

δὲ σοῦ μιλῶ γιὰ περασμένα, μιλῶ γιὰ τὴν ἀγάπη·
 στόλισε τὰ μαλλιά σου μὲ τ' ἀγκάθια τοῦ ἡλίου,
 σκοτεινὴ κοπέλλα·
 ἡ καρδιά τοῦ Σκορπιοῦ βασίλεψε,
 ὁ τύραννος μέσα ἀπ' τὸν ἄνθρωπο ἔχει φύγει,
 κι' ὅλες οἱ κόρες τοῦ πόντου, Νηρηίδες, Γραῖες
 τρέχουν στὰ λαμπυρίσματα τῆς ἀναδυομένης·
 ὅποιος ποτέ του δὲν ἀγάπησε θὰ ἀγαπήσει,
 στὸ φῶς·

A man of unusual sensitivity Seferis certainly was, and even though very much a Greek of the Diaspora, he agonized over the tragic nature of Hellenism. The citation of the University Orator at the 218th Commencement of Princeton University of June 15, 1965, when Seferis was granted the honorary degree of Doctor of Letters,³⁰ may encapsulate what could be said of his life and work:

Like his countrymen of the Golden Age, he serves the twin mistresses of art and state, *poiesis* and *polis*. The wisdom and sure sensitivity that he has brought to the arts of diplomacy are reflected in the maturity of his poetry, which is as sharp in color, as sparse in ornament, as austere as beautiful as the enduring landscape it so often invokes. The long continuity of the classical spirit glows in his images that reflect the mood of modern man by calling upon the legend and the history of the land he loves and nobly represents, the cradle of Western civilization.

³⁰The original diploma is in the Seferis Archives of the Gennadius Library. All the Greek citations from the poetry of George Seferis in this article are taken from Edmund Keeley and Philip Sherrard, *George Seferis: Collected Poems, 1924-1955* (Princeton, 1967).

Seferis and the Homeland

MARIA KAKAVA

"WHEREVER I TRAVEL Greece wounds me."

"There is nothing more bitter than yearning for your country while living there."

"I pray to God that I grow old and die in my homeland."

"The beauty of the transparency of *altra cosa* of Attica is so strong, I mean to say in the medical sense, that you are forced to arrange your senses to absorb it in doses, otherwise it makes you mad and dumb."

Unfortunately, I have to limit myself to very few lines of Seferis' work. These "very few lines" are the demonstration of the poet's preoccupation with the homeland, his admiration for the past, and his grief and the wounds that go along with the priceless heritage, and the unbroken continuity of the culture since archaic times. Seferis is continuously experiencing the ancient moment through his poetic art.

His sister, Ioanna Tsatsou, says: "In order for him to feel the ancient moment, he was experiencing an esoteric short-circuit with the archaic texts." This particular intensity we experience throughout the poet's work. The "day of the return" is the recurrent theme, the Odyssean homecoming. Could anything be more sweet than one's returning home? This very theme is the universality of Seferis' poetry.

Because Seferis deals with the "Hellenic spirit," which he would rather call "the spirit of the people," he can be criticized by many as being extremely nationalistic, and consequently a "poet strictly for the Hellenes." Perhaps some would misunderstand him because of this.

Seferis uses myth because he believes in its universal application. His heroes, Odysseus, Elpenor, Orestes, and the others are not just for a few. They are human beings who suffer

in a tragic way, and their sufferings are every human's toils and pains. This kind of synthesis will move all people, regardless of their language and culture.

Seferis is a poet without labels; he belongs neither to the East nor to the West. He does not confine himself anywhere; he is a free man.

The poet strongly believes in the unbroken tradition, and he proudly says: "If we want to understand the ancient Greeks, it is always into the soul of our own people that we should look."¹

He strongly believed that Hellenism "is not only a country, a people, an idea immortal; it is the eternal man, the eternal earth, the eternal wretchedness."

Greece is the oxygen the poet breathes; Greece is his life. But that "Greece" has no boundaries; it is ecumenical. In "his Greece, one is more friendly, and horror when it falls in our country, it falls with mechanical exactitude."²

The poet has a very organic feeling that identifies humaneness with the Greek landscape. Rocks in his poetry are a recurring theme and something which Greece has most. The Cyclopean rocks, deserted ruins, destroyed homes—all these lived and still live—heads, bodies of mutilated statues, unearthed from Greek soil. This is the symbol of the fate of the gods. These rocks carry murder, blood, centuries, history, the fabric of life itself. In the poem, "Mykenae," we see the ancient ruins and the contemporary despair of today's tragic man.

He who lifts these big rocks sinks
I lifted these rocks as much as I could
These rocks I loved as much as I could
These rocks my fate.

Again, in "Santorine," the burden of the past, of our glorious inheritance weighs him down.

¹Rex Warner, *On the Greek Style* (Boston, 1966) p. viii.

²Nanos Valaoritis, "A Letter to a Foreign Friend," *Estia* (Athens, 1972).

Let your hands, if you can, travel
get away from the unfaithful time
and sink,
he who lifts the big rocks sinks.

Ancient Greece is the "painful yearning of the contemporary Greeks, the thirst of the authentic experience in the King of Asine."

Are they there, the movement of their face
the shape of the affection
of those who became fewer
so strangely in our life of those who remained,
the shadows of the waves and the pondering together
with the immensity of the sea,
or perhaps nothing remains but only the weight
the nostalgia or the weight of a live existence . . .

It is difficult for anyone to be the successor of Aischylos, Pheidias, or Plato. After Solomos, Palamas, and Sikelianos, Seferis is the first to live this "Hellenic" fate proudly, without vanity; humanely and without arrogance. The poet stands against the past and overwhelms the man of his generation.

I woke up with this marble head in my hands,
it exhausts my elbows and I don't know where
to rest it.

Our weak hands of today cannot hold the marble head,
the symbol of past glory. We ought, though, to carry it further
and higher.

A little farther,
to lift ourselves a little higher.

The poet is looking for his lost home everywhere. He is an exile of the past, living his fate in the world of today. His

homeland was always more attractive, more enchanting and greater while abroad. Past memories bring pain and grief to the homecoming, to the reality of the home country. The poem, "Return of the Exile," bears witness to this.

My old friend I think
you will get used to it little by little,
your nostalgia has created
a non-existent country, with laws
beyond the earth and the people.

Seferis travels in Greek time and succeeds in combining memories of the past and of the present in an unbreakable unity. Hellenic continuity is restored in his poetry and is also portrayed in a parallel way with the suffering of the race. All his travels are within Greece, the landscape is Greek, arid, rocky and luminous.

Our country is closed—all mountains
that have the low sky day and night as the roof.
We have no rivers, no wells, no springs, and
only few cisterns, which are empty, that echo and
we revere them.

The roots of his poetry are deep in the archaic tradition and in the contemporary dramatic world. The past experiences terrify him but the future scares him. These fears, of course, are due to the political instability of his country.

The most explicit, the most touching poem dedicated to the "spirit of his people," is "Thrush." The poet himself writes, "I am starting on a long, very dark voyage, and I'm deeply moved by my land." Seferis is filled with emotions of "nostos." In his journal (1945-51), he says of the "Thrush": "The 'Thrush' suffered some experiences of the life of the recent years, and ideas of verses that I took notes in a scattered manner since last January." In a letter sent to R. Levésque, he explains: "The drama, let us say, which consists of the

antithesis in the clash of the absolute light (as you have learned here) with life (my life, the life of my country), our world."

Again, I have to repeat that his poem "Thrush" is the tragic form of the past, the complete conscience of the present, and the threnode of the future. In the poem, the history of all the times of the Hellenes is condensed. The poet envisions the survival of the country and her prevalence during hard times; he is optimistic about the future.

This is the essence of the poem—life, his life, the life of his country, the life of the world—that is his poetry. The calling upon the just, upon Socrates, the suppliant Oedipus, upon his people:

the old man of the sea
said to me
I am your country
perhaps I am no one
but I can be what you want.

The unbroken tradition continues its thread when the poet says:

The culture, the education, which Makrygannis shows, is not fragmentary; it is the common lot, the spiritual wealth of a race, handed on through the ages from millenium to millenium, from generation to generation, from the sensitive to the sensitive; persecuted and always alive, ignored and always present—the common lot of Greek popular tradition, the feeling, a measure for things and for people.³

Seferis feels that there exists an emotional attachment which connects us with the great works of the past. "The great works of the past remain aesthetically distinct and emotionally near to us, and all the more so if there are new works constantly arriving to fortify their position." Seferis sees no "chasm"

³George Seferis, *Dokimes*, 1 (Athens, 1974).

between the classics and the nonclassic works of art.

Art is an endless continuity and solidarity—I am disturbed when I find them endlessly insisting on the existence of the chasm—which to me does not exist—separating and isolating the classics from the nonclassics, which, in the final analysis, means simply a division between good artists and bad artists or, in fact, between artists and those who are not artists at all.⁴

Together with the homeland, the “light” is another infatuation of the poet.

There must be surely something about the light that makes us what we are in Greece; one is more friendly, more at one with the universe. There is a kind of process of humanization in the Greek light.⁵

Despite all his feelings for the “homeland,” he is utterly and invariably opposed to “any suggestion that the culture of his land (or of any land) is the property of a caste whose task it is to educate the rest in an imitation of past greatness.”⁶

Seferis is the only “man” who openly states his opinion concerning “Hellenism in a work of art.”

“Hellenism,” as applied to a work of art, is a big word to use. A big word and a fine word. But if we want to pin down exactly what is meant by it, we shall find it a difficult and dangerous word to use in this context. Those who agitated for the artificially “purist” language aimed just at this; they sought for just this kind of Hellenism. With touching obstinacy, with sweat and toil, they tried to purify the national language from the stains of “bar-

⁴Warner, *Greek Style*, p. 83..

⁵Ibid. p. 171.

⁶Ibid. p. vii.

barism” and hoped that slowly, but surely, we should attain once more the language and the art of Sophocles and Plato. And their reward was what might have been expected—a drying up of Hellenism’s fairest and truest stream. But the opposite may happen, too; and this is why I used the word difficult. We may also, in the confidence that we are “Hellenizing,” come under the sway of values which are not Hellenic at all or only remotely so.⁷

The poet asks the young to seek the truth, just as the first advocates of demotic did, not asking how they can be Greeks, but confident in the fact that, since they are Greeks, the works created out of their souls cannot be anything but Hellenic.⁸

Seferis says, “For the Greek poet, one of the three elements of the whole inheritance is European tradition. The other two are the ancient Greek tradition and the tradition from the gospels which becomes the Hellenic demotic literature.”⁹

The way he uses this tradition in his poetry not only proves that ancient tradition and the demotic form compose essentially two phases of the same culture, but he also says that both “function in a more biological way.”¹⁰

“Our country produces some spark every once-in-a-while.”¹¹

In a letter to a foreign friend, he wrote, “None of our traditions, Christian or pre-Christian, have really died out.” Seferis insists on the unbroken tradition. “The Greek style, is not a drowned body to be revived by artificial respiration

⁷Seferis, 1, pp. 481, 498.

⁸Ibid., pp. 95-96.

⁹*Nea Estia*, 71 (1962) 165.

¹⁰Seferis, *Dokimes*, 6, p. 175.

¹¹*Kathemerine*, November 28, 1965.

administered by professors and academicians. It is alive today and is ultimately connected with the past of Homer, of Pericles, of Alexander and of Byzantium."¹²

Seferis is not chauvinistic; he is Hellenocentric (and I use the word Hellenic with Seferis' meaning), anthropocentric. The diaspora of Hellenism had a significant meaning. Hellenism was worked upon, reformed and revitalized right down to the time of the Renaissance, and crystallized the European civilization. This civilization is basically an offspring of the values of Hellenism.¹³

Let Seferis be a guide for us and teach us about our culture and identity. Let us use Palamas' words, Seferis' predecessor, with whom the poet was in absolute accord. "Imitation is the great rule of societies and of literature. True national poetry is poetry without country and poetry in its highest intensity." Seferis writes that there is no parthenogenesis in art and literature; "once you are Greek, you are bound to produce a work which is Greek."¹⁴ And for the poet to achieve the former, he has to get the strength from his roots and from his own tradition.¹⁵

Let us strive towards the recovery of our tradition and towards the revitalization of Hellenism. This particular Hellenism will manifest itself when the Greece of today has acquired its own real intellectual character and features.

Let us not be searching to rediscover the first seed so that the ancient drama could begin again. Let us not wake up again with this marble head in our hands and not knowing where to put it.¹⁶

¹²Warner, *Greek Style*, p. vii.

¹³Ibid., p. 92.

¹⁴Seferis, *Dokimes*, 1, pp. 95-96.

¹⁵Nassos Vagenas, *Ο ποιητής και ο χορευτής* (Athens, 1980), p. 191.

¹⁶Ibid.

The Eye of the Other: Watching Death in Rural Greece

C. NADIA SEREMETAKIS

BEGINNING WITH THE EARLY and seminal works of Levi-Strauss, structuralist models in anthropology with their emphasis on systemic elegance have overlooked the interpersonal complexities of the fieldwork situation. The ambiguous relationship of structuralist thought to the fieldwork process has its co-origins in the formalist bias of the former as well as in its unresolved status as either normative methodology or 'objective description' of reality. It is the confusion between these two poles of structuralist inquiry that characterizes the present book under review.

The Death Rituals of Rural Greece by Loring Danforth with photography by Alexander Tsiaras (Princeton University Press, 1982) is symptomatic of the imposition of the formalist symmetry of structuralist frameworks on the diffuse, contradictory, cross-cultural reality of fieldwork—as I shall show through an analysis of the methodologies upon which this book is based. Between 1975-76, Tsiaras, a photographer, while visiting relatives in a Thessalian village, 'documented' a series of mortuary and exhumation ceremonies. Upon his return to the States, he was advised to show his portfolio to Danforth who had previously conducted an anthropological study of the fire walkers of Agia Eleni. Motivated by Tsiaras' photographs, Danforth traveled separately to Potamia and conducted a brief ethnographic study of local mortuary rituals. Danforth's ethnography and Tsiaras' photos, separated by a three-year