.
 Blessed be the world that's being born.

ONCE we were very proud, my brother,
 because we were not in the least certain.
 We said grand words,
 we placed many golden stripes on the arm of our verse,
 a tall crest swayed in the forehead of our song,
 we made noise—we were afraid and so we made noise
 we covered our fear with our voice.
 We struck the sidewalk with the heels of our shoes
 with the wide open strides as resonant
 as those parades with empty cannons
 that people watch from doorways and windows
 and no one applauds.

THEN they made speeches from wooden platforms, from balconies,
 radios at full blast rebroadcasted the speeches,
 fear was hiding behind flags
 the murdered dead kept vigil within the drums
 no one understood what was happening
 the trumpets set the rhythm for the marches
 but not for the heart. We were seeking the rhythm.

The reflections from the weapons and the windowpanes gave something
 to the eyes for a moment—nothing more;
 later, no one remembered a word or a face or a sound.
 In the evening, when the lights went out and the wind dragged the small
 paper flags through the streets,
 and the heavy shadow of a steamroller stayed at the door
 we kept watch
 we gathered the scattered din of the streets
 we gathered the scattered footsteps
 we found the rhythm, the heart, the banner.

SO THERE, my brother, we've learned how to converse
 quietly, and plainly.
 Now we understand each other—nothing more is needed.
 And tomorrow, I say, we'll become still more plain,
 we'll find the words that weigh the same in all the hearts, in all the lips
 so that we can call the spade a spade
 so that the others can smile and say: "Poems like these

στή δροσερήν αὐλόπορτα. Τὸ ξέρουμε.
 Εὐλογημένη ἄς εἶναι ἡ πίκρα μας.
 Εὐλογημένη ἡ ἀδελφοσύνη μας.
 Εὐλογημένος ὁ κόσμος ποὺ γεννιέται.

ΚΑΠΙΟΤΕΣ εἴμαστε πολὺ περήφανοι, ἀδελφέ μου,
 γιατί δὲν εἴμαστε καθόλου σίγουροι.
 Μεγάλα λόγια λέγαμε
 πολλὰ χρυσὰ γαλόνια βάσαμε στὸ μπράτσο τοῦ στίχου μας
 ἓνα ψηλὸ λοφίο ἀνέμιζε στὸ μέτωπο τοῦ τραγουδιοῦ μας
 κάναμε θόρυβο — φοβόμαστε, γι' αὐτὸ κάναμε θόρυβο
 σκεπάζαμε τὸ φόβο μας μὲ τὴ φωνή μας
 χτυπούσαμε τὰ τακούνια μας στὸ πεζοδρόμιο
 ἀνοιχτὲς δρασκειλές, καμπανιστὲς
 ὅπως ἐκεῖνες οἱ παρελάσεις μὲ τ' ἄδεια κανόνια
 ποὺ τὶς κοιτᾶν οἱ ἄνθρωποι ἀπ' τὰ πορτοπαράθυρα
 καὶ ποὺ κανεὶς δὲν τὶς χειροκροτᾷ.

TOTEΣ βγάζαν λόγους στὶς ξύλινες ἐξέδρες, στὰ μπαλκόνια,
 φωνάζαν τὰ ραδιόφωνα, ξανάλεγαν τοὺς λόγους,
 πίσω ἀπ' τὶς σημαῖες κρυβόταν ὁ φόβος
 μέσα στὰ τύμπανα ἀγρυπνοῦσαν οἱ σκοτωμένοι
 κανεὶς δὲν καταλάβαινε τί γινόταν
 οἱ σάλπιγγες μπορεῖ νὰ δίνουν τὸ ρυθμὸ στὰ βήματα
 δὲ δίνουν τὸ ρυθμὸ στὴν καρδιά. Ψάχναμε τὸ ρυθμὸ.

Οἱ ἀντιφεγγιὲς ἀπ' τὰ ὄπλα καὶ τὰ τζάμια κάτι δίνουν στὰ μάτια μιὰ
 στιγμή — τίποτ' ἄλλο.
 ὕστερα κανένας δὲ θυμόταν λέξη, δὲ θυμόταν πρόσωπο καὶ ἦχο.
 Τὸ βράδι ὅταν σβήναν τὰ φῶτα κ' ἔσερνε ὁ ἀγέρας στοὺς δρόμους
 τὶς χάρτινες σημαιοῦλες
 κ' ἡ βαρεὶά σκιά ἑνὸς ὁδοστρωτῆρα ἔμενε στὴν πόρτα
 ἐμεῖς ἀγρυπνοῦσαμε
 μαζεῦαμε τὴ σκόρπια βοὴ τῶν δρόμων
 μαζεῦαμε τὰ σκόρπια βήματα
 βρίσκαμε τὸ ρυθμὸ, τὴν καρδιά, τὴ σημαία.

ΚΑΙ νὰ, ἀδελφέ μου, ποὺ μάθαμε νὰ κουβεντιάζουμε
 ἡσυχα-ἡσυχα κι ἀπλά.
 Καταλαβαινόμαστε τώρα — δὲ χρειάζονται περισσότερα.
 Κι αὔριο λέω θὰ γίνουμε ἀκόμα πιὸ ἀπλοὶ
 ὅα βροῦμε αὐτὰ τὰ λόγια ποὺ παίρνουν τὸ ἴδιο βάρος σ' ὅλες
 τὶς καρδιές, σ' ὅλα τὰ χεῖλη
 ἔτσι νὰ λέμε πιά τὰ σύκα: σύκα, καὶ τὴ σκάφη: σκάφη,

we can make for you at a rate of a hundred an hour." That's what we want, too.

Because we don't sing to mark ourselves out from the world,
my brother,
we sing to bring the world together.

WELL then, I don't have to shout for them to believe me
and to say: "Whoever shouts is right."
We are in the right and we know it
and no matter how softly I speak to you, I know you'll believe me—
we are used to the hushed conversations in detention centers,
at meetings, in the conspiratorial work of the Occupation
we are used to the small and direct talk
beyond fear and pain
day, hour, passwords in the dreathful, mute corners of the night
at time's crossings that were lit for a moment by the
searchlight of the future—
hasty words, a brief summary of life, the main points only,
written on a cigarette-box or on a tiny piece of paper
hidden in the shoe or in the hem of our jacket,
a small piece of paper like a large bridge over death.

Ah, true, they'll say that all of those things mean nothing.
But you know, my brother, how from these plain words,
from these plain deeds, from these plain songs
life grows in stature, the world grows, we grow.

AND DON'T say that I've done anything important
only that I passed by and leaned against the same wall
you leaned against, my comrades,
only that I've read the names of our heroes and martyrs
in the deportation stations
only that I wore the same handcuffs you wore
only that I suffered with you and shared the same dreams with you
only that I found you and you found me, comrade.

Barba-Christos built the oven for the army.
I had stood to watch his hands, aged, sure,
plain, wise hands of a comrade—
hour by hour the oven grew taller
the world grew taller
love grew taller
and when I tasted the first slice from our warm loaf

κ' ἔτσι πὺ νὰ χαμογελᾶνε οἱ ἄλλοι καὶ νὰ λένε: «τέτοια ποιήματα
σοῦ φτιάχνουμε ἑκατὸ τὴν ὥρα». Αὐτὸ θέλουμε καὶ μεῖς.

Γιατὶ ἐμεῖς δὲν τραγουδᾶμε γιὰ νὰ ξεχωρίσουμε, ἀδελφέ μου, ἀπ'
τὸν κόσμο
ἐμεῖς τραγουδᾶμε γιὰ νὰ σμίξουμε τὸν κόσμο.

ΛΟΙΠΟΝ δὲν εἶναι ἀνάγκη νὰ φωνάξω γιὰ νὰ με πιστέψουν,
νὰ ποῦν: «ὅποιος φωνάζει ἔχει τὸ δίκιο».
Ἐμεῖς τὸ δίκιο τῶχουμε μαζί μας καὶ τὸ ξέρουμε
κι ὅσο σιγὰ κι ἂν σοῦ μιλήσω, ξέρω πὺς θὰ με πιστέψεις —
συνηθίσαμε στὴ σιγανὴ κουβέντα στὰ κρατητήρια στὶς συνεδριά-
σεις, στὴ συνωμοτικὴ δουλειὰ τῆς κατοχῆς
συνηθίσαμε στὰ μικρὰ σταράτα λόγια πάνου ἀπ' τὸ φόβο καὶ
πάνου ἀπ' τὸν πόνο
ἡμέρα, ὥρα, σύνθημα στὶς τρομερές μουγγές γωνιές τῆς νύχτας
στὶς διασταυρώσεις τοῦ χρόνου πὺ μιὰ στιγμή τις φώτιζε ὁ προ-
βολέας τοῦ μέλλοντος —
βιαστικὰ λόγια, μιὰ μικρὴ περίληψη τῆς ζωῆς, τὰ κύρια σημεῖα
μονάχα
γραμμένα στὸ κουτὶ τῶν τσιγάρων, ἢ σ' ἓνα τόσο δὰ χαρτὶ
κρυμμένο στὸ παπούτσι, ἢ στὸ στρίφωμα τοῦ σακκακιοῦ μας,
ἓνα μικρὸ χαρτὶ σὰν ἓνα μεγάλο γεφύρι πάνου ἀπ' τὸ θάνατο.
Ἄ, βέβαια, ὅλα τοῦτα θὰ ποῦν δὲν εἶναι τίποτα.
Ὅμως ἐσύ, ἀδελφέ μου, ξέρεις πὺς ἀπὸ τοῦτα τ' ἀπλὰ λόγια
ἀπὸ τοῦτες τίς ἀπλές πράξεις, ἀπὸ τοῦτα τὰ ἀπλὰ τραγούδια
μεγαλώνει τὸ μπῶι τῆς ζωῆς, μεγαλώνει ὁ κόσμος, μεγαλώνουμε.

ΚΙ ΟΧΙ νὰ πεῖτε πὺκανα καὶ τίποτα σπουδαῖο
μόνο πὺ πέρασα κι ἀκούμπησα στὸν ἴδιο τοῖχο πὺ ἀκουμπή-
σατε, συντροφία μου,
μόνο πὺ διάβασα στὰ τμήματα μεταγωγῶν τὰ ὀνόματα τῶν ἡρώων
καὶ τῶν μαρτύρων μας
μόνο πὺ φόρεσα τίς ἴδιες χειροπέδες πὺ φορέσατε
μόνο πὺ πόνεσα μαζί σας κι ὄνειρεύτηκα μαζί σας
μόνο πὺ σὲ βρῆκα καὶ με βρῆκες, σύντροφε.

Ὁ μπάρμπα-Χρίστος ἔχτισε τὸ φούρνο τοῦ στρατόπεδου.
Εἶχα σταθεῖ καὶ κοίταζα τὰ σίγουρα γεροντικά του χέρια
τοῦτα τ' ἀπλὰ, σοφὰ, συντροφικά του χέρια —
ὥρα τὴν ὥρα ὁ φούρνος ψήλωνε
ψήλωνε ὁ κόσμος
ψήλωνε ἡ ἀγάπη
κι ὅταν γεύτηκα τὸ πρῶτο κομμάτι ἀπ' τὸ ζεστὸ καρβέλι μας

from that taste I took within myself
 something from the wise hands of the old builder
 something from his peaceful smile that asks no repayment
 something from the hands of all the comrades who knead
 the bread of the world
 that serene confidence of the man
 who makes useful and necessary things.

LATER we learned much more, but if I stayed to tell you
 the whole story
 my song would never end
 just as love never ends, or life, or the sun.

I come only to embrace you and to cry, my brother,
 like the lover who returns after years to his sweetheart
 and with a kiss he tells her of the years he waited
 and of all the years that await them beyond the kiss.

FOR MANY hours we kept our eyes on the same sign
 through many lives we sought that sign
 until we entrusted our hearts and hands to it.
 And that which thousands of suffering men watched
 takes something from our eyes and from the meeting of our eyes
 and rises, rises, rises
 like the dough in the kneading-trough, the tree in the sun,
 hope in our hearts.

And again, as for the other things, the very great,
 the intangible and invisible,
 having looked at them together for so long and loved them,
 they've become our own, one with us, we have them beside us
 like the salt-shaker, the fork, the plate
 and now with the same plainness and warmth we look at a leaf or a star
 the rock we sit on or the tall smokestacks of the future.

TODAY my heart bears no resemblance to a golden cloud
 that glows in the sunset
 or to an angel who sets the table amid the trees
 of Paradise
 and with his white wings shakes the crumbs of the stars
 from the long beards of the ancient Saints.

μ' αὐτὴ τὴ γεύση πῆρα μέσα μου
 κάτι ἀπ' τὰ σοφὰ χέρια τοῦ γέρο-χτίστη
 κάτι ἀπ' τὸ ἥσυχο χαμόγελό του ποὺ δὲ ζητάει ἀνταπόδοση
 κάτι ἀπ' τὰ χέρια ὄλων τῶν συντρόφων ποὺ ζημῶνουν τὸ ψωμί
 τοῦ κόσμου
 ἐκείνη τὴ γαλήνια σιγουριά τοῦ ἀνθρώπου
 ποὺ φτιάχνει ὠφέλιμα κι ἀπαραίτητα πράματα.

ΥΣΤΕΡΑ μάθαμε πολὺ περισσότερα, μὰ ἂν θὰ καθόμουν νὰ σᾶς τὰ
 ἱστορήσω ὅλα
 δὲ θὰ τέλειωνε ποτὲ τὸ τραγούδι μου
 ὅπως ποτὲ δὲν τελειώνει ἡ ἀγάπη μας, ἡ ζωὴ, ὁ ἥλιος.

Κ' ἐρχομαι μοναχὰ νὰ σ' ἀγκαλιάσω καὶ νὰ κλάψω, ἀδελφέ μου,
 ὅπως ὁ ἐρωτευμένος ποὺ γυρνᾷ ἀπὸ χρόνια στὴν καλὴ του
 καὶ μ' ἓνα του φιλὶ τῆς λέει ὅλα τὰ χρόνια ποὺ περίμενε
 κι ὅλα τὰ χρόνια ποὺ τοὺς περιμένουν πέρα ἀπ' τὸ φιλί τους.

ΕΜΕΙΣ ὥρες πολλὲς κοιτάξαμε τὸ ἴδιο σημάδι
 πολλὲς ζωὲς τὸ ψάξαμε τοῦτο τὸ σημάδι
 ὥς νὰ τοῦ ἐμπιστευτοῦμε τὴν καρδιά μας καὶ τὰ χέρια μας.
 Κι αὐτὸ ποὺ τὸ κοιτάζανε χιλιάδες πονεμένοι ἀνθρώποι
 παίρνει κάτι ἀπ' τὰ μάτια μας ἀπ' τὸ σμίξιμο τῶν ματιῶν μας
 καὶ μεγαλώνει, μεγαλώνει, μεγαλώνει,
 ὅπως τὸ ζυμάρὶ στὴ σκάφη, τὸ δέντρο στὸν ἥλιο, ἡ ἐλπίδα
 στὴν καρδιά μας.

Καὶ τ' ἄλλα πάλι, τὰ πολὺ μεγάλα, τ' ἄπιαστα κι ἀθώρητα
 ἀπ' τὸ πολὺ ποὺ τὰ κοιτάξαμε μαζὶ καὶ τ' ἀγαπήσαμε μαζὶ
 ἔγιναν πιά δικὰ μας, ἓνα μὲ μᾶς, τᾶχουμε δίπλα μας
 σὰν τὴν ἀλατιέρα, σὰν τὸ πηροῦνι, σὰν τὸ πιάτο
 καὶ τώρα τὸ ἴδιο ἀπλὰ καὶ γκαρδικὰ κοιτάζουμε ἓνα φύλλο ἢ
 ἓνα ἀστέρι
 τὴν πέτρα ὅπου καθόμαστε ἢ τὰ ψηλὰ φουγάρὰ τοῦ μέλλοντος.

Η ΚΑΡΔΙΑ μου σήμερα δὲ μοιάζει μὲ κανένα σύγνεφο χρυσὸ ποὺ
 λαμπαδιάζει στὸ λιόγεμα
 μήτε μὲ κανέναν ἄγγελο ποὺ στρώνει τὸ τραπέζι μὲς στὰ δέντρα
 τοῦ Παράδεισου
 τινάζοντας μὲ τ' ἄσπρα του φτερὰ τὰ ψίχουλα τῶν ἀστρων ἀπ'
 τὶς γενειάδες τῶν παλιῶν Ἀγίων.

Nothing like that. Now, my heart is a wide
 clay pot
 that has gone many times into the fire
 that has cooked thousands of times for the poor
 for the fieldhands, for the ferrymen,
 for the workers and their embittered mothers,
 for the hungry sun, for the world—yes, for the world
 —a poor, soot-covered, blackened clay pot that
 does its work well
 that boils wild dandelions and once in a while
 a bit of meat
 and my hungry brothers feed the fire from below
 —each of them adds his piece of wood
 and each awaits his portion.

They sit around together with the sheep and cattle
 just as all of you sit around me now
 they talk of the weather, of the seeding-time, of the crops
 they talk of the rain, of the sun, of peace,
 of that sign that more and more eyes are watching
 of that star that no wind puts out
 and the dead gather around our table
 they, too, await their portion.

And this pot is boiling, boiling and singing.

THESE days the wind hunts us down
 barbed wire around every glance
 barbed wire around our hearts
 barbed wire around hope. Very cold this year.

Closer. Closer. The drenching miles are gathered
 around them.

In the pockets of their old overcoats
 they carry tiny fireplaces to warm the children.

They sit on the bench and give off vapors from the rain and the distance.
 Their breathing is the smoke of a train that travels far,
 very far. They are talking
 and then the room's discolored door becomes like a mother
 who has crossed her arms and listens.

I, too, listen, and partake and increase—
 I drop a word in here and there.

Τίποτα τέτοιο. Ἡ καρδιά μου εἶναι τώρα ἓνα φαρυδὺ χωματένιο
 τσουκάλι
 ποὺ μπῆκε πολλές φορές στὴ φωτιά
 ποὺ μαγέρεψε χιλιάδες φορές γιὰ τοὺς φτωχοὺς
 γιὰ τοὺς ξωμάχους, γιὰ τοὺς περατάρηδες
 γιὰ τοὺς ἐργάτες καὶ γιὰ τὶς πικρὲς μονάδες τους
 γιὰ τὸν πεινασμένον ἥλιο, γιὰ τὸν κόσμον — ναι, γιὰ ὅλο τὸν κόσμον
 — ἓνα φτωχό, καπνισμένο, μαυρισμένο τσουκάλι ποὺ κάνει καλὰ
 τὴ δουλειὰ του,
 ποὺ βράζει ἄγρια ραδίκια τοῦ βουνοῦ κι' ἀριά καὶ ποὺ κἀνα κοψίδι
 κρέας
 κι ἀπὸ κάτω συδαιλίζουν τὴ φωτιά τὰ πεινασμένα ἀδέρφια μου
 — καθένας βάζει καὶ τὸ ξύλο του
 καθένας καρτεράει τὸ μερτικό του.

Κάθονται γύρω-γύρω μαζί μὲ τ' ἀρνιά καὶ τὰ γελάδια
 ὅπως καθόσαστε τώρα ἐσεῖς τριγύρω μου
 μιᾶνε γιὰ τὸν καιρό, γιὰ τὴ σπορά, γιὰ τὴ σοδειὰ
 μιᾶνε γιὰ τὴ βροχή, γιὰ τὸν ἥλιο, γιὰ τὴν εἰρήνη
 γιὰ κεῖνο τὸ σημάδι ποὺ ὅλο καὶ περισσότερα μάτια τὸ κοιτάζουν
 γιὰ κεῖνο τ' ἄστρο ποὺ δὲ σβήνει μὲ κανένα ἀνεμο
 κ' οἱ πεθαμένοι μαζεύονται γύρω ἀπ' τὴν τάβλα μας
 καὶ περιμένουν κι αὐτοὶ τὸ μερτικό τους.

Καὶ τοῦτο τὸ τσουκάλι βράζει, βράζει τραγουδώντας.

ΤΟΥΤΕΣ τὶς μέρες ὁ ἀνεμος μᾶς κυνηγάει.
 Γύρω σὲ κάθε βλέμμα τὸ συρματοπλεγμα
 γύρω στὴν καρδιά μας τὸ συρματοπλεγμα
 γύρω στὴν ἐλπίδα τὸ συρματοπλεγμα. Πολὺ κρύο ἐφέτος.

Πιὸ κοντά. Πιὸ κοντά. Μουσκεμένα χιλιόμετρα μαζεύονται γύρω
 τους.

Μέσα στὶς τσέπες τοῦ παλιοῦ πανωφοριοῦ τους
 ἔχουν μικρὰ τζάκια νὰ ζεσταίνουν τὰ παιδιὰ.

Κάθονται στὸν πάγκο κι ἀχνίζουν ἀπ' τὴ βροχή καὶ τὴν ἀπόσταση.
 Ἡ ἀνάσα τους εἶναι ὁ καπνὸς ἐνὸς τραίνου ποὺ πάει μακριὰ, πολὺ
 μακριὰ. Κουβεντιάζουν
 καὶ τότε ἡ ξεβαμμένη πόρτα τῆς κάμαρας γίνεται σὰ μητέρα ποὺ
 σταυρώνει τὰ χέρια τῆς κι ἀκούει.

Κι ἀκούω καὶ γὰρ καὶ παίρνω κι αὐγαταῖνα —
 ρίχνω καὶ γὰρ καμμιὰ κουβέντα ποῦ καὶ ποῦ
 ὅπως ρίχνουμε ἓνα ξύλο στὴ φωτιά —
 φουντώνει ἡ φλόγα, γίνεται πιότερο τὸ φῶς — ξύλο τὸ ξύλο —

the flame swells, the light increases—log upon log—
the walls turn red, the wind withdraws, the window-shutter
creaks
outside you can hear the small donkey still grazing in the grass
and the dog sits quietly before the feet of the dead.
All of us await the dawn.

THE WIND died down. Silence. In the corner of the room
the plow sits pensively—waiting for the plowing.
You can hear clearly the water boiling in the pot.

Those who wait on the wooden bench
are the poor, our own, the strong,
they are the fieldhands and the proletarians
—each of their words is a glass of wine
a slice of black bread
a tree beside a rock
a window open to the sunshine.

They are our Christs, our Saints.

Their heavy shoes are like coal-cars
their hands are certainty itself—
hands hardened from work, knotted hands
with chewed-up nails, with rough hairs
with a thumb as broad as the history of man,
with a broad span like a bridge over the abyss.

Their fingerprints are not only in the registers of
the prisons,
they are kept in the archives of history
their fingerprints are dense clusters of railroad
tracks
that cut across the future. And my heart
is nothing more, comrades than a blackened clay pot
that does its work well—nothing else.

WELL THEN, my children, I am thinking now like the
grandfather who tells stories
(don't be angry that I call you "my children,"
only in years I may be older than you,
in nothing else
and tomorrow you will call me "my child," and I won't be angry
because as long as there is youth in the world I'll be young

κοκκινίζουν οί τοίχοι, αποτραβιέται ό άνεμος, τρίζει τó
παραθυρόφυλλο
άκούγεται έξω κάποιο γαϊδουράκι πού βόσκει άκόμα στό γρασίδι
καί τó σκυλί κάθεται ήσυχο μπροστά στά πόδια τών πεθαμένων.
"Όλοι περιμένουμε νά ξεμερώσει.

ΕΠΕΣΕ ό άνεμος. Σιωπή. Στή γωνιά τής κάμαρας
ένα άλέτρι συλλογισμένο — περιμένει τ' όργωμα.
'Ακούγεται πιό καθαρά τó νερό πού κοχλάζει στό τσουκάλι

Αύτοί πού περιμένουν στόν ξύλινο πάγκο
είναι οί φτωχοί, οί δικοί μας, οί δυνατοί
είναι οί ξωμάχοι κ' οί προλετάριοι
— κάθε τους λέξη είναι ένα ποτήρι κρασί
μιά γωνιά μαύρο ψωμί
ένα δέντρο πλάϊ στό βράχο
ένα παράθυρο άνοιχτό στή liaκάδα.

Είναι οί δικοί μας Χριστοί, οί δικοί μας "Άγιοι.

Τά χοντρά τους παπούτσια είναι σά βαγόνια μέ κάρβουνο
τά χέρια τους είναι ή σιγουριά —
άργασμένα χέρια, σκληρά χέρια, ροζιασμένα
μέ φαγωμένα νύχια, μέ άγριες τρίχες
μέ τó μεγάλο δάχτυλο φαρδύ όσο ή ίστορία τού άνθρώπου
μέ τή φαρδειά σπιθαμή σά γιοφύρι άννου άπ' τó γκρεμό.

Τά δαχτυλικά τους άποτυπώματα δέν είναι μονάχα στά μητρώα τών
φυλακών
φυλάγονται στά άρχεία τής ίστορίας,
τά δαχτυλικά τους άποτυπώματα είναι οί πυκνές σιδηροδρομικές
γραμμές
πού διασχίζουν τó μέλλον. Κ' ή καρδιά μου έμένα
τίποτα πιότερο, συντροφία μου, ένα πήλινο μαυρισμένο τσουκάλι
πού κάνει καλά τή δουλειά του — τίποτ' άλλο.

ΛΟΙΠΟΝ, παιδιά μου, συλλογιέμαι τώρα σάν τόν παππού πού
λέει παραμύθια
(καί μη θυμώνετε πού σάς λέω «παιδιά μου»,
μόνο στά χρόνια μπορεί νάμαι πιό μεγάλος.
σε τίποτ' άλλο,
κι' αύριο θά μέ πείτε έσείς: «παιδί μου», καί γώ δέ θά θυμώνω
γιατί όσο θάναι νιότη μές στόν κόσμο θάμαι νέος,
καί νά μέ λέτε: «παιδί μου», παιδιά μου) —
λοιπόν, παιδιά μου, συλλογιέμαι τώρα
νά βρω μιá λέξη νά ταιριάζει στό μπόι τής λευτεριάς

to think of a word that matches the stature of freedom
neither taller nor shorter
—the excess is false
falling short brings shame
and I don't intend to take pride
in anything more or in anything less than man.

We'll find our song. Things are going well. What do you say, comrade?
Good, very good.

The dandelions are cooked. Not much oil. It doesn't matter
There is plenty of appetite and heart. It's time.

HERE shines a brotherly light—plain are the hands and
the eyes.

Here, it's not for me to rise above you or you above me.
Here, each is meant to rise only above himself.
Here shines a brotherly light that runs like a river beside
the great wall.

We hear this river even in our dreams.
And when we're sleeping, one of our arms, hanging outside
the covers,
bathers in this river.

Only two drops of this water are enough to sprinkle
the face of the incubus that vanishes like smoke behind the trees.
And death is nothing more than a leaf that fell
to nourish the leaf that rises.

NOW the tree looks at you straight in the eye from within its leaves
the root shows you all of its journey
and you look at the world in the face—you have
nothing to hide.

Your hands are clean, washed with the thick soap
of the sun
you leave your hands exposed on the comradely table
you entrust them in the hands of your comrades.

Their motion is plain, full of precision.
And when you lift a hair from the jacket
of your friend
it's as though you turn a leaf from the calendar
and you hasten the rhythm of the world.

μήτε πιό ψηλή, μήτε πιό κοντή
— τὸ περίσσιο εἶναι ψεύτικο
τὸ λιγοστὸ εἶναι ντροπαλό,
καὶ γὰρ δὲν τῶχω σκοποῦ νὰ καμαρώσω
γιὰ τίποτα πιότερο, γιὰ τίποτα λιγότερο ἀπὸ ἄνθρωπος.

Θὰ βροῦμε τὸ τραγοῦδι μας. Καλὰ πᾶμε. Τί λὲς καὶ σὺ, σύντροφε;
Καλὰ, καλὰ.

Βράσανε τὰ ραδίκια. Λιγοστὸ τὸ λάδι. Δὲν πειράζει.
Περσεύει ἡ ὄρεξη κ' ἡ καρδιά. Εἶναι ὥρα.

ΕΔΩ εἶναι ἓνα φῶς ἀδελφικὸ — ἀπλὰ τὰ χέρια καὶ τὰ μάτια.
Ἐδῶ δὲν εἶναι νᾶμαι ἐγὼ πάνω ἀπὸ σένα ἢ ἐσὺ πάνω
ἀπὸ μένα.

Ἐδῶ εἶναι νᾶναι ὁ καθένας μας πάνω ἀπ' τὸν ἑαυτό του.
Ἐδῶ εἶναι ἓνα φῶς ἀδερφικὸ ποὺ τρέχει σὰν ποτάμι δίπλα
στὸ μεγάλο τοῖχο.

Αὐτὸ τὸ ποτάμι τὸ ἀκοῦμε ὥς καὶ μέσα στὸν ὕπνο μας.
Κι' ὅταν κοιμόμαστε τὸνα μας χέρι κρεμασμένο ἀπ' ὄξω ἀπ'
τὴν κουβέρτα

βρέχεται μέσα σὲ τοῦτο τὸ ποτάμι.

Φτάνει μὲ δυὸ σταγόνες μόνο ἀπὸ τὸ νερὸ νὰ ραντίσεις
τὸ πρόσωπο τοῦ ἐφιάλτη, καὶ χάνεται πίσω ἀπ' τὰ δέντρα.
Κι' ὁ θάνατος δὲν εἶναι παρὰ ἓνα φύλλο ποὺ ἔπεσε γιὰ νὰ θρέψει
ἓνα φύλλο ποὺ ἀνεβαίνει.

ΤΩΡΑ τὸ δέντρο σὲ κοιτάει κατάματα μὲς ἀπ' τὰ φύλλα του
ἢ ρίζα σου δείχνει ὅλο τὸ δρόμο της
ἐσὺ κοιτᾷς κατάματα τὸν κόσμον — δὲν ἔχεις τίποτα νὰ
κρύψεις.

Τὰ χέρια σου εἶναι καθαρὰ, πλυμένα μὲ τὸ χοντρὸ σαποῦνι τοῦ
ἡλίου

τὰ χέρια σου τ' ἀφήνεις στὸ συντροφικὸ τραπέζι ξέσκεπα
τὰ ἐμπιστεῦσαι στὰ χέρια τῶν συντρόφων σου.

Ἡ κίνησή τους εἶναι ἀπλή, γεμάτη ἀκρίβεια.

Κι' ὅταν ἀκόμη βγάζεις μιὰ τρίχα ἀπ' τὸ σακκάκι τοῦ φίλου
σου

εἶναι σὰ νὰ βγάζεις ἓνα φύλλο ἀπὸ τὸ ἡμερολόγιο
ἐπιταχύνοντας τὸ ρυθμὸ τοῦ κόσμου.

Μ' ὅλο ποὺ τὸ ξέρεις πὼς ἔχεις ἀκόμη νὰ κλάψεις πολὺ
ὥσπου νὰ μάθεις τὸν κόσμον νὰ γελαίει.

A pot, then. Nothing more.
 A blackened clay pot
 is boiling, boiling and singing
 boiling on the fires of the sun and singing.

CONTOPOULI, LEMNOS, February 1949

ΕΝΑ τσουκάλι λοιπόν. Τίποτ' ἄλλο.
 Πήλινο, μαυρισμένο τσουκάλι,
 βράζοντας, βράζοντας καὶ τραγουδώντας,
 βράζοντας πάνω στοῦ ἡλίου τὴ φωτιά καὶ τραγουδώντας.

ΚΟΝΤΟΠΟΥΛΙ ΛΗΜΝΟΥ, Φεβρουάριος 1949