

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.”⁴⁸ 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 escapist.⁴⁹ Yet his path towards silence is carefully laid with poems which reward closer attention than space here permits.

⁴⁸ Karyotakis, “Όλοι μαζί, *Ποιήματα και Πεζά*, p. 103.

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

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

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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 ethnography, 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 nonmoral sense meaning no more than "minding your own business,"¹ with Hesiod it becomes linked to social organization. In the *Theogony*, for example, Zeus takes Themis² (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"³ and "Ate"⁴ 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."⁵ 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.⁶ Justice (*δίκη*) and the giving of satisfac-

¹ See W.K.C. Guthrie, *The Greek Philosophers* (New York, 1975) p. 7.

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 outrageous 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."

⁶ Charles H. Khan, "Anaximander's Fragment: The Universe Governed by Law," *The Pre-Socratics*, ed. Alexander P.D. Mourelatos (Princeton [1974] 1993) pp. 99-100 and 151.

tion (*τίσις*) thus admit a moral dimension into the earlier purely physical correlatives of the concept.

By contrast, while concurring that all things are a result of Strife and Necessity,⁷ 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 "*palintonos harmonie*" or unapparent harmony.⁸ 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.⁹

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.¹⁰ 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." ("Ἡλιος γὰρ οὐχ ὑπερβήσεται μέτρα· εἰ δὲ μή, Ἐρινύες μιν Δίκης ἐπίκουροι ἐξευρήσουσιν). Born from the mutilation of Uranos by Cronos – the first blood crime of the world – the Erinyes (Furies) were spirits of vengeance whose

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" [εἰδέναι δὲ χρὴ τὸν πόλεμον ὄντα ξυνόν, καὶ δίκην ἔριν, καὶ γινόμενα πάντα κατ' ἔριν καὶ χρεώμενα]. 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 than the one which is obvious: "ἁρμονίη ἀφανὴς φανερῆς κρείττων" Fr. 54.

⁹ See G.S. Kirk, "Natural Change in Heraclitus," *The Pre-Socratics*, ed. Mourelatos, pp. 195 and 210.

¹⁰ Ibid. pp. 193-96.

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 *mēta*-morphosed 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 humanized 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*,¹⁴ 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 Quotations are from Peter Levi’s translation of Papadiamantis’ *The Murderess* (London, 1983). Pages will be given in the text.

¹⁵ Roderick Beaton, *An Introduction to Modern Greek Literature* (New York, 1994) p. 77.

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" (μᾶς ἐγέννησες, 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) (τῆς ἐφαίνετο 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 (37-

¹⁶ "Καὶ ἡ λύπη ἦτο χαρά, καὶ ἡ θανὴ ἦτο ζωὴ, καὶ ὅλα ἦσαν ἄλλα ἐξ ἄλλων. Ἀ! Ἴδού ... Κανὲν πρᾶγμα δὲν εἶναι ἀκριβῶς ὅ,τι φαίνεται, ἀλλὰ πᾶν ἄλλο μᾶλλον τὸ ἐναντίον." Alexandros Papadiamantis, *Ἡ Φόνισσα* [The Murderess] (Athens, [1903] 1988) (50).

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 sling-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 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 sling-shot 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 paraesthesias of a

¹⁷ "Κάτω εἰς τὸ Κακόρρεμα, χαμηλὰ εἰς τὸ βάθος, σιμὰ εἰς τὴν Σκοτεινὴν Σπηλιάν, οἱ λίθοι ἐχόρευον δαμονικὸν χορὸν τὴν νύκτα. Ἀνωρθοῦντο, ὡς ἐμψυχοί, καὶ κατεδίωκον τὴν Φραγκογιαννοῦ, καὶ τὴν ἐλιθοβόλουν, ὡς νὰ ἐσφενδονίζοντο ἀπὸ ἀοράτους τιμωροῦς χεῖρας." (145)

¹⁸ "Τότε ἡ σάρα ἐταράσσετο, ἐφαίνετο ὡς νὰ ἐθύμωνε. Οἱ λίθοι τοὺς ὁποίους ἐξετόπιζε πατοῦσα, ἦσαν ὡς βάσεις καὶ θεμέλιον εἰς ὅλον τὸν ἀπειρον σωρὸν τῶν λίθων, τὸν ἀπλούμενον ἐπὶ τοῦ πρανοῦς τοῦ κρημοῦ. Καθὼς ἔφευγον οἱ πρῶτοι λίθοι, ἄλλοι λίθοι ἤρχοντο νὰ λάβωσι τὴν θέσιν των, μετ' αὐτοὺς δὲ ἄλλοι. Καὶ οὕτω ἡ παλίσροια ὅλη τοῦ κρημοῦ ἤρχετο κατ' ἐπάνω της, ἐπιπτεν εἰς τὰς κνήμας καὶ τὰ σκέλη της, εἰς τὰς χεῖρας καὶ τὸ στέρον της. Ἐνίστε, λίθοι τινές, ἀπὸ ὕψος κατερχόμενοι, ἐπιπτον μὲ ὀρμὴν καὶ κακίαν τοῦ προσώπου της. Τοὺς τελευταίους τούτους ἐφαίνετο πράγματι ὡς νὰ τοὺς ἐσφενδόνιζεν ἀόρατος χεὶρ κατὰ τῆς κεφαλῆς της." (146)

¹⁹ "χωρὶς νὰ ἐνοχληθοῦν ἀπὸ τὸν κρημνὸν, χωρὶς οἱ λίθοι τῆς σάρας νὰ σηκωθοῦν καὶ νὰ ριφθοῦν κατεπάνω τους, νὰ τοὺς κυνηγήσουν!" (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 that 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-tressed planes (51).

Consciously or unconsciously evoked by Papdiamantis, 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 fading forms of the Saints in their icons by her grand-daughter's bedside and in the chapel of St. John-in-Hiding.

²⁰ "Τὸ κύμα ἀνωρθοῦτο, ἐπήδα, ἔπληττε τὴν ἄνω φλὴν τοῦ στομίου, κατέπιπτε, πάλιν ἀνέπηδα, ἐξέπεμπε μακροὺς ὠρυγμούς μανίας ... στεναγμούς πόνου καὶ πάθους." (146-147)

²¹ The most important among them says: "Upon those who step into the same rivers, different and different waters flow" [ποταμοῖσι τοῖσιν αὐτοῖσιν ἐμβαίνουσιν ἕτερα καὶ ἕτερα ὕδατα ἐπιρρεῖ] (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, Papdiamantis 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.

Frankojannou'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 my dowry," (ὦ! νὰ τὸ προικιό 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, Papdiamantis 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. Papdiamantis' deep religious feeling could not conceive of God as an avenging Erinys. 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

KARKAVITSAS

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, Karkavitsas' *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

²² For a discussion of Papdiamantis' paganism, see David Ricks' "Papdiamantis, Paganism and the Sanctity of Place," *Journal of Mediterranean Studies*, 2, 2 (1992), 169-82.

²³ Quotations from this work will be from Andreas Karkavitsas, *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.

Karkavitsas' story unravels at Nykteremi, a Thessalian village of abject poverty which Tziritokostas, 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 of 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*, Karkavitsas' 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, Karkavitsas chose to end his novel with a description of the flight of his protagonist from human and divine justice:

Calm now, Tziritokostas 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 Τζιριτόκωστας, ήσυχος τώρα, έπροχώρησε βαθύτερα. Είχε εξασφαλίσει τὸ παράλλαγμα καὶ δὲν ἐσυλλογιζόταν πλέον παρὰ νέο ταξίδι καὶ νέα τρόπαια. Τὰ κλαριά τῶν πλατάνων μὲ ἓνα φύσημα τοῦ ἀνέμου ἔρριξαν καταπέτασμα πράσινο καὶ πυκνὸ πίσω του, λὲς κ' ἐφρόντιζαν νὰ τὸν ἀσφαλίσουν ἀπὸ κάθε κυνήγημα. Ἡ κοιλάδα πρόθυμη ἐδέχτηκε τὸν

As with Hadoula's mother, the vale now hides the beggar. But unlike the author of *The Murderess*, Karkavitsas 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 Karkavitsas 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" (ἀδιάφορη) – 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 (ἴση ἀγάπη).²⁵ Love and protection are absent from the social environment Karkavitsas 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, Tziritokostas, 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*

ζητιάνοι στοὺς ὑγροὺς καὶ μαλθακοὺς κρυψῶνες τῆς, ὅπως δέχεται τόσα κακοῦργα ἐρπετὰ καὶ παράσιτα.

Ὁ ἄνθρωπος πολλὰς φορὰς δὲν βρῖσκει τῆς ὑπάρξεώς του τὸν σκοπὸ. Καὶ ὅμως τὰ κρατεῖ στοὺς κόρφους τῆς ἡ Φύσις, θεότης ἀδιάφορη, ἀνεπηρέαστη, ἴση δείχνοντας ἀγάπη καὶ τοῦ Κἄη τοὺς καρποὺς καὶ τὰ πρωτοτόκια τοῦ Ἀβελ." (196)

²⁵ According to Parmenides and the Pythagoreans, justice is grounded in equality, unity, and reciprocity. Alexander Mourelatos, "The Deceptive Words of Parmenides," *Doxa*, *The Pre-Socratics*, p. 339; also F.M. Cornford, "Mysticism and Science in the Pythagorean Tradition," *ibid.* p. 135.

²⁶ Camus, *L'Etranger* [*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 Nykreremi, 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 beggary, 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 –

²⁷ "πρόσωπα . . . που παραμορφωμένα επέτρωσεν ἡ ἀδιάκοπη πλαστο-προσωπία . . . σακατεμένες κορμοστασές, που παράλλαξεν ὄχι τοῦ χρόνου τὸ γοργοτρέξιμο, ὄχι τῆς ἀρρώστιας ἡ κρυφὴ ἐνέργεια, ὄχι τοῦ καιροῦ ἡ ξαφνικὴ ἐπιρροή, ἀλλὰ τὸ πείσμα . . ." (38)

²⁸ "Αὐτὸς ὁ ἴδιος ἄρχισε νὰ αἰσθάνεται ψυχικὸν ὕλγιον ἐμπρὸς στὸ τόσο μῖσος καὶ τὴν ἀφάνταστη σκληρότητα, ποὺ ἐκυβεροῦσε δεσποτικὴ τίς χωριάτικες ἐκείνες ψυχές" (89).

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 aga 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 Papadiamantis, Karkavitsas 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

²⁹ " . . . σκοτώνω τὸ παιδί μου, ἂν δὲ σ' ἐπότισε· κι' ἂν σοῦ κράτησε ἡ μάνα μου ταγὴ, χρόνος νὰ μὴν τὴν εὐρη! . . . Λαχταρῶ σὰν βλέπω φαγωμένη τὴν πλεξίδα σου ἀπὸ τὸν βαρὺ ζυγὸ . . . Σκύφτει καὶ φιλεῖ τὸ χτήνος τοῦ ὁ Καραγκούνης μὲ τρυφερότητα καὶ στοργή, ὅση δὲν ἐφίλησε τὴ γυναῖκα τὴν πρώτη νύχτα τοῦ γάμου του." (115)

and grossly violated in *The Beggar*; they are perverted. Balance, retribution and revenge lose their abstract sense degenerating into the insipid materiality of a personal settlement of accounts: the beggar's revenge for the beating Valachas 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.³⁰

SEFERIS

If Papadiamantis' and Karkavitsas' novels encourage, as they do, a reading in the light of the ancient conception of justice, Seferis' 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.

Seferis' 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, Seferis, of course, had the linguistic and aesthetic means of his times and background that ethnography, 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 Seferis will explain 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-

³⁰ As Sachines has put it, “. . . It is clear that for Karkavitsas the world has not been left to the philanthropic hand of God; desire for improvement is needed – and action for its realization.” A. Sachines, *Μορφές της Πειραματικής [Figures of Prose]* 1, pp. 21-65, esp. p. 55. Quoted in P.D. Mastrodemetres' “Appendix” to *The Beggar*, p. 182.

tive; it represents life and knowledge but also death. The olive trees have “the wrinkles of our fathers,” the rocks their wisdom (“Mythistorema 17”).³¹ Light is hard and “biting,” but also a synonym of knowledge. It is, after all, under the bright Greek light, the most striking attribute of the Greek landscape, that the object of the poet's quest will be revealed – light that cannot be explained, as the poet says, only seen. Similarly, the sea is the symbol of strife and serenity, of life and death; the snakes are incarnations of betrayal, yet they make passionate love, as in “*Erotikos Logos*,” the rose, a metaphor for love and harmony, also wounds with its thorns. Apostrophizing it, in “*Erotikos Logos*,” the poet stresses its inherent antitheses:

Rose of fate, you looked for ways to wound us
yet you bent like the secret about to be released
and the command you chose to give us was beautiful
and your smile was like a ready sword.³²

The rose also represents the great secret that death releases, a secret that is well-kept in the heart of its tightly folded petals, which open wide to reveal it only when they fall off, wilted, at the hour of its death—the hour when all things return to the Heraclitean fire:³³

And even what has not yet passed
must burn
this noon when the sun is riveted
to the heart of the many-petalled rose.³⁴
(Summer Solstice, 14)

³¹ “Οἱ ἐλιές μὲ τίς ρυτίδες τῶν γονιῶν μας
τὰ βράχια μὲ τὴ γνώση τῶν γονιῶν μας.”

English quotations of Seferis' poems are from the Keeley/Sherrard translation of the poet's works. See George Seferis, *Collected Poems*, trans. and ed. Edmund Keeley and Philip Sherrard (Princeton, 1967).

³² “Ρόδο τῆς μοίρας, γύρευες νὰ βρεῖς νὰ μᾶς πληγώσεις
μὰ ἔσκυβες σὰν τὸ μυστικὸ πού πάει νὰ λυτρωθεῖ
κ' εἴταν ὥραιο τὸ πρόσταγμα πού δέχτηκες νὰ δώσεις
κ' εἴταν τὸ χαμογέλιο σου σὰν ἔτοιμο σπαθί.”

George Seferis, *Ποιήματα (Poems)*, (Athens, [1972] 1992).

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: [τὰ δὲ πάντα οἰακίζει κεραυνός] (Fr. 64).

³⁴ “Κι ἐκεῖνα ἀκόμη πού δὲν πέρασαν
πρέπει νὰ καοῦν
τοῦτο τὸ μεσημέρι πού καρφώθηκε ὁ ἥλιος
στὴν καρδιά τοῦ ἐκατόφυλλου ρόδου.”

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.³⁵

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 Tsu (Mencius), the second in importance philosopher after Confucius. Ancient Chinese thought regarding ethical and social order moves around two basic notions: that of love (*jen*) and that of justice (*yi*). Meng Tsu 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

³⁵ See George Seferis, "Letter on 'The Thrush,'" in *On the Greek Style*, trans. Rex Warner and Th. D. Frangopoulos (Boston, [1960] 1966) p. 104.

hubris.³⁶ Mencius refers to love as "the serene house of man," a phrase Seferis quotes in his *Diary*.³⁷ 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.³⁸

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 "Mythistorema 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."³⁹ Moreover, the unheroic companions of "Mythistorema – the poet's 'Elpenors'"⁴⁰ – 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."

... Τὰ κουπιά τους
δείχνουν τὸ μέρος ποὺ κοιμούνται στ' ἀκρογιαλὶ.
Κανείς δὲν τοὺς θυμᾶται. Δικαιοσύνη."

³⁶ For a detailed discussion of this influence see Nasos Vayenas, 'Ο Ποιητής και ὁ Χορευτής [*The Poet and the Dancer*], (Athens: Kedros, 1990) pp. 177-78 and 277; See also, Mario Vitti, *Φθορὰ καὶ Λόγος: εἰσαγωγή στὴν ποίηση τοῦ Γιώργου Σεφέρη* [*Decay and Logos: An introduction to the poetry of George Seferis*] (Athens, 1989) pp. 232-33.

³⁷ George Seferis, *Days 5, 1945-1951* (Athens, 1986) p. 54.

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 intimité." [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).

³⁹ *Days 3, 1934-1940* (Athens, 1984) pp. 193-94.

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 collusion of the literal and the metaphoric, here, points to human weakness and incapacity to keep instincts and reason in balance. Elpenor is for Seferis the "sensual" (ἡδονικός) Elpenor who represents scattering, loss of nostos, and man's inability to unite the self. Pound's "hedonist," is an epithet for his own Elpenor figure in "Maunderley 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."⁴¹

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" ("Mycenae").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.

⁴¹ George Seferis, "A Staging for 'The Thrush,'" in *Δοκίμίες Β'* [Essays II'] (Athens, [1974] 1984) p. 39.

⁴² "Ἐδῶ βρεθήκαμε γυμνοὶ κρατώντας
τὴ ζυγαριὰ ποὺ βάραινε κατὰ τὸ μέρος
τῆς ἀδικίας."

⁴³ "Τ' ἄσπρο χαρτὶ σκληρὸς καθρέφτης
ἐπιστρέφει μόνο ἐκεῖνο ποὺ ἦσουν.

"Ἴσως νὰ βρεῖς ἐκεῖ ὅ,τι νόμισες χαμένο·
τὴ βλάβση τῆς νιότης, τὸ δίκαιο καταποντισμὸ
τῆς ἡλικίας."

⁴⁴ "Ἄπ' τὸ φονιὰ στὸ σκοτωμένο
ἄπὸ τὸ σκοτωμένο στὴν πληρωμὴ
κι ἄπὸ τὴν πληρωμὴ στὸν ἄλλο φόνου."

c. Love and the "miracle" of light

Like nature and justice, which I tried to illustrate rather schematically for the sake of brevity, love in the poetry of Seferis is defined by its inner contradictions and is linked to "the miracle" the poet reveals in the light of self-knowledge. It exists only as a brief happy moment in memory which cannot be recaptured: "O could we only love" ("Saturday"). "If we were to love, the circle would break... But we can't love" ("Wednesday"). What makes love impossible is the fact that it breeds the seeds of its own destruction—betrayal, hatred, selfishness. The memory of a brief happy moment of love has the bitter taste of a calculated, wasted, or betrayed love – which the poet evokes on both the personal and the national level. Abused love is hubris committed against *agape*, and this calls for retribution. Our inability to love is often related to blindness, the absence of light or self-knowledge, and the decline of the senses. It is in the recognition and acceptance of such contradictions as part of one and the same reality that "γαλήνη," or serenity, is to be found. "Galini," contemporary man's only possible quest, is often confused with the silence of the dead and the wisdom of the past.

What is the deeper meaning of love, so central a concept in this poet's work? As in Platonic thought, so in the poetry of Seferis the ability to love is the recognition of the divine quality of the soul. To renew our faith in this innate ability is to have a glimpse into our immortality which in turn is tantamount to knowing that Time and decay can be defeated. Love is described as

"... an indissoluble rhythm, unconquerable like music
and endless because it was born when we were born and when
we die
whether it dies too neither we know nor does anyone else."⁴⁵
(Reflections on a Foreign Line of Verse)

Love is the divine spark in the human soul that is not subject to decay. It is like blood, circulating in our veins the way "the miracle is nowhere but circulating in the veins of man" ("τὸ θαῦμα δὲν εἶναι πουθενὰ παρὰ κυκλοφορεῖ μέσα / στὶς φλέβες τοῦ ἀνθρώπου").

⁴⁵ "... (Μιᾶς ἀγάπης) μὲ ἀκατέλυτο ρυθμὸ, ἀκατανίκητης σὰν τὴ
μουσικὴ καὶ παντοτινῆς
γιατὶ γεννήθηκε ὅταν γεννηθήκαμε καὶ σὰν πεθαίνουμε,
ἂν πεθαίνει, δὲν τὸ ξέρουμε οὔτε ἐμεῖς οὔτε ἄλλος κανεῖς."

("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.⁴⁶ 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 και νὰ γυρίζεις μπροστὰ στὶς μαῦρες Εὐμενίδες ποὺ βαρυσθύνονται, / χωρὶς συγχώρεση.) ("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.⁴⁷

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 "Erotikos Logos" (1935):

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' *Oresteia*. 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 . . .⁴⁸

The "miracle" that will restore the "adikima" of decay perpetrated by profane time erupts as a hope ten years later in "Thrush" (Κίχλη). 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.⁴⁹

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.⁵⁰ 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 "Salamis in Cyprus:":

⁴⁸ "Στὴν πέτρα τῆς ὑπομονῆς προσμένουμε τὸ θᾶμα
ποὺ ἀνοίγει τὰ ἐπουράνια καὶ εἶν' ὅλα βολετὰ
προσμένουμε τὸν ἄγγελο σὰν τὸ πανάρχαιο δρᾶμα . . ."

⁴⁹ "Ὅποιος ποτὲ τοῦ δὲν ἀγάπησε θ' ἀγαπήσει,
στὸ φῶς
καὶ εἶσαι
ὅ' ἕνα μεγάλο σπίτι μὲ πολλὰ παράθυρα ἀνοιχτὰ
τρέχοντας ἀπὸ κάμαρα σὲ κάμαρα, δὲν ξέροντας ἀπὸ ποῦ
νὰ κοιτάξεις πρώτα."

The first lines are a paraphrase from the second century A.D. Latin poem "Pervigilium Veneris" ("Eve of Venus"), the rest are taken from *Erotokritos* (Book 1, 1,365).

⁵⁰ See George Seferis, "Dokimes B," [Essays II] (Athens, [1974] 1984) p. 159-61. This essay is a translation of the Nobel acceptance speech Seferis gave in Stockholm, on December 10, 1963.

"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 . . ."⁵¹

This prayer to one's inner self is, in effect, Seferis's response—and in strikingly similar words – to the agonizing appeal Karkavitsas 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."⁵² 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 . . .⁵³

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, βόηθα νὰ θυμόμαστε
πῶς ἔγινε τοῦτο τὸ φονικό·
τὴν ἀρπαγὴ τὸ δόλο τὴν ιδιοτέλεια,
τὸ στέγνωμα τῆς ἀγάπης·
Κύριε, βόηθα νὰ τὰ ξεριζώσουμε . . ."

The poet explains in a note that he took this wartime "prayer" from the ship of 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 ξανακοίταξα τὸ σῶμα ἐκεῖνο ν' ἀνεβαίνει·
εἶχανε μαζευτεῖ πολλοί, μερμήγκια,
καὶ τὴ χτυπούσαν μὲ κοντάρια καὶ δὲν τὴ λαβώναν."

I looked at the sky's air, and it was full of wonder
I looked at the bodies laboring, and they were still
and among them a face climbing the light.
The black hair spilled over the collar . . . and the body
emerged from the struggling arms stripped
with the unripe breasts of the Virgin,
a motionless dance.⁵⁴

The unearthing of a symbol that unites pagan and Christian love going beyond historical time becomes a metaphor for bringing into the light the soul's buried ability for freedom and compassion. At this moment that the poet creates, time stands still and death is defeated, while the past is salvaged and united with the present as if time had never been interrupted by human division. The miracle has finally happened.

Time, dilated beyond its temporal dimensions, fixed almost visibly "immovable" in the middle of the line, resembles

the rhythm in music that stays
there at the center like a statue

immovable.

This breath of life is not a transition:
the thunderbolt rules it.⁵⁵

(On a Ray of Winter Light 7)

⁵⁴ "Ἀξαφνα περπατούσα καὶ δὲν περπατούσα
κοίταξα τὰ πετούμενα πουλιά, κ' εἶταν μαρμαρωμένα
κοίταξα τὸν αἰθέρα τ' οὐρανοῦ, κ' εἶτανε θαμπωμένος
κοίταξα τὰ κορμιά πού πολεμοῦσαν, κ' εἶχαν μείνει
κι ἀνάμεσό τους ἓνα πρόσωπο τὸ φῶς ν' ἀνηφορίζει.
Τὰ μαλλιά μαῦρα χύνουνταν στὴν τραχηλιά . . . καὶ τὸ σῶμα
ἐβγαίνει ἀπὸ τὸ χεροπάλεμα ξεγυμνωμένο
μὲ τ' ἄγουρα βυζιά τῆς ὁδηγήτρας,
χορὸς ἀκίνητος."

⁵⁵ ρυθμὸς τῆς μουσικῆς πού μένει
ἐκεῖ στὸ κέντρο σὰν ἀγάλμα
ἀμετάθετος.

Δὲν εἶναι πέρασμα τοῦτο ἢ ἀνάσα
οἰακισμὸς κεραυνοῦ.

According to Heraclitus, "*The thunderbolt pilots all things*" [τὰ δὲ πάντα οἰακίζει κεραυνός] 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 ἔναι ἡ ἀγάπη ποὺ κόβει τὸν καιρὸ μονοκόμματα στὰ δυὸ καὶ τὸν ἀποσβολώνει;) ("The Mood of a Day"), or, "... the night that split open, a blue pomegranate, / a dark breast, and filled you with stars, / cleaving time" (ἡ νύχτα ποὺ ἄνοιξε, γαλάζιο ρόδι, / σκοτεινὸς κόρφος, καὶ σὲ γέμισε ἄστρα / κόβοντας τὸν καιρὸ) ("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-

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"... πονοῦσες

τὸν ἄλλο μόχθο τὴν ἀγάπη
τὴν ἄλλη αὐγὴ τὴν παρουσία
τὴν ἄλλη γέννα τὴν ἀνάστασι
κι ὅμως ἐκεῖ ξαναγινόσουν
σὺν ὑπέρογκῃ διαστολῇ τοῦ καιροῦ
στιγμὴ-στιγμὴ σὰν τὸ ρετσίνι
τὸ σταλαχτίτη τὸ σταλαγμίτη."

⁵⁷ Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane* (New York, 1959) p.97 et passim.

⁵⁸ Ezra Pound, *Make it New* (London, 1934) p. 336. See also Joseph Frank, *The Idea of Spatial Form* (New Brunswick, 1991) pp. 10-12.

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" ("θαῦμα νὰ τὶς βλέπεις") 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 "adikima" 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 Astraea. 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

⁵⁹ "Τί νὰ σοῦ κάνουν οἱ ταλαίπωρες
παλεύοντας καὶ πίνοντας μέρα καὶ νύχτα
τὸ αἷμα τὸ φαρμακερὸ τῶν ἐρπετῶν.
Αἰῶνες φαρμάκι γενιὲς φαρμάκι."

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."⁶⁰

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.

(Πρὶν πάψ' ἢ μεγάλῃ ψυχῇ πνοὴ χαρὰ γεμίξει·
ἄστραψε φῶς, καὶ ἐγνώρισεν ὁ νιὸς τὸν ἑαυτό του).

⁶⁰ Nikos Kazantzakis, *Report to Greco*, tr. Bruno Cassirer (London, 1965) p. 454.

"κι ἄξαφνα ἀνάμεσά τους ἓνα χελιδονόψαρο εἶχε ἀνοίξει τὰ φτερούδια του, εἶχε δώσει ἓνα σάλτο κι εἶχε πεταχτεῖ ὅξω ἀπὸ τὴ θάλασσα, ν' ἀναπνέψει ἀέρα . . . Λαχτάρησε νὰ ξεπεράσει τὴ μοίρα του . . . νὰ γίνεῖ πουλί. Πὰ μὴν ἀστραπή μονάχα, ὅσο μποροῦσε νὰ βαστάξει, μὰ ἔφτανε· ἡ ἀστραπή αὐτὴ ἦταν ἡ αἰωνιότητα. Αὐτὸ θὰ πεῖ αἰωνιότητα."

Nikos Kazantzakis, *Ἀναφορά στὸ Γκρέκο* [Report to Greco] (Athens: 1982) p. 450. Kazantzakis' eternity is, of course, meant in the Bergsonian sense of the word, not in its metaphysical context. Kazantzakis is interested in the struggle of the matter to become spirit, which takes place in the here and now.

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.⁶¹

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."⁶² 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.⁶³

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" (φτάνοντας ὡς τὴν μνήμη τῆς ἐλευθερίας). "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:

⁶¹ Philip Sherrard, *The Marble Threshing Floor* (London, 1956) p. 36.

⁶² Roderick Beaton, *An Introduction to Modern Greek Literature*, pp. 42-43.

⁶³ Δίνω τὸ χέρι στὴ δικαιοσύνη
Διάφανη κρήνη κορυφαία πηγὴ
Ὁ οὐρανὸς μου εἶναι βαθὺς κι ἀνάλαχτος
Ὁ, τι ἀγαπῶ γεννιέται ἀδιάκοπα
Ὁ, τι ἀγαπῶ βρίσκεται στὴν ἀρχὴ τοῦ πάντα.

Odysseus Elytis, "Sun the First," Poem III, *Selected Poems*, Edmund Keeley and Philip Sherrard, trans. (New York, 1981).

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 (αἰθρία) 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 "Τῆς Δικαιοσύνης ἦλπε νοητὲ καὶ μυροῖνι σὺ δοξαστικὴ
μὴ παρακαλῶ σὰς μὴ λησιμονᾶτε τὴ χώρα μου!"
Ὀδυσσεὺς Ἐλύτη, *Τὸ Ἄξιον Ἔστί* (*The Axion Esti*) (Athens, 1989).

⁶⁵ "Δὲν ὑπάρχουν σύννεφα στὸν ὀρίζοντα τοῦ ἑλληνικοῦ θανάτου. Μιὰ διαφάνεια πάντοτε μᾶς ἐπιτρέπει νὰ διακρίνουμε τὸ ἐσωτερικὸ τοῦ σπιτιοῦ ὅπου ἡ ζωὴ σταμάτησε καί, κάποτε, ἀπὸ κάποιο ἄνοιγμα, τὸ λίγο κυανὸ τῆς πλατωνικῆς ἀθανασίας. Μέσα σὲ μιὰ τρομαχτικὴν ἡρεμία, ὅπως αὐτὴ τοῦ ἀκολουθεῖ τὸν κεραυνό." Ὀδυσσεὺς Ἐλύτης, *Ἐν λευκῷ* (Ἀθήνα, 1992) σελ. 27.

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 Frankojannou'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 "Καιρὸς ἦτο ν' ἀναπνεύσει πλέον τὸν ἀέρα τοῦ βουνοῦ, πρὶν οἱ διῶκται χωροφύλακες τὴν κλείσωσιν, ἵσως διὰ βίου, εἰς τὰ ὑγρὰ καὶ ἀνήλια ὑπόγεια τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης θέμδος" (105).