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**MYTH, MEMORY, AND LOVE IN PLATO, SEFERIS AND JOYCE: The quest  
for language and balance**

by

**CONSTANCE VASSILIOU TAGOPOULOS**

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Comparative  
Literature in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

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In loving memory of my father

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O Love, how manifold and mighty are your powers!  
 ... What philosopher, what artist could ever have  
 conjured up all subterfuges, all the explanations  
 that you offer spontaneously to those who nail their  
 colours to your mast?

Boccaccio, Decameron

Θάθελα αὐτὴν τὴν μνήμη νὰ τὴν πῶ...  
 [I'd like to speak of this memory...]

C.P.Cavafy

## INTRODUCTION

In his struggle to overcome anxiety over time, change, and decay, man has consistently turned to myth-making and story-telling. The poet and the philosopher, spokesmen for humanity, seek to create a balance that would provide a sense of control over what mortals have no power to control. They want to create a sense of permanence in the midst of change and an alternative to the passive acceptance of the process of dying. This alternative comes as a revelation which constitutes an escape from decay through an attempt at stopping time -- the time of calendars and clocks. The revelation thus created is the emergence of a moment of immortality.

Memory and love are expressions of human thought, emotion, and creativity. They illustrate the human potential and represent experience that the artist seeks to record as proof that we have existed. Together with mythical intertextuality, memory and love constitute the language the authors invent for their purposes. The philosophical, metaphysical,

or aesthetic solutions they provide to questions which are, in fact, unanswerable point to their distinct orientations and views of life.

In this study I have chosen to work primarily with Plato's *Phaedrus*, the corpus of Seferis's poetry, and Joyce's *Ulysses* because of the manifold preoccupation with language and writing, myth, history, and time, and mainly because of the prominence these works assign to memory and love. Among other common approaches, I will discuss the duality inherent in life and the human soul as a source of balance, writing and speech as expressions of art, and the representational power of language, the power of its ambiguity, which preoccupies not only the two modernist writers but also Plato. The similarities and differences in orientation, vision, and form that link and also separate these three authors is traced through all these and other themes, but especially through memory, love, and language.

For Plato memory and love are proofs of man's divine potential and possibility of elevation for the sake of both man and the city-state. In a comparable vein but through methods following modernistic practices, Seferis seeks to reveal before our eyes our innate divine potential, so we can rise our humanity to a higher level. Through an intricate symbolism he conceives these concepts as in a strife of warring opposites seeking equilibrium, or "justice" as formulated by Pre-Socratic and classical thought. Love and memory are means of semantic and structural importance but most importantly they establish

human nature as capable of transcending the effects of time, decay, and history, through knowledge that the memory of the past makes possible. Plato and Seferis strive in their distinct ways to give man a second chance by inculcating new faith and self-confidence in his emotional self equated to his ability to love and remember.

By contrast, Joyce avoids providing solutions to the existential problem. For him, memory and love are important situations that move life but have no philosophical or moral implications. Mustering the wisdom of the world that words have preserved through the centuries, he equates life to language. Memory and love are experiences of the mind and the heart and as experiences they are the stuff of artistic transformation. They are like any other word except they have the double power of representing life and the artistic process since both words, besides embodying human experience, are symbols of creativity and unity. Language and life are faithful, yet equally unpredictable and ambiguous reflections of one another. By arranging and rearranging the words that record time and human history, Joyce is trying to escape from history and time into art, playfully creating the sense of immortality Plato and Seferis seek in ideas.

All three authors are preoccupied with the possibilities and limitations of the language at their disposal and go back to their cultural and literary past to recreate it according to their purposes. Plato was the first to attempt to reconstruct the potentialities and weaknesses of language, to purify its metaphors and ambiguity and render

it suitable to articulate new ethical concepts that were crucial to the moral well-being of the citizen. He does the same with myth by correcting traditional mythology or, as is more often the case, by creating his own myths. Plato's "myths" and the conventions of his genre are the vehicle not only of instilling reason and ethical values in the citizen but also of veiling a certain realization that it is impossible to shed light on the mystery surrounding man through reason. The tension between reality and appearances, and knowledge and the impossibility of knowledge is reflected, among others, in Socrates's playful use of etymologies, irony, the difficulty of defining concepts, and the aporetic nature of the Platonic dialogue. Memory and love are in Platonic thought forces that propel the soul's ascent to self-knowledge and the means of transforming thinking and speaking into "dialegesthai" - the art that uses the power of questioning to arrive at an insight.

Whereas Plato and Seferis strive to ensoul man's mechanistic behavior and persuade him that he is capable of action surpassing his human limitations, Joyce looks at these limitations with sympathy and humor, as something with which one can come to terms by simply creatively arranging the words that describe it. Whereas Plato builds his world on ideas, and Seferis on emotion, Joyce presents us with the problems of writing and art, as alternatives to change and mortality. What Plato and Seferis demonstrate through elaborate thinking, Joyce attempts mostly through manipulating the language at his disposal. In their distinctive styles and techniques all three authors deal with the same struggle to unite the opposites -- myth and history, words and

action, patterns of speech and writing, living life and writing about it. All use a technique of revelation. Plato and Seferis attempt to empower human life with dignity in the face of death by emphasizing the soul's potential. The former does it through creating "anamnesis" and "dialegethai," "truths" devised to propel the soul upwards, the latter by resurrecting man's forgotten ability to love and use memory constructively. Joyce, instead, collapses collective culture into skepticism. Life is as unpredictable as language -- both are victims of change and reflect instability. His answer, the answer of an author increasingly effacing himself, can only be a solution that comes through language, that is half-serious and often mocks the effectiveness of the cultural intertexts that reflect our thought and, in the process, subvert philosophy and literature as applied to modern man's life. Joyce's attitude toward language and representation of reality strangely echoes the doubt that informs Plato's rather than Seferis's way of thinking.

These authors' thought seems to have been shaped by certain common powerful influences. The idea of *logos* as the constitutive force of man and of social institutions, history occurring in cycles that imprison us, the tension of contraries as the cause of life, death and the possibility of a symbolic rebirth, all originate in common seminal ideas to which these authors have subscribed directly or indirectly. The influences, distinct orientations, and practices of my authors carry over, of course, not only into their respective genres and sensibilities

but most importantly the historical, cultural, and intellectual circumstances under which they wrote.

I will attempt to illustrate these impressions through a close reading of the works mentioned above, starting with Plato's *Phaedrus*, and focusing on the way this dialogue articulates the philosopher's quest for the soul through the language of myth, memory, and love.

## I. P L A T O: *The Phaedrus*

### 1. THE PLATONIC MYTH

In this chapter I will attempt, if not to define Platonic myth, at least to deal with the concept of what is mythical in Plato and to delineate the function of the philosopher's myths.

The Platonic dialogue displays a number of peculiarities that mark it as a distinct literary-philosophical genre. It is distinguished, among other things, for its non-catechistic character, playful irony, the self-effacement of its author, its multi-layered often ambiguous meaning, and the tension between writing and speech. As Griswold has put it, "Plato's dialogues look like a buzzing confusion of ideas, arguments, images, myths, digressions, and interjections by characters meeting at a variety of places and times."<sup>1</sup> The irony resulting from this confusion arises, in fact, from the tension between appearance and essence, tradition and history, the effort to say something without being dogmatic, and Plato's intention to defend some of the ideas Socrates criticizes. I will limit myself, here, to the use of myth in the *Phaedrus*.

Mythology, fashioned mainly by Homer and Hesiod, was still, in fourth century Athens, the natural language and accepted religion of the Greeks. It constituted tradition and the history of the culture. At a

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<sup>1</sup> Charles L. Griswold, Jr., *Self-Knowledge in Plato's Phaedrus* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), p. 220.

time when rational thinking was at its highest point and crucial to the progress, laws, and education of the city-state, a restructuring of the Homeric mode of thinking was imperative. Instead of shaping the future on the basis of existing past ideas, the powerful culture of the Athenian Golden Age tried to adjust the past to accommodate on-going changes (political, religious, moral, and ethical) sprouting from the rational thinking that differentiated classical from pre-classical thought. Such a reformation would enable the integration of myth and history in a way as to make of mythology (the word, in fact, appears at that time for the first time) the ethical foundation of a reformed society which, much as wants to break loose from the imprisonment of the past, it nevertheless wants to maintain its cultural continuity with tradition.

In the new ethics that Platonic philosophy promotes, the myths and proverbs offered by traditional mythology are viewed as ready-made ideas which teach deception instead of reasoning, and misinterpret the nature of gods and heroes. They are dangerous to the youth and to the polis as they undermine the purposes of education -- the cornerstone of the system. Socrates cautions against this danger: "... the foul story about Ouranos and the things Hesiod says he did, and the revenge Cronos took on him ... and what he suffered at the hands of his son, is not fit as it is to be lightly repeated to the young and foolish, even if it were true; it would be best to say nothing about it, or if it must be told, tell it to a select few under oath of secrecy..."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> *The Republic* II, 378a-379a), tr. Desmond Lee (New York: Penguin, 1984).

Tradition has to be respected as the treasure house of knowledge, agrees Socrates. The ancients possessed wisdom and, although false, myth has some truth in it. If reconstituted to express a moral principle or a philosophical truth, mythology can be rendered useful to the state. In essence, Plato was trying to transcribe the ancient past and its wisdom into a newly coined philosophical idiom and channel it into the political organization of the polis.

Whereas in his dialogues Plato often uses traditional myth to "correct" it (*ἐπανορθοῦσθαι*, 229d6), he generally prefers to invent his own tales which he has Socrates recite in the form of monologues. These myths, which Socrates often calls "logoi," are largely constructed on the traditional mythological model. The metalanguage Plato seeks to create is rooted in the existing language of myth and poetry, epic and lyric, which he transforms by mythicizing or rationalizing it according to his purposes. It is for this reason that to construct his myths Plato often borrows the very stuff of the literary and mythological tradition which he attacks in his *Republic*. Plato's invented stories are products of rational thought carefully composed in writing. As Havelock has put it, "Plato's myths are "stories of invention [which] belong properly to the sphere of *logos*, not *mythos*"... set in motion by the prosaic quest for a non-poetic language and a non-Homeric definition of truth."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Eric A. Havelock, *Preface to Plato* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963) p. 91.

Plato creates his myths or corrects those he borrows from his cultural past. Myth becomes an instrument with a prescribed function: to serve his narrative when what he says has no historical precedent, when he wants to avoid dogmaticism, when he needs an image that, intensified with mythical authority, can show what appears to be a truth established by tradition but mainly in his myths Plato seeks to invent "an abstract language of descriptive science to replace a concrete language of oral memory."<sup>4</sup>

Although labeling his tales "mythoi," Socrates draws our attention to their function as "logoi." Describing the Homeric account of the nether world in the *Gorgias*, Socrates says to Callicles: 'Listen to a fine story (*logos*) which you will regard as a fable (*mythos*), but I consider an actual account (*logos*)" (523a1-2). Socrates wants his interlocutor to endow his tales with mythical authority and at the same time to take their contents as truth. In fact, what the Socratic paradox of using a myth to prove a truth may suggest is Plato's aversion to certainty and dogmatism and his fancy for *aporia*.<sup>5</sup> His thought shaped, to a great degree after Parmenides and Heraclitus, admits at the same time permanence (in the notion of the Forms) and change (in the Heraclitean flux).

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p. 236.

<sup>5</sup> For a discussion of the hermeneutical dimension of the Socratic dialogue as suggesting a confusion of the author, see Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Crossroads, 1988) p. 489.

What is "mythical" in a Platonic myth? There is not, it seems, one theory that could be applied to the totality of Plato's myths and there is also much disagreement on the criteria of the "mythical" in Platonic thought. Frutiger's definition of the "mythical" in Plato includes the "*μυθώδεις*," that is everything that the poet exposes in the form of probability and hidden indirection. In this scholar's own words,

Prenant le mot dans une acception très large, ... nous appellerons donc mythique--outre les récits nettement légendaires, mais à l'exclusion des allégories--tout ce que le philosophe expose, soit d'une façon symbolique, soit en marge de la "science" véritable et sans l'aide de la dialectique, c'est-à-dire comme une probabilité, non comme une certitude.<sup>6</sup>

Elaborating further on the position of scholars who interpret the Platonic expression "*εἰκώς μῦθος*" as "vraisemblable," Frutiger notes that in Plato the vraisemblable usually appears in a figurative form and that the expression "*εἰκώς μῦθος*" or *λόγος* "se trouve être, de fait, riche en symboles qu'il ne faut pas prendre au pied de la lettre." In Plato, this scholar concludes, the "mythique" should be identified with the "symbolique."<sup>7</sup> The characteristics of the Platonic myth are: "symbolisme, liberté de l'exposé, imprécision prudente de la pensée

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<sup>6</sup> Perceval Frutiger, *Les Mythes de Platon; Etude philosophique et littéraire* (New York: Arno Press, 1976) p.37. Disagreeing with those who identify myth with allegory, Frutiger proposes the following distinction: The difference between the two lies, basically, in that the allegory is immobile and is attached to explicit metaphoricity, as opposed to the fictional mobility and implicit indirection of the myth. Contrary to allegory, in myth there is no dogmatic meaning (Ibid, p.66).

<sup>7</sup> Frutiger, *Les Mythes de Platon*, p. 199 and n.1.

volontairement maintenue en deçà de la franche affirmation, tels sont, à notre avis, les trois caractères essentiels des mythes platoniciens."<sup>8</sup>

Based on Frutiger's definition, Griswold differentiates between the Platonic "mythos" and the Socratic "logos:" The Platonic myth, he argues, is "a fictional story whose symbolically expressed meaning requires interpretation in order to be understood. As a rule, it cannot be understood literally. The Socratic logos, by contrast, may be among other things a factual account or an argument."<sup>9</sup>

But as the *Phaedrus* and other Platonic texts show, the distinction in question (whereby "μῦθος," as opposed to "λόγος," designates a fictional discourse, a true or rational account) is not maintained substantively or terminologically, and the terms are often used by the author alternatively. Like mythos, logos seems to mean simply words, which are used by Plato for the purpose of giving an image to an abstract idea. The building of a social system with ideas expressed in logos is described in the building of the Platonic city: "ἡ πολιτεία ἦν μυθολογοῦμεν λόγῳ," that is, the city which we construct as a myth in words (*Republic*, 501c).<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p. 36

<sup>9</sup> Griswold, *Self-Knowledge in Plato's Phaedrus*, p. 139

<sup>10</sup> See also: "τῷ λόγῳ ἐξ ἀρχῆς ποιοῦμεν πόλιν," in words we build the city (*Republic*, 369c).

Myth is an integral part of the Platonic dialogue. Plato's early works, with the exception of the *Protagoras*, do not contain any mythic tale at all. In the later dialogues-- *Phaedo*, *Gorgias*, *Phaedrus*, *The Symposium*, *The Republic*, *Timaeus*, *Politicus* -- myths are introduced on rare occasions and in some of them they hold a prominent place. The *Phaedrus* is one of the dialogues where myth is pervasive.

The poet must construct myths, not logoi, Plato says in the *Phaedo*. Students of Plato have distinguished his myths in purely philosophical, allegorical, and popular accounts.<sup>11</sup> The two larger categories of Platonic myth, according to Edelstein, seem to encompass, on the one hand, the myths dealing with the universe and the soul, and on the other hand, those concerned with the perishable or irrational in our existence, which cannot be explained by reason.<sup>12</sup>

Myth, whatever its origin may be, serves, in general, to create a language through a concrete example (*παράδειγμα*), as Plato goes on to explain later in the *Politicus*:

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<sup>11</sup> Frutiger, *Les Mythes de Platon*, p. 179 n.2

<sup>12</sup> Edelstein distinguishes two kinds of Platonic myths: the philosophical and the ethical. The former kind includes the myths of the early dialogues focused on the nature of the world and the history of mankind -- the perishable -- which reason and knowledge alone are too powerless to explain. In those dialogues, myth functions, by necessity, as an intellectual amusement. The latter deals with the immortality of the soul and is found in the later dialogues, when the philosopher has already established his rules of conduct on the basis of ethics, which provide the power of reason and knowledge through dialectics and investigation. See Ludwig Edelstein, "The Function of Myth in Plato's Philosophy," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 10 (1949) 463-81.

As the children recognize more easily the letter in the syllables which are already familiar to them, and decode the others so in the obscure problems a concrete example deliberately chosen on the basis of its analogy with a certain concept, facilitates the study of this analogy and allows the mind to form an exact notion (*ἀληθῆς δόξα*, 278c, which does not retain here its technical sense of "opinion" as opposed to "science."<sup>13</sup>

The Platonic myth serves as a language. It presents a concrete example which is free of dogmatism and points to possibilities rather than conclusions, while it mocks in a playful way the assumption that man's predicament can be explained by language. This is a notion that brings modernist claims, and in our case Joycean discourse as it will be discussed later, amazingly close to the Platonic idea of myth and the function of language, in general.

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<sup>13</sup> Politicus, 277b. See also Frutiger, *Les Mythes de Platon*, p. 187 n1.

## 2. MYTH, MEMORY, AND LOVE

Considered by contemporary scholarship to be among Plato's latest works,<sup>14</sup> the *Phaedrus*<sup>15</sup> is known for the variety of its themes and the complex and often controversial way in which it treats the question of writing. Its central theme is rhetoric, in both its oral and written expressions, as exercised by the "sophoi" -- contemporary professionals as sophists, profit-making rhetoricians, and law givers, as opposed to the way philosophy proposes it should be used. Inherent in rhetoric is the way we think which in turn is contingent upon our understanding of human nature and man's position in the cosmos. Love and its higher and lower forms, its relation and the relation of memory to the soul's immortality, and the way to speak about all this, are the dialogue's basic themes, skillfully woven into the fabric of dialogue. To say all this Plato needs a metalanguage, which he seeks in the pre-existing culture, its myths, poetry, and the concepts of love and memory, material he corrects and transforms for his purposes.

The *Phaedrus* is composed of elenctic dialogue and monological recitals connected by interludes. The monological recitals, to which we now turn, are termed by Socrates as both "logoi" and "mythoi." These monologues appear in the text when Socrates, suddenly stepping out of

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<sup>14</sup> See G.J. De Vries, *A Commentary on the Phaedrus of Plato* (Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1969), pp. 9-11.

<sup>15</sup> All quotations in English from the *Phaedrus* are from H.N. Fowler's translation in the Loeb Classical Library edition, *Plato I, Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Phaedo, Phaedrus* (New York: Harvard University Press [1914] 1982). Lines will be given in parenthesis, in the text.

character, puts his conversation with Phaedrus on hold in order to give a set speech. The majority of these speeches are myths which Socrates pretends to recall from the collective memory of the mythical past, that are in effect fabricated by Plato. To these invented tales Socrates gives the form and appearance of mythic fiction constructed according to the mythical vocabulary and images with which his audience was familiar.

There are three invented "myths" recited as monologues in the *Phaedrus*: the myth of the cicadas, the myth of Theuth/Thamus, and the "mythic hymn" contained in Socrates's second speech. According to Frutiger, the first two myths, significantly both in the same dialogue, are the only two pure mythical inventions in the entire Platonic corpus.<sup>16</sup> The mythic hymn of Socrates's second speech is a poetic composition constructed on a metaphor. All three fables constitute monologues addressed by Socrates to an audience represented by Phaedrus. The other monological recitals of this work include two speeches of non-mythical content: Lysias's speech and Socrates's first speech. Both constitute important steps in the development of the Platonic themes and, most importantly, pave the way for the palinode.

The *Phaedrus* also uses several allusions and fragments of popular tales and legends of the mythical past, as is the myth of Boreas and Oreithyia and the fragmentary allusion to Typhon (230a5). Evocation of legendary characters like Helen, Odysseus, Nestor, and Palamedes (261b9-

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<sup>16</sup> "Il n'y a, semble-t-il, que deux mythes platoniciens qui soient entièrement originaux: la fable des cigales dans le Phèdre, et celle de Theuth dans le même dialogue." Frutiger, *Les Mythes de Platon*, p 233.

11), among others, are additional examples of Plato's intertextual use of literary myth. With such mythical diversity, the *Phaedrus* lends itself to the study of the Platonic "mythical method" and the way Plato relates myth to the concepts of love and memory.

Love, or eros, is meant as physical desire or seduction, intellectual and spiritual attraction for the beautiful, affection for the Muses, and fondness for intellectual activity such as thinking, speaking, and writing. It covers the entire gamut from carnal desire to the soul's longing for the Forms. Most importantly, Eros is the longing for immortality.

A disputed word in the Platonic vocabulary, "love" kindles the two interlocutors' desire to define and understand it -- in fact, to redefine it for Plato's specific purposes. Being the power that unifies body and soul, love offers itself as a proof of the soul's potential to elevate itself to the level of spirit.

Whereas love occupies the first part of the dialogue, memory runs throughout the entire piece. Both are linked to immortality. Eros is fulfilled by contemplating the Ideas, in other words by transcending the limitations of time and space which restraint the freedom of the soul. The transcendence which Plato seeks is achieved by means of knowledge, that is, the capacity of the mind that exists in time to know the eternal. *Anamnesis*, the memory leading to internal knowledge is the

means of achieving this knowledge not once but repeatedly. This knowledge which establishes immortality was acquired by the soul before the soul was born in its present human form but was forgotten. Plato is recreating a memory which, by repeated recall, can eternalize the soul's potential for immortality.

I will take the "myths" -- or what amounts to a myth -- of the *Phaedrus*, separately and in the order these mythical constructs occur in the text, and will attempt to establish their relationship to my themes and their particular function in the dialogue.

a. The myth of Boreas and Oreithyia (227a-230e).

The myth of Boreas and the early part of the dialogue where it occurs serve thematic, structural, and self-constituting purposes. It borrows from the past and its myths recognizable elements, building blocks of the author's new language. In modern sociolinguistic terms, the opening section of the *Phaedrus* functions as an "abstract" and "orientation," the two first parts of oral narrative which summarize the content of the entire dialogue identifying the time, place, persons, and situation it involves.<sup>17</sup> This part of the dialogue introduces the themes of love, desire, and seduction, death and immortality, memory and writing, in their literal manifestation, before they develop into

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<sup>17</sup> See William Labov, "The Transformation of Experience in Narrative Syntax," *Language in the Inner City: Studies in the Black English Vernacular*, (Philadelphia: University of Alabama Press, 1980) pp. 14, 20.

symbols. It prepares us to follow the transformation the philosopher attempts to achieve through his dialogue.

The dialogue opens with Socrates and Phaedrus, lovers of speeches, running into each other outside the Athenian walls. Master and disciple, who are mutually attracted to each other because of a discourse each one of them uses to seduce the other, agree to continue their walk together so they can discuss the latest speech on love written by Lysias, a popular rhetorician who, in Phaedrus's admiring words, is "the cleverest writer of our day" (*δεινότατος ὦν τῶν νῦν γράφειν*, 228a). The written speech (*λόγον*, 228d) of Lysias, which Phaedrus is carrying hidden under his cloak, is referred to by Socrates as *pharmakon* (230d8); it is the drug, poison or cure, with which Phaedrus has lured him out of the city.<sup>18</sup> Although the two characters are unequal, from the point of view of education, intellectual power, and age, Socrates's seductive power over Phaedrus is balanced by Phaedrus' ability to attract him away from the city with the help of the *pharmakon* of Lysias' speech (230d8).<sup>19</sup> The two interlocutors have thus a power over each other because each possesses what the other desires. Phaedrus is a character

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<sup>18</sup> The *Phaedrus* is the only Platonic dialogue which takes place outside the city of Athens.

<sup>19</sup> Jacques Derrida argues that behind the structured oppositions of *pharmakon* as poison and cure, lurks an older meaning of the word associated with *pharmakos*, or scapegoat. It represents *the expulsion of the evil, its exclusion out of the body (and out) of the city*. Linking, by exchange and substitution, all the *pharmaceutical* metaphors of the dialogue, Derrida argues that Socrates is *pharmakos*. Socrates' logographic rejection, concludes Derrida, makes writing a scapegoat, a necessary poison that society has to tolerate. See *Dissemination*, trans. by Barbara Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981) pp. 130 and 128-134.

already established in the *Symposium*, where he contributes a speech on love. As in the *Phaedrus*, so in the *Symposium* the young man gives a superficial performance concealing his own voice under quotations from other authors. In both speeches he identifies with the "beloved." It seems that Plato has intentionally chosen the mediocre and rather naive youth of the *Symposium* to establish a poorly balanced relation with Socrates, which makes him an ideal subject for education by Socrates. The theme of equality and balance is thus established early in the text to enable the transformation the text seeks to achieve.

The story of Boreas erupts spontaneously in Phaedrus's memory, stimulated by the senses as soon as his eyes make contact with the beauty of the landscape: "Is it not from some place along here by the Ilissus that Boreas is said to have carried Oreithyia?" asks Phaedrus at 229b5-7. The idea of natural beauty perceived through sight appears first on the natural, human, and dramatic levels, to be raised, as the dialogue progresses, to the level of Beauty which nurtures love and the soul through sight. The spirits of love convey to the lover the image of the beloved. Something analogous happens with the landscape, which is described in detail: a tall plane tree, a shadowy willow in full bloom, the cool water flowing under it, resounding with the shrill summer music of the chorus of the cicadas (*λιγυρόν ὑπηχεί τῷ τῶν τεττιγῶν χωρῷ*, 230b2 c-4). The reader's attention is drawn to the temporal markers of a changing reality through deictics like "this," "that," "here," "there," as for instance in "let us turn aside here and go along the Ilissus" (229a), "this" (*τῆνδε*) time of the year and the day (229a), "do you see

that (*ἐκείνην*) very tall plane" (229a), "there is a shade there," (*ἐκεῖ*) (229b), all occurring in the same rhesis. Phaedrus's insistence on urging Socrates to confirm whether it is "not from some place along here (*ἐνθένδε*) by the Ilissus ..." and again "well, is it from here (*ἐνθένδε*)?....," at 229b, shows the intention of this part of the dialogue to historicize the myth and at the same time mythologize the place. Socrates's confirmation at 229b8, and his statement, later, that the scenery "seems to be a sacred place of some nymphs..." (230b9) transform the profane landscape into a mythic, divine place and make it a reflection of the larger cosmos, part of which the interlocutors are and with which they seek communion.

While the content of the dialogue is thus mythicized, the myth of Boreas is historicized by way of its eruption into the concrete space where the two interlocutors move. In this deliberate confusion of myth and history, imagination and drama, Socrates and Phaedrus duplicate, in fact, the roles of the two mythical protagonists--Boreas and Oreithyia. By his remark that "the streamlet is very pure and clear and fit for girls to play by" (*ἐπιτηδεῖα κόραις παίζειν παρ'αὐτά*, 228b), Phaedrus, himself playing with the *pharmakon* of Lysias's speech, is identified with Pharmacea -- an invented name -- playing with Orytheia just before the latter was carried off by the North Wind --here, Socrates.<sup>20</sup> Place

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<sup>20</sup> Burger notes the association of Orythyia and her girlish playing with Phaedrus playing, with the speech of Lysias, whereas Socrates is an analogue of Boreas who will "carry off" Phaedrus, to whom he was lured by the *pharmakon* of Lysias' speech. Pharmacea is associated with Lysias' text, or *pharmakon*, of 230d6 with which Phaedrus "plays." See R. Burger, *Plato's Phaedrus: A Defense of a Philosophic Art of Writing* (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1980) p. 14. The analogies between

and *dramatis personae* are thus recast into mythical context as the reader is induced to accord mythical character to the tales of the dialogue.

Phaedrus's next question to Socrates, whether the latter believes in the truth of this "*mythologema*" (229c5)-- rather contemptuously referring to the myth of Boreas-- exposes the young man's shallow approach to myth and his limited notion of truth. "If I disbelieved" (*εἰ δπιστοῖην*) responds Socrates, "I should not be extraordinary (*οὐκ ἄν εἶην*)... then I might give (*φαίην δν*) a rational explanation" (229c8-10). The contrary-to-fact conditional tenses formulate a confusing hypothesis which allows Socrates to sidestep the question. We are not clearly told whether he believes the myth or not, which is, of course, in keeping with the Socratic position that myth has some truth in it and has to be respected as a part of the tradition. Instead, Socrates offers a "rational explanation," (termed a "logos," at 229d2), which demonstrates the sophistic treatment of myth (*σοφιστικός*) and is introduced by a hypothetical tense (*φαίην δν*, or I might tell), "that a blast of Boreas, the north wind, pushed Oreithyia off the rocks near by as she was playing with Pharmacea, and that when she had died in this manner she was said to have been carried off by Boreas" (229c7-9).

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Boreas/Socrates and Phaedrus/Oreithyia are also proposed, as Griswold notes, by the Alexandrian scholar Hermeias in his *Platonis Phaedrum Scholia*, ed. P. Couvreur [Hildesheim: G. Olms, 1971] p. 29. Also Griswold, *Self-Knowledge in Plato's Phaedrus*, p. 252.

But as soon as Socrates has said that he "might tell" what he has already said, he subverts his own version with a broad generalization: "Such explanations are... the inventions of a very clever and laborious (*λίαν δεινοῦ καὶ ἐπιπόνου*) man," with a "rustic sort of wisdom" (229e3-4). He adds that to invent, or interpret myths in accordance with appearances and plausibility (*κατὰ τὸ εἰκός*, 229e3), one needs a great deal of leisure (*πολλῆς αὐτῷ σχολῆς δεῖσαι*, 229e4). The hermeneutic model leads nowhere if there is no suitable instruction and preparation of the interpreter. The oppositional clauses introduced by "but" (*ἐγὼ δε, ... ἐμοὶ δέ...*) stress the contrast between sophistic and philosophical practices and formulate the distinction between traditional myth and the myths Plato invents. Socrates's first priority is to devote what time he has for the discovery of philosophical truth. Popular myth can be useful if corrected (*ἐπανορθοῦσθαι*, 229d6) through reason, otherwise it should be accepted as it is: "...and so I dismiss these matters and accepting the customary belief about them, ... I investigate not these things, but myself, to know whether I am a monster more complicated and more furious than Typhon or a gentler and simpler creature, to whom a divine and quiet lot is given by nature" (230a2-3).

The difference between his own mythical inventions and those of the enemies of philosophy lies in that the practices of the sophists were aimed at explaining symbolic images literally, or according to appearances or plausibility (*κατὰ τὸ εἰκός*), whereas the philosopher pays attention to the symbol and the meaning beyond appearances. Appearances alone that interest Phaedrus do not promote inner knowledge.

In concealed irony, Socrates uses the same words with which Phaedrus, just a few lines earlier, praised Lysias as "the cleverest (*δεινότατος*) writer of our day," who "took a long time to compose at his leisure, (*ἐν πολλῷ χρόνῳ κατὰ σχολήν συνέθηκε,*" 228a1-2) to attack the sophistic mode of writing and interpreting--and, of course, to reprimand Phaedrus' praising of Lysias's methods. The way to treat myths is to interpret them by internal criteria and according to what is human in order to reveal general truths about human nature.

The search for truth and self-knowledge is the purpose served by the allusion to the mythical monster Typhon.<sup>21</sup> Hesiod's illustration of Typhon, or Typhoeus, is the epitome of a complex (*πολυπλοκώτερον*), arrogant and vain beast, the symbol of mindless nature. Typhon's defeat by Zeus symbolizes brutal force subjugated to reason and the power of the mind. As with the myth of Boreas, so with the Typhon example Plato is preparing us for the distinction between bestiality and spirit, violence and gentleness, soul and body, polarities the dialogue seeks to harmonize.

The "rational explanation" of the Boreas myth which Socrates ventures offers useful insight on the way Plato uses traditional myth. In fact, it constitutes the only version of this myth the reader hears. The myth of Boreas had existed in Greek mythology, as shaped and

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<sup>21</sup> Typhon, according to Hesiod, was the father of the Winds--but with the exception of Boreas (*Theogony*, 869-70).

recorded by Homer and Hesiod.<sup>22</sup> But the rape of Oreithyia appears, for the first, time in Plato's *Phaedrus*.<sup>23</sup> As for Pharmacea, she is a pure Platonic creation. The phrase "as she was playing with Pharmacea," in fact, is not instrumental to Socrates's version. It is evoked solely for the purpose of establishing the relationships that maintain the tension-- and balance-- between the symbolic meaning of things that reason cannot explain.

The invention of Pharmacea links, through cultural intertextuality and on the level of the signifier, myth, death, love, memory, and writing. The image, for instance, of nymphs playing before the rape, echoes another familiar myth: the rape of Persephone whom Hades abducted "...παίζουσαν κούρησι σὺν Ὠκεανού" [as she was playing with the daughters of Oceanus].<sup>24</sup> The association may be also reinforced by the *Phaedrus*'s "ἐπιτηδεῖα κόραις παίζειν παρ'αὐτά," at 228b1, [suitable for girls to play by] where "κόραις," echoes κούρησι and also Κόρη [Kore], the other name of Persephone.

The similarity of the two rape myths is constructed on the affiliation of love with death. Boreas's own relation to death (he and

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<sup>22</sup> Hesiod refers to the birth of Boreas, a Titan (*Theogony*, 379), whereas Homer depicts him as having fallen in love and coupled with pasturing horses which bore him twelve young horses (*Il*.20.222).

<sup>23</sup> Later accounts of it we see in Apollodorus (*III*, 199) and in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (Book VI).

<sup>24</sup> Cf. *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, Hesiod, *The Homeric Hymns and Homerica*, H.G. Evelyn-White trans. Loeb Classical Library, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982).

his brother Zephyros, the West wind, represent the mythical brothers Death and Sleep) reinforces this association. Love is traditionally tied to death -- we only have to remember how closely Eros, Hypnos, and Thanatos are related in Greek mythology. Pharmaceia's name echoes *pharmakon*, a cure and a poison, like Lysias' written manuscript.<sup>25</sup> Writing is a remedy against the loss of memory, enables abstract and analytical thinking and is capable of maintaining human knowledge for posterity. Yet, it is also poison, because it commits live speech and spontaneous thought to the dead letter and because it destroys memory, an intellectual activity, as it will be argued in the last section of the dialogue.

The meanings of "pharmakon" are established through the literary tradition, and particularly the Homeric, which seems to be constantly alive in the philosopher's memory. For intertextuality is the returning memory of a literary past. In the *Odyssey*, Helen casts "a pharmakon into the wine to make one forget all sorrows" (4.220-21). Similarly, Circe offers Odysseus's companions a mixture of "*φάρμακα λυγρὰ*," or malignant drugs, which make them forgetful of their own nostos (10.235-36). Both women are immortal goddesses, like Calypso, whose offer of immortality Odysseus rejects, opting for the reality of Ithaca. Pindar, in Pythian IV.186f, relates the story of Zetas and Kalais, the sons of Boreas, who join the voyage of Argo to find a "pharmakon" for death itself (*ἐπὶ καὶ θανάτῳ φάρμακον*). The drug they seek is called, simply, "immortality."

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<sup>25</sup> At 242e2 Socrates will refer to the bewitching effects of this speech with a past participle (*καταφαρμακευθέντος*) in an emphatic form of the verb for poisoning.

"Lethe," or forgetfulness, signifies the absence of suffering, the end of the ability to be human. It is the constant memory of Ithaca that keeps Odysseus's mind alive and finally enables him to regain nostos -- emblematic of living and suffering. For human fate is "the return to grief that cannot be forgotten" (*Odyssey* 4. 108). Forgetting one's sorrows is entering a utopian state of existence for which both the palace of Helen and Menelaus and the enchanted house of Circe are metaphors. The word *pharmakon*, thus enables a multiple relationship not only with love, death, immortality, and writing but also, indirectly at this state, with memory.

In keeping with its propensity to reproduce on the pragmatic level what is taking place on the mythical and symbolic levels, the scene ends in a sense of immortality established on the level of the dramatis personae, as the two interlocutors turn once more to the physical landscape; the plane tree, the shady willow, the trees in bloom, the running water, the shrill (*λιγυρόν*) chorus of cicadas, all confirm the place as sacred (*ιερόν*). But "the most delightful thing of all," concludes Socrates, is the grass, as it grows on the gentle slope" (230c3-5). In ancient myth and folktale, as Vermeule shows, grass is integrated in Greek thought as a fixture related to immortality. In examples taken from ancient myth, poetry, and vase painting, it resembles a *pharmakon* to counteract death.<sup>26</sup> Language thus brings out

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<sup>26</sup> Among the examples Vermeule presents is that of Glaukos of Anthedon, a fisherman, who tasted a rare "everliving undying grass" (*δείζων δφθιρον πόαν*) and became immortal with the gift of prophecy (Aeschylus, *Glaukos Pontios* fr. 28N<sup>2</sup>, 60 M). The Aeschylean text characteristically uses "*δφθιρον*," the epithet for imperishable glory--

a multiple relationship between the affinities and oppositions between love, death, immortality, writing, and memory, which are striving for balance.

But let's return to the Socratic rational explanation of the Boreas myth to see in what way it affects the traditional Boreas myth. A violent wind that pushes off the cliffs and kills a young woman is transformed by mythical imagination into a god burning with erotic desire who abducts her. Through metonymic displacement, death is denied and euphemistically replaced by eros, a creative force. It is transformed into its opposite. Socrates's version reversing the metonymies and euphemisms of myth restores things to their ostensibly true dimension: death is death and there are no metaphors for dying. His explanation postulates that allegory and symbol are opposite to truth-- that rape and death have only literal meaning.

The effect of the Socratic "rational explanation" and its withdrawal is threefold: First, it announces the failure of the attempt to reconcile myth and reason. There is more to myth than words can account for; second, it identifies violent love with death; third, it creates Pharmacea. The fact that this explanation was rescinded does not efface it from the reader's mind because it still exists written and immortalized on the page. Socrates's revocation of this explanation is a confirmation of the power of myth and the impossibility of reconciling

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Achilles' choice-- to combat death. See Emily Vermeule, *Aspects of Death in Early Greek Art and Poetry* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1981) pp. 131-32.

it with reason if reason is used unwisely, that is, not for the purpose of promoting self-knowledge. In such cases, myth should not be touched at all. In the myths and speeches to follow, Plato will embark on the task of gradually decreasing the distance between reason and myth, rendering myth suitable for the purposes of philosophy, yet allowing it to retain its affinity with vagueness and indeterminacy.

The tale of Boreas and Oreithyia establishes myth as a structural device from which the Platonic themes and ideas, embryonic still, unfurl into their full shape. Love, memory, death, immortality, writing, reason, all in an unrefined stage here, seem to proceed from this point. Love is introduced as linked to the flesh; it is violent, separating body and soul, whereas memory is still an external, mechanical, unreflective function that fragments the self. As purely carnal love is violent, asymmetrical, and identified with death, so mechanical memory is, at this stage, a spontaneous function useful in maintaining the contact with tradition but external and not involving man's inner self. As is the case with love, memory too will evolve, as the dialogue progresses, into "anamnesis," a property of the soul. The attempt to reconcile myth and reason fails, as everything else, at this stage. The tension between writing and telling, mythos and logos, conveys an analogous sense of disunity and lack of integration. What happens at the conceptual level of abstract ideas is mimicked by the two interlocutors' performance. The unbalanced relationship between Socrates and Phaedrus representing, among other things, the old tradition of the oral past and the young, playful art of writing, reflects the absence of

unity and integration on the other levels. All these themes brought together by myth, will evolve beyond their initial state as the poet's quest for balance, unity, and language seeks fulfillment.

**b. The non-mythic monologues: Lysias's speech and Socrates's first speech**

Before Socrates's major speech on love -- the palinode -- Plato introjects two speeches: (a) Lysias' speech which Phaedrus reads to Socrates (230e-234c), and (b) Socrates's first speech (237b-241d), which he improvises for the purpose of refuting Lysias's sophistic oratory. The first is termed a "logos;" the second, both a "mythos" and a "logos. Neither of these two speeches is mythic in the traditional sense, except perhaps for the fact that they are both delivered by a fictional character in the first person, and represent a probability rather than a certitude.<sup>27</sup> All speeches, however, are important to the transformation and completion of the Platonic synthesis which progresses through small revelations occurring with each speech.

**Lysias's speech**

Lysias's speech is referred to as a "logos" (234c6, 264e3, 227c4, 234d3), nowhere as "mythos. Yet, it merits, I think, our brief attention because it picks up and advances the themes and motifs of the myth of

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<sup>27</sup> Jowett has called all three speeches of the dialogue "myths," whereas Couturat lists the last two along with all six discourses of the *Symposium* under the general title "*Mythi de amore.*" See Frutiger, *Les Mythes de Platon*, and his account of the controversy informing the Platonic myth (p. 99ff).

Boreas, and particularly those of love, memory, and writing, placing them into a fictional framework. It also redefines reason for the purposes of philosophy.

Lysias was a contemporary speech writer who wrote for others and did not deliver his speeches himself. His written words, therefore, could be given life only through a reader-- in this case Phaedrus who is reading Lysias's manuscript he is carrying under his cloak. The authenticity of this speech has been disputed by some scholars who contend that it is a Platonic invention. Whether a Lysian authentic speech or a Platonic concoction, this speech is another example of how a monological text is inserted into the dialogue to present an argument without having to resort to didacticism. Its purpose is to illustrate the different aspects of love. Lysias's "logos," the pharmakon with which Phaedrus identifies, presents a "nonlover" (*οὐκ ἐραστής*) who tries to seduce by a monological argument the "beloved" (*ἐρώμενος*), a young boy for whom he does not feel the passion of love: "It will be better to yield to me than to a lover... If you yield to me, I shall consort with you, not with a view to present pleasure only, but to future advantage also, not being overcome by passion but in full control of myself" (233b-c).

The speaker, here, is trying to show how a relation between lovers can lead to the benefit of both nonlover and beloved (*ὠφελίαν ἀμφοῖν γίγνεσθαι*, 234c4). The concept of love, as seen by the sophists who were enemies of thinking, is profit-oriented. A good, calculated management of one's love life can lead to a life free of frictions and

emotional stress. For the passion of love, argues the nonlover, moves to acts beyond due measure (*παρὰ τὸ βέλτιστον*, 233a8) and obscures judgement. Love amounts to jealousy, competition, in short, unreason (*τὸ ἄφρον*, 236a2) and destroys friendship. Emotions are "evils" that have to be removed from one's life. Lysias's "artless" speech that uses no metaphors or poetic images to convey the feelings of either of the lovers reflects the dichotomy of body and soul. Its striking characteristic is the uneven-powered relationship between lover and nonlover and the absence of love. This "love-relationship" subverts the very notion of balance and proportion inherent in the very nature of love; it does not take the feelings of the persons involved into account; it equates love with unreason and distorts the meaning of what is best (*βέλτιστον*) translated here as measure. In short it fails to define love, and even makes it resemble the violent and one-sided love in the Boreas myth.

Lysias's speech projects an attempt to reconcile reason and love but it is based on misconceptions and fails to unite the opposites in the human soul. It is a consequence of lack of proper education. The nonlover has managed to control his emotions and maintains that it is through reason that he can achieve love and friendship. Reason thus becomes identified with a kind of love in which emotions and the spirit are absent, a love dictated solely by sexual desire (*epithymia*), the basest kind of love, because it involves only the senses. Although it moves toward a kind of a shared experience, some kind of friendship, love is still unilaterally inspired. This kind of love dehumanizes and

in reality constitutes a abuse against reason which is used to keep feelings polarized. The kind of love Lysias's nonlover is fostering does not account for the wholeness of human experience. What is revealed in this speech is the absence of the human soul and its struggle for balance.

### **Socrates's first speech (237b-241d)**

Socrates's first speech is a speech on love, offered in refutation of Lysias's speech. Socrates labels it both a "mythos" (237a(, 241e8, 243a4) and a "logos" (241d3, 242e3, 243c2, 244a1, 264e7, 265c6, d7, e3, and 266a3). This speech is important in that it establishes the ethical foundations and the necessary vocabulary to re-articulate the concepts of memory and love in philosophical terms and to institute the concept of immortality. It is crucial for our focus because it ties memory to love and reveals these two forces as agents of transformation. This speech is fundamental in understanding the palinode and the mythic hymn -- the dialogue's rhetorical and philosophical climax.

The themes of the earlier parts of the dialogue are reintroduced in the interlude between Lysias's logos and Socrates's first speech (234d-237b). The themes of memory and knowledge are first evoked through the playful and ironic exchange of roles between the two interlocutors that characterizes the first half of the *Phaedrus*, as in Socrates's remark: "O Phaedrus, if I don't know Phaedrus, I have forgotten myself," [ὦ Φαίδρε, εἰ ἐγὼ Φαίδρον ἀγνοῶ, καὶ ἐμαυτοῦ ἐπιλέλησμαι, 228a6-7],

which is duplicated by Phaedrus's echo: "O Socrates, if I don't know Socrates, I have forgotten myself" (*ὦ Σώκρατες, Σωκράτην αγνοῶ, καὶ ἑμαυτοῦ ἐπιλέλησμαι*) at 236c6-7. Socrates delivers his first speech as a consequence of forgetfulness-- forgetting himself he loses control of himself. He will return to this notion pretending he has forgotten whether he defined love (*οὐ πάνυ μὲμνημαι*) as he was in such an ecstasy (263d4). Memory-- a mechanic revival of impressions, as defined so far - - is now linked to love as ecstatic madness nurtured through the senses. Both are transformed into inner activities.

The speech itself is termed by Socrates a *mythos* (237a12) in spite of the fact that its content is not mythical. It opens with an epic invocation to the Muses and is introduced with the traditional fairytale formula: "Now there was once upon a time a boy...of great beauty who had many lovers." (*Ἦν οὕτω δὴ παῖς... μάλα καλός· τούτῳ δὲ ἦσαν ἐρασταὶ πάνυ πολλοί*, 237b3). It is a speech constructed on a hypothesis and delivered by an imaginary lover who is in fact indistinguishable from Lysias's nonlover, since love appears as a desire (*ἐπιθυμία τις ὁ ἔρως*, 237d3-4) that both nonlover and lover are experiencing through a series of concealments and revelations. With his head covered (to imitate Lysias's nonlover who conceals his own desires-- and also Phaedrus who had concealed Lysias's speech under his cloak -- Socrates delivers a speech which although technically superior to that of Lysias, it is still an impersonal monologue. Socrates's *mythos* seeks to emphasize self-knowledge by revealing the nature of Lysias's nonlover who is

ignorant of his own desires and lacking in the ability for self-criticism.

The effort to understand love will lead to the understanding of the nature of the human soul. But *eros*, being among the things that are ambiguous or doubtful (*τῶν ἀμφοισθησίμων*, 263c8-9), as are the Ideas of Justice and Goodness (263a12), cannot be easily defined.<sup>28</sup> The Platonic link between love and justice will reappear in Seferis and the obsession with the indeterminacy of language in Joyce.

To understand love and the essence of Ideas, one must take into account two ruling principles, Socrates argues: the innate desire for pleasures (*ἐμφυτος ἐπιθυμία ἡδονῶν*) and the acquired opinion which strives for the best (*ἐπικτητος δόξα, ἐφιεμένη τοῦ δρίστου*, 237d6-9)-- in other words, human nature and what culture has stored in us. If innate desire rules, the relationship will be tyrannical and unequal: it will result in a bestial kind of love that separates rather than unite. The proverb Socrates uses at 241d1-2 ("just as the wolf loves the lamb, so the lover adores his beloved") offers, like myth, a popular image to illustrate a point.

The second ruling principle, *epiktetos doxa*, is knowledge acquired through the senses. To utilize this knowledge, memory is needed.

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<sup>28</sup> The Platonic dialogues often demonstrate the inability to define ambiguous words. Examples of this we see in the *Euthyphro* regarding piety and justice, in *Meno* regarding virtue, in *The Symposium* with respect to love, and elsewhere.

Socrates's first speech stresses the role of the senses in the formation of *doxa* through a profusion of sight and hearing metaphors. Acquired opinion is all Socrates has heard from the wise poets of the past (Sappho, Anacreon, or some prose writers) though he cannot remember by whom exactly: "Because of my stupidity I have forgotten how and from whom I heard it" (235d 2-4). Forgetfulness is stupidity, the numbing of the mind. This knowledge has filled him "through the ears" (*διὰ τῆς ἀκοῆς*, 234c4-5) like a second nature. What Socrates is stressing by repeating again and again that he is not responsible for the speech he gives because it was inspired by external sources is that externally acquired madness motivates us mechanically to action without the participation of the whole person. Mechanical memory is comparable to externally acquired knowledge, or opinion (*δόξα*), summoned to mind unreflectively. This kind of memory resembles the sophists' mnemotechnic practices aimed at mere persuasion.

The power that transforms *doxa*, however, is not only reason but also the madness of love. *Doxa* is the stuff human thoughts is made of. With the right use of reason, it can be given the potential to "strive for the best" (*δόξης ... ἐπὶ τὸ δριστον λόγῳ ἀγούσης*, 237ε). Recognizing and internalizing what we are ultimately results in self-knowledge which leads to *sophrosyne* (*σωφροσύνη*), or self-restraint. Divine erotic madness (*μανία*) although provoked by an external object of love, springs from the divine part of the self, its soul. This divine part is the force responsible for the elevation of "*epithymia*" to *eros* and then to *sophrosyne*. Self-restraint and reason are the forces that transform

acquired opinion into knowledge. In Socrates's first speech, reason has already come a long way since Lysias's nonlover: "But now that the time of payment has come he has a new ruler and governor within him, sense and reason in place of love and madness (*νοῦν καὶ σωφροσύνην ἀντ' ἔρωτος καὶ μανίας*), and has become a different person" (241a3-5). But although he has now a different intelligence and self-control, sense and reason are still different from love and madness, mind and feeling are still split apart.

The dialogue now institutes eros as an inner function and links it to *anamnesis*, while at the same time it establishes reason as the power that transforms doxa into knowledge. The dialogue, up to this point, is structured in such a way as to prepare us for the palinode, and particularly for its mythic hymn. The distinction now arises between mechanical, unreflective memory and *anamnesis*, recollection leading to the highest knowledge. According to the Platonic definition in the *Phaedrus*, *anamnesis* implies unity and balance:

collecting into a unity by means of reason the many perceptions of the senses; and this is a recollection of those things which our soul once beheld, when it journeyed with God and, lifting its vision above the things which we now say exist, rose up into real being (*ὃ ποτ' εἶδεν ἡμῶν ἢ ψυχὴ συμπορευθεῖσα θεῷ καὶ ὑπεριδοῦσα ὃ νῦν εἶναι φασμεν, καὶ ἀμακύνσασα εἰς τὸ ὄν ὄντως* (249c10-13).

It is the conscious and willed recollection of an experienced moment of transcendence which keeps motivation for perfection alive -- a moment of eternity intensified by nostalgia.

The movement toward self-knowledge that this part of the dialogue initiates is made possible, as Griswold notes, by a new vocabulary which introduces, for the first time, new words in this dialogue: "nous," "mania," (241a3-4) "divine philosophy" (239b-4), "soul" (241c5), a new ethical vocabulary that recreates memory as noetic vision, linking "nous" with "sophrosyne", and "eros" with "mania" (241a4-5).<sup>29</sup> By recognizing and naming the properties of our soul which are innate but only inadequately known to us, we can become whole.

The collaboration of reason and desire (eros) and the inseparability of lover and nonlover that Socrates's first speech advances, set this speech apart from Lysias's concept of reason as an instrument of desire and mark a step forward in uniting body and mind. Desire for the body is gradually transformed into desire for reason. On the level of the dialogue's dramatis personae, this intellectual desire is represented by the two interlocutors' longing for each other's logos.

The structure of Socrates's first speech provides the formal and conceptual frame on which the image of the soul will be moulded. It prepares a language for the new ideas that philosophy is striving to establish. By naming things and thereby calling them into presence, the poet as creator will achieve, as the dialogue progresses, the union and balance between senses and intellect, revealing them through dialectics.

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<sup>29</sup> Griswold, *Self-Knowledge*, p. 63.

c. The Palinode (243b10-257b8) and the mythic hymn (245c6-257b8)

Socrates's second speech, or "palinode," is the climactic point of the interaction of myth, memory, and love in the poet's quest for language and balance. The palinode achieves a gradual transmutation whereby the external becomes internal and thereby creates wholeness. It redefines what is human as being partly mortal, partly immortal, and unveiling man's inborn potential to harmonize the discordant forces in the human psyche. To understand this, we must conceive our impulses as guided by an entity both corporeal and incorporeal, complex but ideally whole, which depicts human nature as guided by a divine energy which makes it immortal. Plato calls this energy "a soul." In proving the soul immortal, Plato was proving the human potential for elevation and perfection, for the benefit of the individual and the city-State.

The palinode, beginning with a discussion of the traditional forms of "divine madness" -- inspiration and prophecy-- is followed by the "apodeixis," or exposition which Socrates offers in the form of a simile purporting to describe the "form" (*ἰδέα*) of the soul and prove that it is immortal. In the process, the apodeixis, or "mythic hymn," reconstitutes love and memory in terms of their relation to the soul and establishes them as proofs of the soul's immortality.

In calling his speech a "palinode," or recantation, Socrates turns for the symbols and analogies, once more, to "acquired opinion," which he had defined as what he had absorbed through his senses from the words

of the poets of old. Here he borrows the example of the poet Stesichorus who lost his sight because he spoke ill of Helen -- an immortal goddess representing Love and Beauty. In Platonic philosophy love is defined in terms of beauty. It is desire of beauty which becomes a key concept in the moral realm. Beauty was considered the result of harmony and proportion that holds a thing together. Realizing his sin, the poet atones for his blasphemy by writing a recantation-- the "Palinode to Helen":

*οὐκ ἔστ' ἔτυμος λόγος οὗτος·  
οὐδ' ἔβας ἐν νηυσὶν εὐσέλμοις  
οὐδ' Ἴκεο πέρασμα Τροίας.* (fr. 192)

[That story is not true / You never sailed in the well-oared ships/ You never went to the walls of Troy].

Stesichorus regains his sight because he is capable of realizing that it was only Helen's "eidolon" that went to Troy, not her true person.<sup>30</sup> Like the poet, Socrates makes amends for the error he committed against Eros and Beauty, in his first speech, by reciting a recantation to Love. Eros, the son of Aphrodite (242d10), is, like Helen, an immortal god, after all. As Stesichorus regains his vision because he was able to distinguish between an "eidolon" and its true form, so Socrates makes believe he suddenly sees his error and learns from it (*μανθάνω τὸ δμαρτημα*). But contrary to the myth of Boreas, which can be neither morally interpreted nor rationalized but should rather be left as it is, Stesichorus' fable is accepted and believed as hiding a deeper truth. In the process of discovering this truth, reason combined

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<sup>30</sup> This is a theme that had also inspired Euripides's comedy "Helen."

with introspection becomes increasingly important as Socrates's acts are now guided by an inner voice, rational and mystical at the same time-- a *daemonion*, 242b10. Sight identified with insight is a notion developed through traditional literature, as in the case of Homer and Tiresias. The motif of blindness is contrasted with the principle guiding art: the ability of perceiving (literally, "seeing") and bringing together in one idea the scattered particulars of the discourse, as when speaking of Love, for example (*εἰς μίαν τε ἰδέαν συνορῶντα ἄγειν τα πολλαχῆ διεσπαρμένα*, 265d). Socrates uncovers his head when he wants to show that he has perceived the meaning of Love -- symbolically he has seen the light of truth.

When Socrates has to describe the form of the soul and its journey, he is more pressingly than ever confronted with the problem of choosing the appropriate kind of language: "to tell what [the idea of the soul] really is would be a matter for utterly superhuman and long discourse but it is within human power to describe it briefly in a figure" (*ὧ ἔοικεν*, 246a5-7).

The two kinds of discourse he contemplates, image and narrative, are opposed to each other. The brief kind for which Socrates opts is the symbolic/mythical image given here in the form of a simile. This leads to conceiving as human an autonomous living being, existing as a whole. In Socrates's words,

the whole, compounded of soul and body is called a living being and is further designated as mortal (*ζῶον το ξύμπαν ἐκλήθη, ψυχή καί σῶμα παγόν, θνητόν τ' ἔσχεν ἐπωνυμίαν*). It is not immortal by any reasonable supposition, (*οὐδ' ἐξ ἐνδὸς λόγου*

λελογισμένου) but we, though we have never seen or rightly conceived a god, imagine an immortal being which has both a soul and a body which are united for all time (*ἀθάνατόν τι ζῶον, ἔχον μὲν ψυχὴν, ἔχον δὲ σῶμα, τὸν δεῖ δὲ χρόνον ταῦτα ξεμπεφυκότα*, 246d1-3).

Plato's definition of God is based on inner unity and balance. What is human can also be godlike if body and soul are harmoniously united. Human nature is the balanced coexistence of the divine and human elements in the psyche.

The language Plato constructs to express what cannot be justified rationally is the language of myth. Immortality cannot really be explained, for the soul is not immortal by any reasonable supposition. Not everything can be explained by "logos lelogismenos," reasonable speech. This myth is built around an image and on the idea that a human soul is by nature deficient, fallen, or cut off from truth, but capable of discovering truth by remembering it from within, by dialectical reflection. It is introduced by the same verb, "ἔοικέτω" or "let [the form of the soul be likened]" (246a8). This same verb Socrates had used with respect to the Boreas myth to disapprove arbitrary interpretation of myths according to appearances (*κατὰ τὸ εἰκότως*). Why is Socrates now opting for a method he had earlier rejected? Why is he resorting to allegory when he has already discouraged Phaedrus from doing so? This apparent contradiction forces us to differentiate between a Platonic myth and one borrowed from traditional mythology. The Platonic myths are created to be interpreted on the basis of certain guidelines that thwart the dangers of indeterminacy and metaphoricity of traditional poetic

language. It is these monsters Plato is trying to expel from the polis when he attacks the poets in his *Republic*. Plato makes two kinds of complaints against poetry: a) it uses bad examples of heroes and gods lacking in virtue b) the art of imitation is far removed from the real. As a result poets create confusion in people's experience in their emotional identification with drama and the representation of truth. Plato customarily corrects language before he can accept it, as is the case with the interlude here. The danger of arbitrary interpretation feared in relation to the myth of Boreas is thus averted by offering a key to the hymn's own hermeneutics. The explosive potential of traditional language is thus detonated and a key is provided by the philosopher for the interpretation of his constructed myths and those that he adopts from the stock of tradition. Ambiguity is thus controlled but also acknowledged.

Image or myth, the brief and human kind, is the kind of expression which is within the potential of human articulation. It provides Plato the poet with a spatial location for the abstract and the non-spatial, making it visible to the mind's eye. To explain the soul in words is superhuman, for its form is not known. The given language is not the appropriate discourse. By resorting to an image of likeness, Plato turns to a symbolic language pretending to do away with an idiom which is loaded with preconceptions. As Griswold observes, myth, better than logos, affords a medium which can capture the whole of the soul without necessarily assuming that the soul has an Idea-like essence. There is a certain dimension of the myth that "cannot in principle be accounted

for."<sup>31</sup> Avoiding the rational determinacy of logos, myth leaves room for the mystical and the inexpressible. In using the mythical image, Plato corrects and at the same time uses the indeterminacy of language.

The Platonic myth is a language that re-articulates tradition by trying to turn it into a rational account that admits its own limitations in explaining the world through words. Socrates calls the mythic hymn, alternatively, a "mythos" (237c7, 253c8), an "apodeixis"<sup>32</sup> (245c5), and a "logos" (252b2, 265b8c6, d7, e3, 264e7, 266a3). These controversial, in fact, concepts in Socratic idiom describe the new kind of discourse Plato is instituting as unconventional, discouraging its categorization according to standard definitions. Plato's myth is the result of the fusion of symbol, truth, and probability of what cannot be fully explained. It is a new language that allows education about our human and divine nature in terms understandable by man.

The "apodeixis" is purported to persuade his reader that perfection of the soul is within man's power:

Every soul is immortal. For that which is ever moving is immortal... For every body which derives motion from without (*ὃ μὲν ἔξωθεν τὸ κινεῖσθαι*) is soulless, but that which has its motion within itself (*ὃ δὲ ἐνδοθεν αὐτῷ ἔξ αὐτοῦ*) has a soul, since that is the nature of the soul; but if this is true, - that that which moves itself is nothing else than the soul, - then the soul would necessarily be ungenerated and immortal (*ἀθάνατον*) 245c-246a).

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<sup>31</sup> Griswold, *Self-Knowledge*, pp 149-150

<sup>32</sup> Meaning exposition, making known, proof.

The concept of the soul (*ψυχή*) is first brought up at the end of Socrates's first speech in relation to love and the boy's education: Surrendering to a non-reasonable nonlover would be "most harmful by far to the cultivation of his soul" (*πολυ δὲ βλαβερωτάτῳ πρὸς τὴν τῆς ψυχῆς παιδείῃσιν*, 241c5-6). Later on we see the soul as the seat of divine madness (*[μανία]* at 245a2. Now, with the Hymn, Plato approaches the topic metaphysically and theoretically. If the capability for learning and erotic madness are internally sustained, it is as if the soul were moving by itself. The focus is emphatically on the distinction between motion originating from outside and movement beginning from inside. The inside/ outside dichotomy (the tension between *ἐξωθεν* and *ἐνδοθεν*) is used here, again, as was the case with memory and knowledge. The *Phaedrus* is, in fact, the step by step description of the soul's activity springing from inside, its innate potential which man has to acknowledge, cultivate, perfect, and preserve.

The mythic hymn repeats the Boreas tale and brings to completion its failed attempt to reconcile reason and love. The image, or look (*ἰδέσθαι*) of the self-moving soul is likened "to a composite image of winged horses and charioteer" (*ἑξυμφύτῳ δυνάμει ὑποπτέρου ζεύγους τε καὶ ἡνιόχου*," 246a8-9). Horses and charioteer are naturally united (*ἑξυμφύτῳ*). The noble and obedient horse is guided only by reason (*λόγῳ ἡνιοχεῖται*, 253d9,) whereas the unruly horse tends to pull the chariot down, toward the earth. The white horse symbolizes moral values, whereas the black one stands for uncontrollable sexual desire.

The wings are nourished not only by eros longing for beauty, but also by memory. Symbols of balance and upward elevation, sprouting on all parts of the soul they represent eros (252b).<sup>33</sup> They are linked to the body, are nourished by reason and desire, and feel pain as they grow. They unite the body with the soul. The complementarity of love and memory established in Socrates's first speech is now intensified. Without recollection of the absolute truth experienced once, love for the Forms degenerates into mere "epithymia and matter weighs the soul down to its fall."<sup>34</sup> The chariot cannot continue its upward flight, the soul loses its wings and with them also the chance to be with God and the Beings. The theme of seduction and death of the Boreas myth, returns now in the image of winged Eros seducing and carrying off the soul that succumbs to erotic desire and to self-interest. Oreithyia, passively carried off by a god, is replaced by the self-acting, self-moving Soul.

Reason, which maintains unity in the soul and makes its ascent possible, is personified in the figure of the charioteer. He is the one who controls the horses and makes them move in unison and harmony to bring the chariot upwards at the highest point of heavens, where the gods drive their chariots in the company of the Forms. This is the

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<sup>33</sup> The palinode uses sexual language to express the eros of the spirit. Eros is a winged god. While representing bodily desire, he can also elevate himself in the air. His symbolic power of uniting is noted by Arrowsmith: "Like Iris and Hermes, Eros wears wings because he is a god who links heaven with earth" (p. 165). See W. Arrowsmith, "Aristophanes' Birds: The Fantasy Politics of Eros," *Arion*, n.s. 1 (1973): 119-67.

<sup>34</sup> Plato's conception of mortality as weight brings to mind Dante stepping into Charon's boat in *Inferno* and causing it to sink slightly as opposed to Virgil who, being dead, does not affect the boat's displacement.

vision the soul remembers from a previous journey upward and is endlessly seeking to see again. True knowledge is the soul's utmost desire -- to contemplate the gods and the Hyperuranian Beings --which can only be achieved through memory and if the natural unity of the soul is maintained.

The mythic hymn is trying to construct a cosmos of the absolute truth that the soul can contemplate. It is a means of turning what is invisible and inexpressible into something accessible to the senses:

the colorless, formless, and intangible truly existing essence, with which all true knowledge (*ἀληθοῦς ἐπιστήμης*) is concerned, holds this region and is visible only to the mind, the pilot of the soul. Now the divine intelligence (*θεοῦ διάνοια*) ... rejoices in seeing truth for a space of time and by gazing upon truth is nourished and made happy until ... it beholds absolute justice, temperance, and knowledge (*δικαιοσύνην, σωφροσύνην, ἐπιστήμην*)... (247c8-247d8).

The utmost goal of the perfect soul is to behold for a short period of time (that is the most a human being can achieve) the divine Forms *Dikaiosyne*, *Sophronyne*, *Episteme*, in order to create a memory that will eternalize through repeated recall this potential of the soul that endows it with immortality. Socrates's myth concocts this vision of perfect truth as an image of the twelve Olympian gods driving their chariots and proceeding steeply upward to finally take a place on the outer surface of the heaven where the revolution carries them round and they behold the Forms outside of the heaven. Revolution and motion denotes timelessness. The eternal Forms and the gods are what the perfect soul which manages to arrive at the highest point of the heaven can see and cherish in its memory as an incentive for its perfection.

The place of the gods is described as lying beyond conceivable space and time. By taking a glimpse at the Hyperuranian Beings, the soul possesses "episteme," the absolute truth and knowledge. The Platonic conceptualization of the most intense form of desire is illustrated as the reaching out of the soul to recapture the memory of beauty or love. In effect, it is a moment of transcendence in which man surpasses himself. Kazantzakis describes such a moment of transcendence and absolute freedom in the description of a painting he saw on the wall of the royal palace at Knossos:

Numerous fish were cruising in the water with lifted tails, frolicking happily, whereupon a flying fish in their midst suddenly spread its little fins, took a leap and bounded out of the sea in order to breathe air. Too big for its slavish piscine nature it was, too big to live all its life in the water. It suddenly longed to transcend its destiny, breathe free air, and become a bird -- for a flash only, as long as it could endure. But that was enough; this flash was eternity. That is the meaning of eternity.<sup>35</sup>

This desire to transcend man's destiny and unite with God is the human struggle for absolute freedom. According to Bergson, who profoundly influenced Kazantzakis' thought, our life is a brief moment between two abysses, one before we were born, the other when we die. The struggle of matter to become spirit, as Bergson's *élan vital* theory postulates, is represented by such a superhuman effort for transcendence of human nature. Kazantzakis does not believe in life after death. His highest objective is freedom, which apparently does not exist. But what

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<sup>35</sup> Nikos Kazantzakis, "Zorba," in *Report to Greco*, Bruno Cassirer, trans., (Publishers Ltd., London, 1965) p. 474.

matters is not freedom *per se* but the struggle for freedom. It is a struggle which, contrary to that of the Platonic soul, occurs in the here and now.

Love and memory originate inside the soul. They are the desires of the flesh and of the spirit expressions of our human and divine nature, and vehicles of wholeness. For the poet, memory and love are metaphors of immortality that can instill in man the belief in his ability to defeat time. The memory of the sacred vision of the Forms, kept away from corrupting influences, represents human achievement kept alive in thought and stimulating the desire for a repetition of the experience. These two inner forces constitute the Soul's self-motion.

Eros and human response to it make possible our approaching the soul through observation of its *πάθη τε καὶ ἔργα* (245c4), the soul's acting out its desires and the way it is led by them. Love has by now been established as an inner activity through erotic divine madness which springs from within and is superior to any kind of divine external madness because it leads to true knowledge. It reconciles and harmonizes the soul's parts (*meri*), or desires. The struggle toward this harmony is illustrated by the impetuous horse's nature which is constantly drawing the chariot downwards, frustrating its upward flight toward which the wings are striving. It is a strife between two kinds of love: instinctual sexual desire (*epithymia*) and the soul's love for the Forms, a clash between opposite manifestations of love.

To talk about love Plato depends for his metaphors on tradition. For unlike the situation related to the soul's immortality, conventional language is appropriate for the human emotions and situations of love. The images of the charioteer and of the horse endowed with human voice (255e6) go back, in fact, to the epic and lyric poetry. The Platonic horse that speaks to his master-- "the unruly horse that has something to say to the charioteer...the horse...says nothing," (256a) has its prototype in Achilles' immortal horses that the gods had given as a wedding gift to Thetis. One of them speaks to Achilles and prophesies the hero's death (*Iliad* 19, 400-417). The verb "ἡνιοχεύω," -- to be a charioteer-- is used literally in the *Odyssey* (6.319) and *Iliad* (11.103, 23.641). In using the word metaphorically, Plato was already subscribing to a post-oral technologizing feature which was already infused and internalized in the language available to him. The image of the winged charioteer was already known from Greek poetry and art.<sup>36</sup> In his pederastic poetry, Anacreon had imagined the soul of the lover as a chariot controlled by the beloved: "Oh youth, with your girlish glances, (βλέπων) / I long for you, but you do not hear (οὐ κοεῖς), / knowing not that you are the charioteer of my soul (poem 360, Page translation).

The senses, particularly seeing and hearing, are central metaphors here, as in Plato. But whereas for Anacreon the love relationship appears to be asymmetrical, in Plato, when the soul reaches perfection, lover and beloved are one balanced whole. By borrowing from tradition,

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<sup>36</sup> See de Vries, apud 246a7.

Plato rewrites it for the ends of philosophy. In the process, he transforms doxa into episteme.

Like love, memory is an innate quality of the soul that transcends time and unites experience. It differs, however, from love in that it is a manifestation of divine intelligence, not divine mania. It is this spiritual rather than emotional quality which is responsible for the soul's knowledge of the Forms and its immortality. Forgetfulness is human weakness, whereas memory makes the access of the fallen souls to wholeness possible. Memory secures the individual, after having broken from its past and forgotten it, a chance to chose a higher kind of life in a future incarnation. Like love, it stimulates the growth of the wings, for without anamnesis, the knowledge the soul possesses is lost, the wings wither, and base desires dominate (256d4). It is also related to reason since recollection secures self-control (254e6). Like love, memory leads to *sophrosyne* and absolute knowledge.

What preserves the soul's completeness and its ability to remember correctly is memory conceptualized by Plato in the act of

collecting into a unity by means of reason the many perceptions of the senses; and this is a recollection of those things which our soul once beheld, when it journeyed with God and, lifting its vision above the things which we now way exist, rose up into real being." [Only] "the philosopher's mind has wings, for he is always, so far as he is able, in communion through memory with those things the communion with which causes God to be divine. Now a man who employs such memories rightly (*ὑπομνήμασιν ὀρθῶς χρώμενος*)... he alone becomes truly perfect (249b9-d4).

We have followed the evolution of memory and love so far in the *Phaedrus*. From Boreas and Lysias's nonlover and from Phaedrus's and Socrates's mechanistic evocation of doxa we have come to love for the Beings and to anamnesis. Love and *anamnesis* are identified with truth and knowledge, ascent above matter, and transcendence of time and space. To quote Griswold again, immortality should not be taken literally. It means "to know the truth even if forgotten and to be able to know it again... to transcend the obstacles posed by the dimensions of time and space."<sup>37</sup> At its highest emotional point, the mythic hymn unites the senses and the mind, eros and reason, memory and immortality and articulates the soul's longing for a return to that nostalgic moment of eternity which it had experienced for a brief moment.

The mythic hymn is an effort to define human nature. The answer is given by Socrates. The dialectical probing into the self has yielded an answer to Socrates's question, whether, he is "a monster more complicated and more furious than Typhon or a gentler and simpler creature, to whom a divine and quiet lot is given by nature" (230a2-3). The answer is that human nature is both: complex and violent, and gentle and divine. In the same fashion, love which isolated and fragmented the cohesiveness of the total human experience, is now seen to coordinate the different desires in the soul; memory which was separated from thought, now fuses the different kinds of knowledge. Desire and knowledge are the qualities that exemplify the human and divine aspects

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<sup>37</sup> Griswold, pp. 144-145.

of our existence and love and memory become the ties that bind the human and divine elements together.

In the three monologues discussed up to now the analogies are set for the development of the themes of love, memory, and doxa, which leads to the elevation of the individual to the level of absolute truth and knowledge. One of the crucial differences between the two non-mythic speeches and the palinode is language. The mythical allegory of the palinode creates the language that allows the transmutation of thought into abstract concepts which better serve philosophy's political purpose. Socrates is an enlightener. Plato provides the material by turning to the roots of human knowledge, religion, and language which the Master transforms into the values that breed moral and ethical thinking. Myth provides the image which is needed to give shape not only to a thought uttered for the first time, but also to the abstract, the hypothetical, and the imperfectly known, what is, in other words, inexpressible. Dogmatism, which monological preaching cannot avoid, is thus averted. The use of myth resembles to a kind of gesture by which we point at things to create them.<sup>38</sup>

This dialogue's preoccupation with rhetoric and dialectics is fully developed in the part of the *Phaedrus* following the palinode. As

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<sup>38</sup> I'm thinking of the forceful opening lines of García Márquez's *Cien Anos de Soledad* which describe the flooding of life into new village of Macondo: "*El mundo era tan reciente que muchas cosas carecían de nombre y para mencionarlas había que señalarlas con el dedo*" [The world was so recent, that many things lacked a name and to refer to them they had to be pointed at with the finger].

rhetoric becomes the focal point from now on, the topic of love falls behind, leaving memory, which remains consistently conspicuous throughout the work, to defend the unity of the dialogue. Love and memory, instruments of uniting emotions and intellect, constitute the language that moves the image toward conquering that longed-for moment of perfection and turning it into permanence. This is the apocalypse that memory seeks to revive. It is the nostalgia for the perfect, for something unchanging amid change, uncorrupted by decay. It represents the longing of the mortal man for a moment of immortality endlessly recreated.

#### d. The tale of the cicadas (258e-259d)

As already mentioned, the cicada myth is one of the two original Platonic inventions-- the other is the myth of Theuth/Thamus. These two myths (and the myth of the ring of Gyges) are termed "ordinary myths" (*κοινοί μῦθοι*) that is, simple apologues (*παραδείγματα*), as they have no speculative, or philosophical import.<sup>39</sup> The cicada myth is rather -- but not clearly-- labeled a "myth." It is introduced by "legetai" (259b6) which points at both myth (as a story being narrated) and *logos* (as a gathering together).

The cicada myth comes after an agreement between Socrates and Phaedrus to investigate what makes effective rhetoric. It is actually occasioned by Phaedrus's remark that one should not bother to live if

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<sup>39</sup> See related discussion in Frutiger, p. 179, n.2

not for the pleasure of discourse. Evoked exactly at midday, as Ferrari observes, this tale is structurally placed at the middle of the dialogue and "marks the transitional point between the two parts of the dialogue,... in order to orient our reading of its curious structure-- the brusque shift, that is, from celebration of love to celebration over rhetoric."<sup>40</sup> It has a function, comparable, we can say, to that of the interlude preceding the Palinode. Both orient our reading so we can understand and interpret better the two key passages that follow, one a poetic speech, the other a rhetorical study.<sup>41</sup> They do it by calling attention to the topographic and temporal aspects of the scene: The tall plane tree, the "shrill" song of the cicadas, the soft grass by the Ilissus brook on which the two interlocutors are lying comfortably. After the theoretical venture of the Palinode, the dialogue returns to its human and dramatic action. What is added to our already familiar landscape is a sense of lingering time and the paralyzing summer heat at midday, the backdrop against which the Socratic argument is projected. Consistently, Plato moves from the landscape and the actual dialogue between Socrates and Phaedrus -- from history, that is, to myth -- to *illo tempore* -- which he turns when he wants to describe an experience

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<sup>40</sup> G.R.F. Ferrari, *Listening to the Cicadas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) pp. 25-26.

<sup>41</sup> See de Vries, apud 258e6-7. The "myth of the cicadas... serves as a relaxing intermezzo. But at the same time some fun is made of Phaedrus' *philologia*... Further Plato calls upon his readers to serve the Muses in the right way."

he wants to present as new, charging his tale with the emotional intensity of the first time (*ab origine*).<sup>42</sup>

The story goes that these locusts were once men, before the birth of the Muses, and when the Muses were born and song appeared, some of the men were so overcome with delight that they sang and sang, forgetting food and drink, until at last unconsciously they died. From them the locust tribe afterwards arose, and they have this gift from the Muses, that from the time of their birth they need no sustenance, but sing continually, without food or drink, until they die, when they go to the Muses and report who honors each of them on earth (258b6-259c7).

Socrates had just alerted Phaedrus as to the fact that the cicadas, a censoring consciousness, were watching and hearing their discourse, therefore, they should be careful not to doze off and keep their dialogue intelligent and alive. The Muses that will learn of their devotion to philosophy are Terpsichore, Calliope, and Urania, that is the Muses concerned with thought divine and human and with music. Philosophy is, as defined in the *Palinode*, the knowledge of human nature and the soul, human and divine, and as it is to be established now, the sweet and appropriate voicing of these thoughts for the purposes of proper education.

Nowhere in the passage does Plato mention that the cicadas were awarded the gift of immortality, as is widely assumed by the readers of this passage. The gift the Muses gave the locusts was to sustain their physical ability to sing, and talk, and report to them, in short, to

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<sup>42</sup> See Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, Willard R. Trask trans., (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1959) pp. 68-70.

speak but not necessarily to think. They were poets once led to their death by the inability to overcome the extreme delight caused by poetry - and here is another Platonic jab against poets. The cicadas were not restored by the Muses to their previous human status but accorded the life of an inferior species with no mind. They couldn't even choose their next incarnation, a right that Plato gives to a virtuous soul. The Muses chose for them their next life, a life in the service of philosophy. By reporting the good philosophers to the Muses, the locusts make possible their reward with eternal life without the need for food and without losing their humanity. In other words, they enable them to transcend their human nature and death and, not depending on material nourishment, turn into spirit. The Platonic soul is nourished just by gazing upon truth (*θεωρούσα τ' ἀληθῆ τρέφεται*, 247d5).

The mission of the cicadas is to demonstrate what happens to man who forgets his divine potential -- reason and self-restraint -- and indulges in excesses. The Socratic myth exemplifies the use of reason by juxtaposing bad poets and good philosophers. The former are abusers of their natural gift of reason, the latter use it correctly and are rewarded because they have honored their human and divine nature. The ancient notion of measure as natural and moral balance that keeps the universe together is emphasized by Plato as a product of the mind. In the poetry of Seferis, as we will see, it is related to love which, rather than reason is the divine quality of human nature. The myth warns against the dangers of forgetting one's nature, lazily relaxing the

intellect, and against the inability to discriminate among the different kinds of intellectual discourse.<sup>43</sup>

The themes of the first part of the dialogue --love, memory, death and sleep, the dangers of seduction, immortality, dialectics, unity and balance in the soul, the nature of the human soul -- summarized in the mythic hymn are reiterated in the cicada passage. Moreover, Socrates, consistent with his strategy, tells a tale using the language of literary tradition. His demonstration of its transformation into philosophical language is a demonstration of doxa striving for the best in the hands of the philosopher. A close reading of the Platonic text, in fact, reveals a sustained intertextuality with the Homeric and lyric tradition, meaning acquired opinion. In the same way, for instance, that literary tradition has made familiar the image of the winged horse and chariot, so it had associated the cicada with love and death. In his fragment 347 the lyric poet Alcaeus recasts Hesiod's poem Op. 582-8 in a song about drinking and erotic desire aroused in the heat of the day:

Wet your whistle with wine now, for the dog star, wheeling the  
sky,/ brings back the summer, the time all things are parched  
under the searing heat./ Now the cicada's cry, sweet in the  
leaves, shrills from beneath his wings .../ women in lush, ask  
too much of their men,/ who grow lank, for the star burning  
above/ withers their brains and knees.

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<sup>43</sup> Alluding also indirectly, as Ferrari has it, to the need for a different reading of the sober analysis to follow, from the poetic and rhetorical speeches up to now, enthusiastically accepted by Phaedrus, up to now. See Ferrari, p. 29

In consciously shaking off sleep, the mythical brother of death, Phaedrus and Socrates fight the death of mental indolence and forgetfulness (259a). Eros and thanatos appear in ancient poetry as the two aspects of the same power.<sup>44</sup> Erotic desire loosening the knees and undoing the members (*λυσιμελής ἔρως*), is a topos in epic and lyric poetry that also describes the hero's death in battle.<sup>45</sup>

In using these images, Plato constructs a system of economy in which old concepts and rhetoric are rearticulated to fit his teaching. Here is one more example of this transformation: One characteristic of early poetry, as Vernant notes, is that it illustrates desire as pothos, using a word which belongs to the traditional vocabulary of mourning. Abduction by some demon "involves a shock of an irremediable absence which is eternally mourned."<sup>46</sup> Tracing the origins of words in *Cratylus*, Socrates reverses this established meaning: "... the word *πόθος* (yearning) signifies that it pertains not to that which is present, but to that which is elsewhere or absent, and therefore the same feeling which is called *ἡμερος* when its object is present, is called *πόθος* when it is absent" (420a).

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<sup>44</sup> For a detailed treatment of the association of Pothos, Hypnos, and Thanatos, see Emily Vermeule, *Aspects of Death in Early Greek Art and Poetry* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1981) pp 131-33.

<sup>45</sup> See *Odyssey*, 18.212; Sappho frag. 130; Archilochus frag. 118; Alcman "Partheneion," and Hesiod's *Theogony*, 120, 911. Also *Iliad* 5.176, 11.579, 16.332, 21.114, 22.335.

<sup>46</sup> Jean-Pierre Vernant, "Feminine Figures of Death in Greece," *Diacritics* 16.2 (1986) 54-64.

In the *Phaedrus*, the word "himeros" (*ἡμερος*) is related to the soul's erotic desire, first through reference to Stesichorus of "Himera" (Town of Desire) at 244a3, and later by the use of the pun "himeros/meri" at 251c8 ("meri" are the particles which excite desire in the soul). "Himeros," here, expresses the yearning of the soul for its beloved (251c8) "when it gazes upon the beauty of the boy" (251c6), that is, when the boy is present. With erotic desire thus identified with the soul, Platonic love is freed from its traditionally established pathetic kinship with death and becomes a mediator of immortality.

It is through the elements borrowed from epic and lyric poetry formally textualized in the *Phaedrus* that the cicadas are identified with the Homeric Sirens. "Λιγυρός," or shrill (230c) is a word associated with seduction and death. The Platonic Muses with their shrill song (*δι' ᾧδῆς εἶδος λίγυραι... γένος τὸ λιγύων*, 237a10) can just as easily foretell the death of the mind it succumbs to idleness. The "shrill" (*λιγυρόν*) song (230c2) of the cicadas, prophets of the Muses (262d), identifies them with the Sirens (259a8) whose prophetic song Homer calls "*λιγυρή δαιδῆ*" (*Odyssey*, 12.44). Hesiod uses the word to describe the locust proper.<sup>47</sup> The Platonic text, and particularly Fowler's rendition, enhances further the Homeric analogy: "If [the cicadas] see us conversing sailing past them, unmoved by the charm of their Siren voices..." (258e-259a). The Sirens, who have knowledge of the future, sing the song that glorifies and immortalizes the hero, in the presence of the hero. They differ from the bard who also sings the

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<sup>47</sup> Hesiod, *Op.* 583. See also *Theognis*, 939 and *Iliad* 14.290.

hero's prowess but after his death. As Odysseus, tied on the mast, protects himself from the Sirens' fatal seduction while enjoying alive his immortality in their song, so Socrates and Phaedrus keeping their mind awake, enjoy the song of the cicadas that will immortalize them by reporting their good discourse to the Muses. The difference between Odysseus and a rigorously trained philosopher is that the former cannot control the unruly horse in him except by using violence against his own body, by manacling the part of himself that would succumb to the body, whereas the philosopher can coordinate and harmonize his desires by the power of reason, restraint, and self-knowledge. This is the concept of "sophrosyne," or nothing in excess (*Μηδέν ἄγαν*) the second of the two commands of the oracle of Delphi with which Socrates is obsessed. Odysseus is torn between the desires of the body that the mind strives to control. The philosophical soul, under the guidance of reason, can please them both at the same time, reconciling the dual nature of man's soul.

These intertextual analogies validate the message of the passage of the cicadas as a revelation of the need for wakefulness against a slavish love and the dangers of sensory experience, which can make the spirit a slave of the body. It is also related to memory, the failure of which resembles death. Odysseus' mind is neutralized by sleep on two crucial moments of his journey home: firstly upon leaving the island of Aiolos when he cannot overcome the bodily impulse for sleep and succumbs to it, giving his curious companions the opportunity to open the flasks and let loose the manacled destructive aspects of nature. Secondly, when

he falls asleep on the island of Helios and his ravenous ship-mates slaughter and eat the god's oxen. The hero's characteristic struggle for survival and homecoming consists in a constant effort to achieve a balance between the temptation to be godlike and the need to be human. In Plato, these opposite forces strive for harmony, which is possible only in the perfect soul.

The struggle of the human spirit against nature's paralyzing charms which this myth brings to the fore is illustrated in the mature work of the Greek Romantic poet Dionysios Solomos (1797-1857). His major poem, "The Free Besieged," celebrates the spirit's victory over matter. This poem depicts the besieged Messolonghians at the end of a two-year hopeless defense (1825-1826) struggling in vain to break the siege of their town by the Turks. They are exhausted from hunger and thirst. Moreover, it is springtime when the beauty of nature and the lust for life lulls their souls into a sweet swoon at the very moment when they should keep their mind vigilant and alert to fight for their freedom. The most irresistible temptation is the sight of blond April dancing and laughing hand in hand with Eros inviting the besieged:

*Μάγεμα η φύσις κι όνειρο στην ομορφιά και χάρη,  
η μαύρη πέτρα ολόχρυση και το ξερό χορτάρι·  
με χίλιες βρύσες χύνεται, με χίλιες γλώσσες κραίνει·  
'Οποιος πεθάνει σήμερα χίλιες φορές πεθαίνει.*

[So sweet is nature, and so fair, a dream of Heaven's grace,  
She makes the dry grass fresh and green, and gilds the rock's  
black face;  
She murmurs in a thousand rills, a thousand voices sing,  
He dies a thousand deaths at once who dies amid the spring!]

The desire for life and love is the temptation to which they must not give in. They could save their lives by surrendering to the enemy but this would be unworthy of free souls; they choose, instead, to sally and die. The famous Exodos of Messolonghi in 1826 resulted in the brutal massacre of its inhabitants. But it marked a moral victory.

To cite one more Platonic echo in Solomos, let me turn to "The Shark," one of his latest poems, which tells of a young swimmer brought to a state of mystical ecstasy by the harmonious beauty of nature in the moonlight. As he swims, he becomes one with the sea and sky. Through nature he can look into the eternal presence of God. But, just as his mind and body are lulled into a trance, a shark-- the menacing aspect of nature-- strikes. The swimmer frees himself spiritually from the enchantments of nature, for a split instant, just before he succumbs to his wounds. But at the very moment of his death, the young man is suddenly struck with a revelation:

*Πριν πάψ' η μεγαλόψυχη πνοή χαρά γεμίζει  
άστραψε φώς, κ'εγνώρισεν ο νιός τον εαυτό του*

[Before the spirit of his great soul ceases he is filled with joy;/ light shone, and the youth knew himself;]

The fleeting vision of nature's beauty and its mindless force becomes the revelation of his own inner soul-- the supreme knowledge that is acquired when spirit freed from its earthy bonds is united with the universe.

The tale of the cicadas warns against excesses and teaches *sophrosyne*. Self-restraint and a wakeful mind are needed not only to

protect us from stupidity -- an attribute of the sleeping and the dead -  
 - but also to secure the individual a better life after death. This is a  
 promise that relieves the anxiety over the effects of time and brings a  
 sense of equilibrium to counteract the injustice of death. The means to  
 fight the matter's tendency to take over and drive the chariot downwards  
 lies in keeping in mind our divine potential. The myth cautions against  
 relaxing the mind's supervision over the senses. "Laborious" dialogue  
 and dialectics, even in the heat of a summer afternoon, will thwart the  
 danger. In contrast to the earlier part of the dialogue which links  
 "leisure (*σχολή*, 228a1-2, 229e4, 258e6) to the sophists' practices, the  
 vocabulary now stresses "laborious" dialogue and dialectics, as  
 appropriate to philosophy. Dialectics involves questioning through  
 dialogue and reflection.

#### e. The myth of Theuth/Thamus (274c-275b)

In this passage, the ends of rhetoric-- understood as education  
 and persuasion-- are considered. In order to express himself usefully  
 and effectively, man must know the truth about the things of which he  
 speaks or writes and find the discourse that is "suitable to each  
 nature." The passage examines dialectically a tale in an attempt to  
 reconcile *mythos* and *logos*. The tale is offered in the form of a  
 dialogue within a dialogue, which marks a moving away from the  
 monological form of the Socratic myth.

This "entirely original" myth of the *Phaedrus* differs from all the earlier fables in that it leaves entirely behind the theme of love, and shifts to Egyptian myth, turning its back on Greek mythology. It also dispenses with poetic speeches and adopts a more technical discourse. Having elevated love to a perfection which excludes further development, Plato now substitutes rhetoric for love, in a way equating them in the philosophizing soul's desire. As with love, *logos* is constantly perfected and finally elevated through *techne* to the status of *episteme*.<sup>48</sup> Memory and its utility now becomes the object of a dispute between *Thamus* and *Theuth*. The dialogue's concealed but sustained preoccupation with its own status as a text finally establishes Platonic dialogue as a metalanguage of philosophical discourse.

This last myth told by Socrates, partly a Platonic invention, reproduces a fictional dialogue taking place in Thebes. The interlocutors are *Theuth*, the inventor of *grammata* (geometry, arithmetic, astronomy, *logismos*, and writing) and *Thamus*, the wise royal god of all Egypt to whom *Theuth* shows his inventions. When the question comes to the invention of writing, the following conversation ensues:

*Theuth*: This invention, O king ... will make the Egyptians wiser and will improve their memories; for it is an elixir of memory and wisdom (*μνήμης τε και σοφίας φάρμακον*) that I have discovered.

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<sup>48</sup> Griswold distinguishes between "Episteme," and "episteme." The first is understood as the absolute knowledge the souls have from contemplating the Beings, among whom the Idea *Episteme*, herself). It is tied to the Forms, immortality and anamnesis. The lower case "episteme," is a teachable method for the exact analysis of the soul -- a *techne* or artful rhetoric -- not divine or associated with anamnesis. The two notions described by the same word are two sides of knowledge or approach: a) the metaphysical and b) the methodological. See *Self-Knowledge*, pp. 232, 261 and *passim*.

Thamus: Most ingenious Theuth ... you have been led by your affection to ascribe to [the Egyptians] a power the opposite of that which they possess... This invention will produce forgetfulness (*λήθη*) in the minds of those who learn to use it, because they will not practice their memory. Their trust in writing, produced by external characters (*διὰ πίστιν γραφῆς ἐξωθεν*) which are not part of themselves will discourage the use of their own memory within them. You have invented an elixir not of memory but of reminding (*οὐκ οὖν μνήμης ἀλλ' ὑπομνήσεως φάρμακον*); and you offer your pupils the appearance of wisdom (*σοφίας δόξαν*), not true wisdom for they will read many things without instruction and will therefore seem to know many things (*πολυγνώμονες εἶναι δόξουσιν*), when they are for the most part ignorant (*ἀγνώμονες*) and hard to get along with, since they are not wise, but only appear wise (*δοξόσοφοι γεγονότες ἀντὶ σοφῶν*) (274c-275b).

Before we can deal with the text of this dialogue-within-a-dialogue, however, I would like to look briefly into the origins of this myth and speculate on the possible reasons for Plato's interest in it.

The characters of the myth are truly Egyptian, but the myth's originality lies in the invention of the story and the contents of the dialogue of its characters, not the characters themselves.<sup>49</sup> Theuth -- who is also mentioned very briefly in the *Philebus* -- is the Egyptian Hermes, called by the Egyptians "the scribe of the gods," "lord of the divine word," and "writer of truth."<sup>50</sup> Thamus -- the name is coined by

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<sup>49</sup> See Frutiger, p. 233, n2: "Sans doute, les personnages de ce mythe sont réellement égyptiens, soit Thamus ... dieu déjà connu d'Hérodote (II,42); soit Theuth, en qui les Egyptiens révéraient, sous le nom de Thoth, l'inventeur de la législation, des arts, des sciences et de l'écriture... Mais l'histoire elle-même -- les reproches que Thamus adresse à Theuth -- est sûrement une pure invention de Platon."

<sup>50</sup> For the relationship between Thoth or Theuth, Hermes Trismegistus, Plato, and Neoplatonism, see Frances Yates's *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, pp. 2-3, and 131. Thoth represents "Egyptian truth," says Yates, magical truth (p.239).

Plato -- is Ammon, an Egyptian deity identified with Ra, and represented as a ram. His oracle at the oasis in the Libyan desert rivalled the oracles of Delphi and Dodona. This archetypal, so to speak, myth, featuring animal-gods, goes beyond phonetic alphabets and the written image of sound to the representation of an idea, as depicted by the ideographic system of Egyptian script, in favor of which Thamus refuses to accept the inventor's "modern" alphabetical script. Thamus' wisdom illustrates the spontaneous human reaction to anything extramental that enfeebles thinking and weakens memory. Anamnesis is the noetic function that keeps the mind alive. Without it, the soul loses its knowledge and the potential for immortality, the ability to perceive the atemporal from inside ephemeral time.

A close reading of the passage above would better explain the Platonic concept of memory at this stage. Its task is to help internalize external knowledge through the technology of writing and thus transform writing into a useful reminder. As he did with the oral tradition, Socrates is now teaching the right use of memory in writing.

The exchange of arguments between Theuth and Thamus, above, is characterized by a series of oppositions emphasized through paronomasia and echo, as for example:

λήθη/μνήμη/ὑπόμνησις - (lethe/mneme/hypomnesis): forgetfulness/  
memory/ reminding  
μελέτη/ἀμελετησία - (melete/ameletesia): study/lack of study  
ἐξωθεν/ἐνδοθεν - (exóthen/endóthen) :from outside/ from within  
σοφίας δόξα-δοξόσοφοι/σοφοί - (sophias doxa-doxosophoi/sophoi):  
appearance of wisdom/those who appear wise/wise.  
πολυγνώμονες/ἀγνώμονες - (polygnomones/agnomones): polymaths/  
ignorant.

These oppositions emphasize the difference between appearance and reality. Memory is opposed to forgetfulness and wrong use of reminders, wisdom to the appearance of wisdom, education to the impression of knowledge. In short they stress the antithesis between internal and external. True knowledge comes from a virtuous soul but with the help of education whereas false knowledge is acquired externally without instruction (*δνευ διδαχῆς*). It re-articulates and reforms the definitions of acquired opinion and mechanical memory in terms of writing. Memory alone is not wisdom. As knowledge is not achieved without memory, so memory cannot function without knowledge. To Theuth who equates memory with wisdom (in discovering writing, he says, he has found the pharmakon of memory and wisdom), Thamus replies that writing can only serve as a reminding of knowledge, not a pharmakon of memory; for letters are external signs and not part of the soul. Writing is a skill, *techne*, (he calls Theuth "technikotatos" (229e6-7, 275b7), the art of collection and division, which is inferior to *episteme*. *Episteme* is achieved through *anamnesis*, the fusing together of the activity of thinking and the nostalgic emotion for virtue. Writing can be acceptable, Plato, implies, if it becomes part of the human soul and helps education. The goal of questioning through dialectics is to inscribe "the word [of him who knows] with intelligence in the mind (*ψυχῆ*) of the learner, (*[Λόγος] ὅς μετ' ἐπιστήμης γράφεται ἐν τῆ τοῦ μανθάνοντος ψυχῆ*) (276a). *Logos* internalized retains simultaneously external and internal characteristics. Behind its visual appearance, there is its true form: knowledge of the soul.

By serving to remind, writing immortalizes the thought it is recording. This involves the reader without whom writing, and the Platonic dialogue, is dead. The epigraph on Midas's tomb exemplifies this:

A bronze maiden am I; and I am placed upon  
 the tomb of Midas.  
 So long as water runs and tall trees put forth  
 leaves,  
 Remaining in this very spot upon a much lamented tomb,  
 I shall declare to passers by that Midas is buried here;<sup>51</sup>

The voice of the statue of a bronze maiden is animated by the written epitaph, but turning to life cannot be achieved without the response of those passing by. As Burger suggests, the epitaph points to the desired immortality and immutability sought in the activity of writing, but the condition for the fulfillment of that desire seems to require the seemingly impossible convergence of the dead written word and the living presence of its reader.<sup>52</sup> Like Lysias's speech, Midas's inscription remains a group of external, dead words without a human voice to turn them alive. This is an allusion, of course, to the text we are actually reading, which poses as dialogue. Rather than bluntly reject writing, to which Platonic discourse owes its existence, Socrates is warning against the wrong kind of writing and using it as a reminder against what is mechanic and foreign to human nature. The way Stesichorus and Socrates were capable of perceiving the true image

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<sup>51</sup> These lines are quoted by Dionysus Laertius, who gives credit to the poet Simonides for citing the poem as evidence for the belief that "all things fall short of the might of the gods." See Ronna Burger, *Plato's Phaedrus: A Defense of a Philosophic Art of Writing*, pp. 28, 133 n.33.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 28 & 133.

behind the *eidolon* of Helen, the reader should be educated to search for the idea behind the words and, like them, see the light.

The verb "anagnosko," compounded of a preposition and a verb (*aná + γινώσκω*), means to read and also to know again, as through a process of recognition, or anagnorisis. This is what the two interlocutors do in recognizing and defining their ideas (228e7, 230e5, 234d5). The verb *γινώσκω* is frequently evoked throughout the Platonic dialogues. To know yourself (*Γνῶθι σ'αυτόν*), as the Delphic command urges, is the individual's highest aspiration; In Socratic thought "gignoskein yourself" is identified with the awareness of ignorance, the true and only knowledge Socrates admits to possess.<sup>53</sup> There is a third kind of knowledge, Griswold argues, "that one might call "gnosis" and that characterizes, in my view, 'self-knowledge."<sup>54</sup> The purpose of "gignoskein" in Platonic discourse is superior to "epistasthai." Episteme, Griswold goes on to say, is in the potential of the gods, whereas *gnosis* "is worked out in the existential context of dialogue" and is closer to "what it is to be human."<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> In *Apology* (23b) Socrates identifies it as the greatest human wisdom. Socrates' love of wisdom allows him to recognize the playfulness of writing.

<sup>54</sup> Griswold, *Self-Knowledge...*, p. 261

<sup>55</sup> "Is there a sense of self-knowledge that tells us 'what it is to be human' without transforming the soul into a special type of abstract object (whether an Idea or a complex of forms and causes)?" See Griswold, pp. 4-6, 261, 232 and passim.

By reaching beyond Greek culture and into pre-Greek myth, Plato can claim to use the language of a tradition other than his own, which is rid of the cultural preconceptions and metaphors. In choosing a visual representation to describe the form of the soul, Socrates was also choosing an ideographic system which declares independence from the externality of the inscribable sign. The juxtaposition of Greece and Egypt, according to Burger is suggestive of the antithesis between alphabetical writing as a combination of particles to represent logos, on the one hand, and Egyptian hieroglyphic writing using symbols, each of which constitutes a meaningful whole, on the other.<sup>56</sup> The myth of Theuth/Thamus attempts a return to the origins of language and of human thought, beyond historical and cultural constraints, to start again the teaching of new ideas with a *tabula rasa* and a new vocabulary.

In his quest for language, Plato needs the reader to divide and collect the proliferating semantic and formal equivalences, solemn, ironic, or playful, poetic or technical, which the text endlessly reproduces. He invites his reader to discover true knowledge as the philosopher reveals it. The revelation transpires in the process of reading and lies in the paradox of a "dialogue" verbally delivered by Socrates who does not write, and written by Plato who does not speak. The cause of the dialogue's preoccupation with the relation between oral tradition and writing should perhaps be sought in Socrates's and Plato's own historical context in four and fifth century Athens and the impact of new technology on older tradition.

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<sup>56</sup> Burger, *Plato's Phaedrus...*, pp. 22, 91.

### 3. ISOCRATES AND SOCRATES

The *Phaedrus* ends with the sudden introduction of Isocrates into the dialogue. The introduction by Socrates of the young orator comes playfully as the final revelation of the dialogue. Plato ends his work by emphasizing the revelation of self-knowledge, "Truth," and balance as the achievement of the art of dialectics.

The text first returns the reader to the topic of prophecy. Prophecy, encompassing the entire range of expression and communication, of reading and deciphering, has been one of the persistent echoes of this dialogue. The frequent evoking of the two oracles -- the more primitive oracle of Dodona where prophetic utterance came in the sound of the words of the oak (275b7) and the Delphic *gramma* involving the participatory activity of decoding, establishes hearing and reading as the two components of prophecy and revelation. It is Apollo, combining the poet, the seer, and the spirit that the text seems to worship now. Socrates making poetic myths, after all, ends up being not only a prophet but also a poet.<sup>57</sup> The art of prophecy (*mantike*), which through a Socratic pun, at 244c2-5, was likened to the madness of love (*manike*), is established early in the text as "*the noblest of arts*" which is the philosopher's goal to achieve. It is identified with self-knowledge. When the Boreas myth was evoked Socrates had remarked: I am not yet (*οὐ νῦν*) able, as the Delphic inscription has it, to know myself"

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<sup>57</sup> He admits the role of the poet in shaping the moral character of the children by making myths (*Republic*, 378e).

(229e6-7). The anticipatory "ἤνω," meaning yet, creates expectations which the text satisfies later when an inner prophetic voice of madness, the Socratic *daemonion*, makes him suddenly aware that he is "a seer, not a very good one, but ... good enough for his own purposes" (242c6-8). We see Socrates finally turn into a prophet foretelling (*μαντεύομαι*) that Isocrates will be able to realize his inner philosophizing gifts, as he is led by a divine impulse that will distinguish him from all the others: "a more divine impulse will lead him to greater things; for ... something of philosophy is inborn in his mind" (279a-b). This is the message that the master sends to his companion (*ἑταῖρον*) Isocrates. It establishes Socrates as a wise prophet and Isocrates as a philosopher; and comes right after the two interlocutors have agreed that the highest epithet that befits God alone is "wise" whereas "philosopher" comes next, followed by "poet."

Scholars have struggled to find reasons to justify Plato's enlisting of Isocrates among the *dramatis personae* of the dialogue. They cite Socrates's liking for him (he was nine years older than Plato), the younger man's anti-sophistic oratory, his known gift of divine prophecy, his praise for Helen in his *Encomium to Helen*, and a possible common link with Pythagoras, whom Isocrates appears to have described in his *Busiris* as the first to introduce philosophy from Egypt to the Greeks.<sup>58</sup> Other commentators infer that Isocrates' philosophy was very

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<sup>58</sup> Charles H. Khan, "Pythagorean Philosophy before Plato," *The Pre-Socratics*, Alexander P.D. Mourelatos ed., (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, [1974] 1993) p. 164. Jebb adds another equally weak explanation: Isocrates taste for mixing mythical subject matter with everyday matters as well as political and moral issues, a method Socrates

different from the one Socrates was advocating.<sup>59</sup> Still, are these qualifications adequate for Socrates to identify with Isocrates? The suggestion of their equality can hardly be taken seriously. Isocrates and Socrates are set apart by age, wisdom, experience, and philosophical ideas. They could even be opposites.

The answer should be sought elsewhere: in language. The way Plato used a pun-name (Pharmaceia) to establish the relation with *pharmakon*, so he ends with the euristic invocation of Isocrates mainly because it echoes Socrates. The name of Isocrates differs from that of Socrates only by its prefix "Iso-" signifying "equal" or "even." Isocrates, therefore, becomes linguistically "equal to Socrates." Plato, in fact, does what he did with love, which moves from a conflict between the strong and the weaker and a lower conception of eros to an even-powered symbiotic partnership between equals. This brings together the concepts of equality, justice, and Truth, which in Pre-Socratic thought are alternate expressions for balance and equilibrium, as I will discuss more extensively in the next chapter.<sup>60</sup> The idea of equality is

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favors. R.C. Jebb, *Attic Orators from Antiphon to Isaeos*, Vol. 11 (New York: Russell & Russell, 1962) pp. 55, 105-106. See also "Platon et Isocrate," *Revue des Etudes grecques*, Vol. I, No. 1 (1888), (Paris: E. Leroux) pp. 49-60.

<sup>59</sup> Griswold, *Self-Knowledge* 287; de Vries, *Commentary* 15-18; Burger, *Plato's Phaedrus*.

<sup>60</sup> In defining *dikaiosyne*, Plato rejects the current meaning of the word and reconstructs it according to inner life. In his *Republic* (also sub-titled "On Justice,") *dikaiosyne* is finally defined after several attempts as follows:

*Dikaiosyne* pertains to the inner action not the outer, to oneself and to the elements of the self, restricting the specific

fundamental to the doctrine of "Truth" in the thought of Parmenides. "Truth" is understood as distributive *ἰσὸν ἰσωνομία*, equality in apportionment. As Mourelatos argues, the real is *ἰσὸν*, 'equal,' in so far as it is *ὁμοῖον*, 'alike,' or self-contained, self-congruent, and self-consistent. If one were to speak of the real as 'just,' the appropriate definition of this term would have to be obtained from Plato or from a rationalist -- it fulfills its own appointed role." The sameness (*ὁμοῖον*, *ἰσὸν*) of Parmenides' "Truth," concludes Mourelatos, is reflexive rather than distributive; it is nothing short of identity, unity, total integration."<sup>61</sup>

The sudden emergence of Isocrates as an equal to Socrates, seals the series of concealments and disguises of characters and discourses and wittingly establishes Socrates as an hierophant of the art of *mantike*, the "noblest of arts" which represents the philosopher's highest achievement. It parallels the growth of eros into *manike*, a higher form of love. The fact, of course, that the reader knows that Isocrates did not become another Socrates, or even the kind of philosopher Socrates had predicted, undermines the above conclusions,

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elements in one's self to their respective roles, forbidding the types in the psyche to get mixed up in one another's business; requiring a man to make a proper disposition of his several properties and to assume command of himself and to organize himself and become a friend of himself... becoming in all respects a single person instead of many.

<sup>61</sup> See Alexander P.D. Mourelatos, "The Deceptive words of Parmenides' "doxa," *The Pre-Socratics*, P.D. Mourelatos ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, [1974] 1993) p. 339. In this context, see also Gregory Vlastos, "Equality and Justice in Early Greek Cosmologies," *Classical Philology* 42 (1947), pp. 162ff.

ending the dialogue in an unresolved tension between words and context. The Socrates/Isocrates pun thus seems to point to language and its ambiguous nature, both suggestive and subversive.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

The study of the monological recitals, myths, and interludes that connect and unite the speeches of the *Phaedrus*, leads to the following conclusions:

The dialogue is structured in two parts, the first dominated by the subject of love, the second by the theme of rhetoric. Memory is one of the themes which most effectively than anything else contribute to the disputed unity of the dialogue. It is its central theme, first connected with love, then with rhetoric. The linking ring is intelligence inherent in memory; this is the force that elevates man beyond the bestial condition.

Beginning with an effort to define the "disputed" word "love," the dialogue manages to probe deeply into the soul and the way humans behave when they love and are loved. Different kinds of love emerge before our eyes: Selfish and one-sided love ends up in "divine erotic madness." The study of the latter leads to the conclusion that the human soul responds to external stimuli by developing inner activity. What this proves is that creative love possesses a force comparable to self-movement, which enables it to transcend its human limitations. Memory also functions in an analogous way: The soul of man is partly human, partly divine, since it possesses self-motion. From its different incarnations it has acquired knowledge of the Forms (all human souls have seen God, even for a split moment) but this supreme knowledge is forgotten as a consequence

of time and human weakness. The soul, however, has the potential to retain this knowledge, if its divine nature is respected and maintained through education. It is this power coming from the soul's divine nature that makes it immortal. Memory and love nourish the soul and make its wings grow enabling its journey towards the limits of the sky in search of God.

To say all this -- what is human nature, how we feel and think, how we talk about what we feel and think, and how we deal with time and mortality -- the philosopher needs a metaphilosophical language to talk about new philosophical concepts which cannot be expressed in words already burdened with the metaphors of history. His answer, by necessity, has to move to "mythos." While logos is the rational expression of man, mythos is more fit for human discourse when the poet's world cannot be explained rationally. The Platonic myth fuses the rational and the irrational, the definite and the ambiguous; it makes it possible for new ideas to be expressed and for the greatest story ever told -- the story of the soul's immortality -- to be taught to the uninitiated. Socrates's reluctance to admit that he knows reflects the impact of the Pre-Socratics on Plato. The proclaimed Socratic inability to know in the face of change is related to the Heraclitean flux, whereas the knowledge with which he tyrannizes his young interlocutors emanates from the Parmenidian conviction of permanence. Knowledge is possible only in a world that is not constantly changing. This contradiction is reflected in the Platonic dialogue which makes enables the simultaneous operation of aporia, the Socratic irony, and that

irresolvable inconsistency that constantly marks the tension between the surface of the text and its context.

Having touched upon major questions -- such as human nature, the nature and immortal intelligence of the soul, what is god, what is philosophy, self-knowledge and absolute truth -- the dialogue enters its second part, which is interested in preserving that precious intelligence and the mind that will elevate man to a god-like status. After warning against the dangers of stupidity that destroys memory and the knowledge it preserves, the dialogue moves on to its final theme concerning the purpose of rhetoric and the way writing -- the technology of the word -- should be utilized for the benefit of philosophical thought. This part is concerned with the fear that writing will weaken memory. The question is how we can internalize writing minimizing the dangers of the written word and transforming external knowledge into "knowledge written in the soul." The way memory and love are transformed into inner activities, so writing should become a property of the soul. Plato is not condemning writing; he is defending it against Socrates and his censoring, critical consciousness.

The dialogue thus moves through parallel transformations toward a progressive movement that reveals the possibility of human perfection. The diagram that follows will illustrate this moral progress better.

<u>Initial stage</u>	<u>Progress marked</u>	<u>Final stage</u>
Acquired opinion (doxa)	Techne/episteme	Episteme, gnosis (self- knowledge)
Epithymia	Divine erotic madness	Longing for the Beings, Sophrosyne
Mechanical memory	Anamnesis	Absolute knowledge
Monological recitals	Dialogue (dialegesthai)	True knowledge
Writing as mere reminder	Reminder of what we know (remembering correctly)	Knowledge written in the soul

These ideas have evolved from an initially unphilosophical state to the highest level of their perfection, which represents the philosopher's quest: self-knowledge and Sophrosyne that define the moral perfection of the human soul. The full ascent of the perfect soul actually ends in a contemplation of the motionless and immutable Ideas: Justice, Sophrosyne, and Knowledge. This is the meaning of the experience of a moment outside the conceivable limits of space and time, or temporal duration that is subject to change and physical decline.

Plato is laboring to achieve here an act of resurrecting in the human soul the belief that man is capable of action lying beyond his limitations. This belief alleviates the anxiety that makes the future unexciting in view of our absence from it and arrests all effort crucial to social progress. In Platonic thought, myth, memory, and love are used toward creating this moment of relief, this sense of balance that weighs the futility of human existence against man's desire to see himself as part of a larger scheme in the cosmos, where the physical and moral order of things is secured by a self-regulating and balancing mechanism.

On the other hand, Plato tones down the seriousness of his utterances by acknowledging the indeterminacy and ambiguity lurking behind what Socrates says in the dialogue, the genre Plato has invented for the purpose of enjoying this freedom. What the inconclusiveness of the Socratic utterances suggests is the author's guarded attitude toward a feared clash between the dogmatism of philosophy and the impossibility of defending metaphysical "truths" without being dogmatic. This way Plato, through the persona of Socrates, satisfies the duality of his own position: his belief in knowledge and at the same time in the impossibility of knowing; the ultimate knowledge is in fact the knowledge of ignorance. In the *Phaedrus*, the paradox results from the dialogue's ironic self-reflection on its own character as a product of writing.

By means of a series of revelations, Plato unveils the soul's elevation to perfection through the parallel purgation of myth, love, and memory. Plato's enigmatic use of the Socrates/Isocrates paronomasia with which, significantly, he ends this dialogue, may be pointing to two things: the Parmenidian equality, another name for justice, as the objective of his philosophy; or -- and I think this is more likely -- he is calling attention to the indeterminacy of language which subverts dogmatic answers to life's unanswerable questions.

## II. GEORGE SEFERIS

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Seferis's poetry also grows out of contemporary man's preoccupation with time and his desire to grasp something permanent in a changing world. The poet tries to answer this time-honored human need, which is even more intensely felt in our times, by using the language of myth, memory, and love as a vehicle for emotion. Memory and love are in Seferis's poetry the emotional language that leads to wholeness, human dignity, and potential for moral elevation. They can endure through time and defeat it. Love is the soul's creative ability that makes life tolerable; memory an example of the way love can be preserved and history transformed into knowledge. Seferis's plea for an "authentic life" is essentially a plea for the revival of our forgotten potential for feeling and a correct use of memory, both stifled in an emotionally sterile world. Fragmentation, doubt, our tendency to forget, and the injustice of death are the agonizing issues the poet evokes using a simple language in a complex network of symbols. Seferis's poetry is a "humble art" that strives to express the most complex thought in the simplest possible language, unadorned and stripped from the rhetorical ornaments of the past.

The poet's argument sums up man's struggle against time and change. The human soul, he postulates, has an immortal quality: the ability to love -- a concept that goes, in fact, back to Plato. If we

can acknowledge this divine trait of our mortal nature, in other words, if we can resurrect love in our soul, we will defeat time related to change and decay, the time of the clocks and calendars. The act of recognizing that there is a part in us which change cannot touch will relieve man's existential anxiety and make life more rewarding. This "truth" is presented as a revelation under the bright Greek light, symbol of knowledge. It coincides with a privileged, enlarged "Moment" in which time appears to stop. This is the "miracle" which the poet creates in words which stop, for a moment only, the devastating flow of temporal duration -- a moment of immortality created through poetic logos.

Seferis's poetry seems to have received its impetus from the Imagist movement and its impact on modern Anglo-American poetry.<sup>62</sup> "An 'image'" wrote Pound, the leading theoretician of Imagism, "is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time."<sup>63</sup> Elaborating on the implications of Pound's definition, which helped him to formulate his "spatial form theory," Frank posits:

An image is defined not as a pictorial reproduction but as a unification of disparate ideas and emotions into a complex presented spatially in an instant of time. Such a complex does not proceed discursively, in unison with the laws of language, but

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<sup>62</sup> Pound's comment on a poem by H.D. regarding the "laconic speech of the Imagists" describes Seferis poetic diction: "Objective -- no slither--direct -- no excess of adjectives, etc. No metaphors that won't permit examination -- It's straight talk--straight as the Greek!" See Hugh Kenner, *The Pound Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971) p.174.

<sup>63</sup> Ezra Pound, *Make It New* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1935) p. 336

strikes the reader's sensibility with an instantaneous impact. Pound stresses this aspect by adding, in the next paragraph, that only an instantaneous presentation of such complexes gives "that sense of sudden liberation; that sense of freedom from time limits and space limits; that sense of sudden growth which we experience in the presence of the greatest works of art."<sup>64</sup>

This moment of freedom from time is tantamount to moving outside ephemeral time to replunge into it the next moment.

The revelation the poet attempts comes as a result of the recognition that human life is defined by the duality of things on which the order of the world depends. It is the principle that preserves the natural order in the cosmos, in spite of us, and in defiance of our vain efforts to understand it, that the poet is acknowledging. It is the strife of opposite tensions that finally secures the balance that holds the world together and makes our transition into the "other life," when we are called to pay our "debt" to time, a kind of resurrection. The conscious awareness of this higher example of balance of which man partakes brings a feeling of "galini," or serenity, a key word in the poetry of Seferis. This is the only quest, a modest quest, contemporary man can have.

Like the human ability to love, memory is related to the senses and the mind which the poet evokes in terms of emotion. Homer invoked *Mnemosyne*, the mother of the Muses, to immortalize in song the heroes

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<sup>64</sup> Joseph Frank, *The Idea of Spatial Form* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991) p. 11. The agricultural fair scene of *Madame Bovary* is cited as an example of the process in which three levels of discourse spatially presented are united and the broken continuity of the narrative is restored in a simultaneous interplay of meanings.

and their feats. Operating simultaneously in the present and in the past, memory has the ability to move in and out of time and recapture lost moments of experience. It can preserve the self's wholeness and sense of continuity and identity. What brings our profoundest memory alive, says the poet, is language "the expression that ripens in the depth of the soul, there, where feeling and mind meet on a word and charge it with emotion." This language of emotion is the language of poetry.<sup>65</sup> Seferis seeks, to fuse, simultaneously, contemporary man's scattered self and to grasp a total glimpse of disintegrated Hellenism in an unbroken continuity. In a country like Greece language and landscape are inseparable from the deep and enduring historical memory of a long culture.

Love is man's ability to use his innate potential for feeling and thus keep the senses alive, whereas memory is the means of recalling this past experience, personal and historical, and learning from it. Memory enables us to talk with the dead. The gramophones, the stones, and the mutilated marble statues are examples of our struggle to communicate with a part of us that has sunk into oblivion. They constitute models of resistance against time and decay, expressions of memory reaching back into the past to recapture a lost emotion, expressions of wholeness.

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<sup>65</sup> Seferis, *Dokimes B'*, p. 170. Seferis's two volumes of essays will be referred to, from hereon, as *Dokimes A'* and *B'*. A number of these essays were translated by Rex Warner and Th. D. Frangopoulos in the volume: *George Seferis: On the Greek Style: Selected Essays in Poetry and Hellenism* (Boston: Little Brown and Co., 1966).

Memory and love, like everything else in the poetry of Seferis, exemplify the strife of opposites that secures balance, a mechanism envisioned first by the Pre-Socratics. Things and concepts are not sources of a single meaning, but products of the opposite tensions that define them. For example, love is often undistinguishable from betrayal, hate, violence and revenge. In his poetry Seferis refers, most of the time, to love that is debased, calculated, and wasted. Man commits hubris against it. Similarly, in spite of its ability to sustain continuity and eternalize experience, human memory appears defenseless against pain: We willfully repress and avoid what is painful to remember. If we restore memory and love to their pure, uncorrupted state, we will have defeated decay. Love, exhorts the poet, should not be debased and memory should be used according to the lessons of the past. In fact, Seferis evokes here the Platonic *anamnesis*, the internalized memory of the soul leading to self-knowledge. If we can keep memory uncorrupted, in Seferis's words "if we can remember correctly," we will be able to keep in mind our responsibility in allowing the self's fragmentation to happen. In short, we should learn to respect the immortal qualities of the soul, the only ones that can raise human beings "a little higher."

The tension between contraries constitutes the rhetoric which expresses, obsessively in Seferis's poetry, humanity's ageless quest for equilibrium. All of Seferis's symbols are dual symbols existing as a result of their inherent oppositions, and striving for equilibrium. The light is "black and angelic," the snakes are incarnations of betrayal,

yet they make passionate love; the rose is a symbol of harmony and passion, yet it wounds with its thorns; blood is life but is also associated with violence. Both are parts of our nature; "The first thing God made is love, then comes blood / and the thirst for blood / roused by / the body's sperm as by salt" ("Stratis the Sailor Among the Agapanthoi"). Memory, love, light, blood, justice, the sea, the rose, the statues, the swans and the angels, are symbols nesting their opposites and striving for equilibrium. Like Plato, Seferis seeks an answer in the opposites within the concepts and symbols that define life and the human soul according to a higher system of order that the Pre-Socratics have called "justice."

Seferis's poetry works through an intricate network of symbols tightly interwoven into the fabric of myth and contemporary history. One of the distinct functions of literary myth, which Seferis uses intertextually, is to awaken the profound memory which charges language with emotion. In a country like the poet's own, where the layers of historical memory reach great depths, myth and history, present in the same enduring landscape and the same language that have prevailed through the centuries, become metonymies of memory and constitute the natural language of emotion. Like memory, myth runs in the veins of men with a long past.<sup>66</sup> The ancient legends constitute a common means of communication, the natural language of universal truths still found in

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<sup>66</sup> Since for Seferis the analogy with the human dimension is Greece, this is better understood if one considers the history and endurance of the Greek language, a language with deep roots spoken by a people with deep historical memory.

the spoken language and in the Greek landscape.<sup>67</sup> Through the words of his native tongue that time has hardly touched, the poet defeats time. He exploits the emotional component of myth to enhance the impact of the language of poetry, the language of emotion.

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George Seferis (1900-1972), poet, essayist, novelist, and critic, winner of the 1963 Nobel prize for literature, is among Greece's foremost writers. The most important intellectual of his generation, Seferis is also responsible for revolutionizing modern Greek poetry.<sup>68</sup>

A brief reference to Seferis's major works will familiarize my readers with the poems I shall be discussing and their place in the

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<sup>67</sup> Derrida sees the eruption of myth as an unconscious effect of return counteracting the "violence of writing." *Of Grammatology*, trans. G.C.Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press [1974], 1976) p. 37.

<sup>68</sup> I'm referring to the so-called "Generation of the Thirties," writers mostly from Anatolia who matured between 1930 and 1940" and shared the personal experience of consecutive wars and particularly the horror of the Asia Minor Disaster in 1922. They also shared the belief that Greek literature should move away from the narrow nationalistic concerns of the past and open up to European influence. See Mario Vitti, *H Γενιά του Τριάντα* [The Generation of the Thirties]. Athens: Hermes, 1989, p. 46 and passim; also see George Theotocas's *Free Spirit*, considered as the "Manifesto" of this generation.

Seferis, who was born and grew up in Smyrna, experienced the loss both of a fatherland and the memories of a childhood, both swallowed by the flames that destroyed Smyrna in 1922. For the relation of the literature of that period to history see Thomas Doulis, *Disaster and Fiction: Modern Greek Fiction and the Impact of the Asia Minor Disaster of 1922* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977).

Seferian corpus.<sup>69</sup> "Turning Point," the poet's earliest important work, is a collection of poems published in 1932 and has been characterized as a real turning point in Greek poetry. It introduced rhymed poems composed in the manner of the French Symbolists, in an unadorned language, and making little or no use of ancient mythology. The collection includes his longer lyrical work *Erotikos Logos*, which more than anything else bears the influence of Valéry and of "poésie pure," but it also echoes *Erotokritos*, Vincenzo Kornaros's verse romance.<sup>70</sup> Like *Erotokritos*, "Erotikos Logos" is written in the traditional 15-syllable meter of the Greek ballads. "The Cistern" (1932) a rather obscure poem in iambic pentameter bearing, again, the influence of Valéry, and especially of his "Cimetière marin," introduces the leitmotif of a desiccated world dying in our soul and around us. A second, and more important turning point came with "Mythistorema" (1935), a sequence of twenty-four lyrical and dramatic unities in the pattern of the Homeric epics, using for the first time free verse and the modern techniques of Eliot (particularly *The Waste Land*) and Pound. In the interwar period, Seferis published the collections *Book of*

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<sup>69</sup> For all Seferis's poems I will be using the Keeley /Sherrard translation. See *George Seferis: Collected Poems*, trans., ed., and introduced by Edmund Keeley and Philip Sherrard (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967). Other translations from the Greek original are mine.

<sup>70</sup> *Erotokritos* is a seventeenth-century heroic verse romance of 10,052 lines, of the Cretan Renaissance, written in Crete by Vincenzo Kornaros and is considered a milestone in the history of Greek literature. Inspired by the oral tradition, it employs the traditional "depentasyllabos" --an iambic line of fifteen-syllables with a caesura after the eighth syllable and two main accents, one on the sixth or eighth syllable and one on the fourteenth. This meter, called also "political meter," is traced back directly at least to the Byzantine period and is the dominant form of Greek folk poetry.

*Exercises* and *Logbook I*, the second including "The King of Asine," one of his most important poems constructed on Homeric allusions. The next collection, *Logbook II* (1944), comprises poems written during the poet's exile in the Middle East, where he fled with the Greek government during the German occupation. In "Thrush" (1947), a longer Eliotian poem marking a breakthrough in the poet's work, the clash between myth and history reaches an impasse, but is resolved in the prediction, for the first time, of an apocalyptic vision of truth. The poems of the collection *Logbook III* (1953-1955), characterized by a greater clarity, precision, and directness, mark the apex of Seferis's artistic evolution. It contains poems written in Cyprus between 1953 and 1955. Seferis's last collection *Three Secret Poems*, published in 1966, is characterized by mystical and cryptic overtones presenting a harmonious synthesis of the great oppositions that govern the world and man.

Seferis's poetry has been widely translated, but translation often mutes its cryptic and complex symbolism. As his translators E. Keeley and Ph. Sherrard observe, "the combination of the modes of everyday speech with the forms and rhythms of traditional usage," which creates the effect of both density and economy, is hard for the foreign reader to appreciate.<sup>71</sup> As for the poet's original Greek, Seferis uses only those words which have survived through time in a long tradition and have come to express the poet's personal experiences. He has managed in this way to hone the modern Greek language, after its endless adventures

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<sup>71</sup> George Seferis, *Collected Poems*, ix.

and abuses, "into what perhaps may be the purest and leanest of modern Greek idioms."<sup>72</sup>

Before I attempt a look into Seferis's poems, I will discuss the relevance of the concept of justice as envisaged by the Pre-Socratics and Aeschylus that permeates Seferis's thought.

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<sup>72</sup> Kimon Friar. *Modern Greek Poetry: From Cavafis to Elytis* (Simon and Schuster: New York 1973) p. 72.

A note on the long history and idiosyncrasy of the modern Greek language is necessary, I think, at this point. Modern Greek literature had long been plagued by the scourge of diglossia -- the simultaneous existence of two forms of language: the "katharevousa" (puristic) and the "demotic" (virtually the latest version of the Hellenic and Byzantine Koine.) But although "demotike" was the language spoken by the people without interruption since Hellenistic times, it was "katharevousa" that held the title of the official language for writing for 200 years. In fact, it was an artificial language using vocabulary from the spoken language, forms and words from classical Greek, and grammar from the Western languages, particularly the French. This was seen as a way to "purify" and "embellish" the spoken language and was chosen by Adamantios Korais (1748-1833) as the "middle road" during the period of the Greek Enlightenment preparing the 1821 Revolution, to promote education and save the language from the excesses of Atticism (a tendency traced back to the Byzantine scholars to recreate the attic dialect of classical antiquity). The demotic language, by contrast, had only sustained changes in pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar that resulted naturally from its long usage during the centuries and the successive invasions of foreign cultures the country had suffered. Demotiki was the living idiom of the folk tradition and poetry, but due to four centuries of Ottoman domination (1453-1821) it had remained undeveloped grammatically and stylistically and therefore was unsuitable for literature. After passionate wars over the language issue between the "purists" and the "demotacists," the demotic language became finally the medium of Greece's best modern poetry, starting with its national poet Dionysios Solomos. It was only recently that it was deepened further and perfected by the poets Seferis and Elytis. Demotic Greek was declared the official language both for speaking and writing only as recently as 1976.

## 2. THE POETICS OF SEFERIS

Seferis's poetry and poetics owes a great deal to many influences. The poet found his mature voice in the technology and free spirit of the West, particularly the French Symbolists, T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, which he fused with the cultural inheritance and landscape of his own country. But his thought was also shaped through his identification with a number of literary, mythical, and historical figures and ideas, such as Homer and Odysseus, Pre-Socratic thought, the ancient tragedians, Dante, Don Quixote, the Greek folk tradition, General Makryannis, and his compatriot poets Sikelianos, Karyotakis<sup>73</sup> and Cavafy.<sup>74</sup> "I am a stubborn man," writes the poet to his friend Katsimbalis, "who, for twenty years now, has not stopped saying again and again the same things; things that are not even his."<sup>75</sup> The poet's tragic view of reality is enhanced by his immersion into the Greek culture and its history which he lived conscientiously, with a sense of responsibility

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<sup>73</sup> The poetry of Nikos Karyotakis (1896-1928) had an impelling impact upon the young intellectuals of his generation, mainly because of his pessimistic vision of the function of the poet who is unable to express himself and his time. This obsession, together with the boredom and futility of everyday life --like Seferis he was a public servant -- led him to commit suicide at the age of thirty-two.

<sup>74</sup> It took Seferis a long time to appreciate Cavafy's poetry because he could not understand how the latter's anti-poetic language could convey emotion. Later he saw that it was Cavafy's dramatic style that conveyed emotion. See Seferis, "Cavafy and Eliot: A Comparison," *On the Greek Style*, p. 121-161 and in *Dokimes A'*, p. 17-46.

<sup>75</sup> Seferis, "A Staging of the Thrush," *Dokimes B'*, p. 56

and guilt.<sup>76</sup> Since history was too close to the poet to be presented objectively, he seeks in classical mythology the dramatic personae that would provide the necessary distance. I will begin discussing the poetic of Seferis by focusing on the Pre-Socratic and Aeschylean concept of justice. Then, I will examine the poet's use of myth, the influence of French Symbolism and of modernist poets, and the impact of contemporary Greek history that shaped Seferis thought and formed his language.

#### a. The ancient concept of Justice

The ancient concept of justice has provided Seferis with a model and vocabulary that empowers his symbols. Words and concepts like justice and injustice, decay (*φθορά*) and retribution, hubris and ate, debt, fate, strife, measure, the Furies, equality, unity, and many others, are related to balance and serve as a language of economy that describes love. They are borrowed come from the Pre-Socratic conception of the physical universe which was developed into the moral regularity of the world, particularly the Aeschylean view of life.

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<sup>76</sup> As a career diplomat, Seferis could experience history from a privileged position. But his career was also a cause for a feeling of imprisonment and lack of freedom as it impelled him to do things that did not express him. This feeling of imprisonment from which he could not detach himself is often expressed in his Diaries and poems. In "Last Stop" he sees public officials as souls "shriveled by public sins / each holding office like a bird in its cage." His career, in a way, represented for the poet what he called "unauthentic life," against which he never stopped warning his reader.

Before the Pre-Socratics, justice (*dike*) had a purely non-moral sense, as in Homeric usage. With Hesiod, the concept becomes linked to social organization and prepares the ground for a moral reflection which finds its full expression in Aeschylus, and later in Plato.<sup>77</sup> It is this incorporation of moral justice into natural justice and the combination of the two that interests Seferis. In *Works and Days*, *dike* develops as a moral reflection standing opposite two vices: "hubris"<sup>78</sup> and "ate."<sup>79</sup> The divinity Justice<sup>80</sup> had lived upon the earth during the golden age, often called the age of Astraea, but the wickedness and impiety of mankind drove her away in the brazen and iron ages. The yearning for the "return of Astraea" has ever since become a literary topos. It is the golden age topos in Virgil's *Aeneid*, in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, and Voltaire's *Candide*. In modern Greek literature it is found in the writings of the Generation of the Thirties.

The Pre-Socratic philosophers, guided by scientific curiosity and the need to establish the pattern and structure of the world in order to

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<sup>77</sup> In the *Theogony*, Zeus takes Themis (the personification of law and order) as his wife, and has three daughters with her, Eunomia (Law and Order), Dike (Justice) and Peace (Ειρήνη) who represent the ideals of human community. *The Presocratics*, Philip Wheelwright ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1966) p. 328.

<sup>78</sup> The outrageous disregard for others, whether god or man, that results from man's lack of regard for his own limitations.

<sup>79</sup> The infatuated delusion that leads man to folly and his own ruin (W&D 213-18).

<sup>80</sup> She is represented by the divinities "Aidos" and "Nemesis" --the consciousness of what is just and the embodiment of moral sentiment, respectively. Another name for personified Justice is Astraea.

create something permanent in a world of changing realities, see justice as a cosmic principle that governs the physical universe and preserves the "cosmos."<sup>81</sup> Anaximander (610 BC) believes that the opposite powers in the universe "are inevitably and continually at war with one another, and the advantage of one is the decay (*φθορά*) of its rival."<sup>82</sup>

"*Adikia*," or "*adikima*," (injustice) results in decay and establishes a debt (*χρέος*), identified with retribution -- revenge, or Fate -- which equals death balanced by birth. Justice and the giving of satisfaction (*tisis*) express the quasi-moral nature of the universe<sup>83</sup>

Contrary to Anaximander, Heraclitus (576-480), crucial in Seferis's conception of justice and love, sees strife as the highest justice. For him, "*Aphanēs harmonia*" that holds the universe together lies in "the unity that subsists in apparent opposites."<sup>84</sup> It works together with "*palintonos harmoniē*" -- equal tension from inside and outside-- to create the interdependence and unification of apparent opposites. The resulting effect is that all things are one, and happen by strife and necessity.<sup>85</sup> Fragment 94 gives an example of natural justice: "The sun will not overstep his measures (*metra*); if he does, the Erinyes, agents of Dike, will find him out." Born from the first

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<sup>81</sup> In the early fifth century the word meant "order," or "regularity".

<sup>82</sup> F.M. Conford, "Mysticism and Science in the Pythagorean Tradition," in *The Pre-Socratics*, p. 150.

<sup>83</sup> Heraclitus, fr. BI.

<sup>84</sup> G.S. Kirk, "Natural Change in Heraclitus," in *The Pre-Socratics*, p. 189.

<sup>85</sup> W.K.C. Guthrie, "Flux and Logos in Heraclitus," *The Pre-Socratics*, p. 198.

blood crime of the world, the mutilation of Uranos by Cronos, the Erinyes, or Furies, were spirits of vengeance and guardian of moral justice. The balance of the underlying unity of the cosmos depends on *metron* which controls change.<sup>86</sup> The single formula, or law, according to which all things happen and coexist harmoniously is "logos" (proposition, gathering-together, as the verb *legesthai* suggests, or mere utterance). According to Heraclitus's rather obscure aphorisms, logos can mean proportion, or measure, which regulates the *cosmos* and is identified with a "living fire kindled in measure and quenched in measure."<sup>87</sup> Logos is the broader aspect of the *metron* which regulates change. According to Parmenides (504-500BC), the keys of the gate from which Day and Night enter are held by Dike and Justice is that "Truth" which is grounded in equality, as already discussed in the previous chapter. The Pythagoreans also reciprocity as equivalent to absolute justice.<sup>88</sup>

Seferis identifies with the Aeschylean application of the ontological and cosmological aspects of the *Theogony* and the Pre-Socratic ideas. The *Oresteia*, for instance, which constitutes a major

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<sup>86</sup> Heraclitus's "river fragments" emphasize change, opposition, balance, and unity. Here is fragment B12, the most representative, in this respect: "Upon those who step into the same rivers, different and different waters flow" (*ποταμοῖσι τοῖσιν αὐτοῖσιν ἐμβαίνουσιν ἕτερα καὶ ἕτερα ὕδατα ἐπιρρεῖ.*)

<sup>87</sup> "Κόσμον τόνδε, τόν αὐτόν ἀπάντων, οὔτε τις θεῶν οὔτε ἀνθρώπων ἐποίησεν, ἀλλ' ἦν δεῖ καὶ ἔστιν καὶ ἔσται πῦρ δειζῶν, ἀπτόμενον μέτρα καὶ ἀποσβεννύμενον μέτρα." See Heraclitus B30.

<sup>88</sup> Philip Wheelwright, *The Presocratics* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1966) p. 217.

intertext in the poetry of Seferis, moves away from the violence of the primitive vendetta into the first human court of law, the Areopagus, instituted by Athena. The violence of primitive retaliation is thus tempered into orderly conduct, seen by the poet as love. The Erinyes, spirits of revenge, change their name to Eumenides, spirits of love, and invoke the dark spirits of blood to "come to light" and join in praise of the gifts of god.<sup>89</sup>

With Plato, justice becomes a state of inner harmony, which bears a crude analogy with the organization of the state. The Platonic moral theory that places the human soul at its center is adopted by Seferis to identify justice with love. Socrates's sacrifice on the altar of justice in the *Republic* makes him a captivating figure for Seferis.

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. Love and the nostalgia for the Forms is the result of remembering a moment of mystical transcendence that the soul once experienced and wants to recapture through memory. This nostalgia of a lost paradise is often identified with the longing for the return of Justice.

Seferis's indebtedness to the Pre-Socratic and Aeschylean concept of justice is well established through his own writings:

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<sup>89</sup> Aeschylus, *Eumenides* 948-960.

"I think of the mechanism of justice which [Aeschylus] sets before us, this alternation of Hubris and Ate, which one will not find to be simply a moral law unless it is also a law of nature. A hundred years before him Anaximander of Miletus believed that things pay by deterioration for the "injustice" they have committed by going beyond the order of time. And later Heraclitus will declare: "The sun will not overstep his measures; if he does, the Erinyes, the handmaids of Justice, will find him out" [*Ἥλιος οὐχ ὑπερβήσεται τὰ μέτρα· εἰ δὲ μὴ, Ἐρινύες μιν δίκης ἐπικούροι ἐξευρήσουσι.*]<sup>90</sup>

Moreover, the poet sees this ancient sense of justice as a component of Greekness:

The free man, the just man, the man who is the "measure" of life; if there is one basic idea in Hellenism, it is this one. It is born in the dawning of Greek thought; then it receives in the work of Aeschylus its full and firm extension. Whoever goes beyond the measure is guilty of "hubris"... will feel the thunderbolt of "Ate," the stern fate that provides for the balance and equilibrium of the universe.<sup>91</sup>

The embodiment of justice in the modern Greek world is General Makryannis, a hero of the Greek War of Independence, and the epitome of integrity. He was a man of unique courage, the "just man," and also the victim of flagrant injustice by the emerging young nation.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Seferis, *On the Greek Style*, trans. Rex Warner and Th. D. Frangopoulos (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1966) p. 104.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid, p. 57.

<sup>92</sup> Although illiterate, Makryannis learned to write at the age of 32 for the purpose of recording his "Memoirs" (1797-1864) of the 1821 Revolution and the story of the formation of the new nation. Makryannis was grossly neglected by the Bavarian king and his environment, who were called to rule the new nation. Having orchestrated a successful protest against king Otho who was refusing to sign the Constitution, Makryannis was accused of "conspiracy," given a trial that was a parody of justice, and condemned to death. His accusations were never proved. After a prolonged imprisonment he was set free, shortly before his death, as a result of international pressures because of the festering body and head wounds he had received in battle.

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

#### b. Seferis and myth

To give expression to the human condition and establish the distance between life and history, Seferis turns to literary myth, mainly the Homeric epics and Attic tragedy.<sup>93</sup> In a landscape highlighted by ruins, "fragments of a life which was once complete" ("Delphi"), the ancient world and contemporary reality "meet in a metaphor without strain or contrivance."<sup>94</sup>

Myth and history converge and fuse naturally in the poetry of Seferis -- and in Greece.<sup>95</sup> As Keeley and Sherrard note, the native

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<sup>93</sup> He is not interested in Latin mythology because their gods, Seferis says, grew out of different emotions and were the products of a different mentality. We shouldn't confuse the Greek gods with their Renaissance versions. See *Dokimes*, pp. 240-241.

<sup>94</sup> George Seferis, *Collected Poems*, Foreword x.

<sup>95</sup> Commenting on the poetic yet "unreal" letters Lawrence Durrell was writing Henry Miller from Greece, the latter writes: "They caused a certain confusion in me owing to the fact that the dream and the reality, the historical and the mythological, were so artfully blended. Later I was to discover for myself that this confusion is real and not due entirely to the poetic faculty." Henry Miller, *The Colossus of Marousi* (New York: New

Greek poet has a distinct advantage against his non-Greek colleagues. He

can evoke characters and settings that have mythological overtones with less danger of being merely literary in doing so, with less danger of arbitrarily imposing gods and heroes on an alien landscape -- Tiresias on the Thames or Prometheus in Pennsylvania, for example -- since his own natural landscape is that to which these gods and heroes themselves once belonged and in which they still confront the mind's eye plausibly.<sup>96</sup>

Seferis's own explanation of the term "a certain mythology" and of the title of "Mythistorema" may shed some light on his mythopoietic method:

Mythistorema--it is its two components that made me choose the title of this work: MYTHOS, because I have used, clearly enough, a certain mythology; ISTORIA [both "history" and "story") because I have tried to express, with some coherence, circumstances that are as independent from myself as the characters in a novel.<sup>97</sup>

Keeley sees myth as employed by Seferis, particularly in "Mythistorema," as what Eliot has called "objective correlative,"<sup>98</sup> in the sense the term was introduced by Eliot to describe James Joyce's mythical method in *Ulysses*.<sup>99</sup> Eliot, in fact, had argued that the

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Directions, 1941) p.4.

<sup>96</sup> Seferis, *Collected Poems*, x.

<sup>97</sup> Seferis, *On the Greek Style*, pp. 167-168. In modern Greek, the word "Mythistorema" means "novel."

<sup>98</sup> "A set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which is the formula of the particular emotion." See T.S. Eliot's "Hamlet," in *Selected Prose of T.S. Eliot*, Frank Kermode ed., (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, [1932] 1975) p.49.

<sup>99</sup> Seferis's mythical method, argues Keeley, is not simply a structural element but "a continuous framework, an overall structure" that gives the poem the "kind of coherence that narrative supplies in the traditional novel," as Eliot suggests in his review. In a later reappraisal of his statement, Keeley writes: "The presence of myth in

method -- which consists in "manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity" -- is simply a way of controlling, of ordering, or giving shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history."<sup>100</sup>

Seferis seems to have been thinking of ancient myth as a poetic language even before 1928, when he first used it. It is around that time that he refers to Homeric allusions as a potential "language."<sup>101</sup> Those among the Homeric characters who play a key role in Seferis's poetry are Odysseus, Elpenor, and Circe. From Attic tragedy he prefers the Aeschylean vision but he also uses Sophocles and later in his poetry, Euripides. Seferis is also interested in Plato and particularly in Socrates, who acquires particular importance for the poet, because he is a model of integrity, justice, and love. Tragedy provides personas

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Seferis is sometimes overt, sometimes covert, but with or without the benefit of direct illusion, the 'certain mythology' is always there to give the poet's image of contemporary reality a particular shape and significance, as it does throughout Joyce's novel."

Seferis's mythical method has been deemed by many more effective and diachronic than Joyce's and Pound's. Aware of the innovative techniques in literature, the poet himself had written that the mythical method was used by Cavafy "long before the appearance of Joyce's *Ulysses*, and also long before Yeats. See E. Keeley, "T.S. Eliot and the Poetry of George Seferis," *Comparative Literature* (Summer 1956) 214-26. 215. Also G. Seferis, "Cavafy and Eliot - A Comparison." *On the Greek Style*, p. 137 and *Dokimes A'*, p. 340. In this respect see also Vayenas, *Ο Ποιητής και ο Χορευτής* [The Poet and the Dancer] (Athens: Kedros, 1979) p. 152.

<sup>100</sup> *The Dial* (November 1923) 483; reprinted in *Selected Prose of T.S. Eliot*, Frank Kermode, ed. (New York: 1975) 175-178.

<sup>101</sup> See *Days I*, February 16, 1925-August 17, 1931, p. 44; February 14, 1926; and September 22, 1925, p. 15.

like Agamemnon, Clytemnestra, Orestes, Oedipus, Antigone, Helen, Teucer,<sup>102</sup> characters with intense personality who represent the sensibility of the poet's times.<sup>103</sup> They are chosen carefully according to the psychological and symbolic situations they portray, which make them poetic symbols of the human condition that seeks expression. Seferis's own words explain this better:

...men of inconstancy, of wanderings and of wars, though they differ and may change in terms of greatness and value... always move among the same monsters and the same longings. So we keep the symbols and the names that the myth has brought down to us, realizing as we do so that the typical characters have changed in keeping with the passing of time and the different conditions of our world -- which are none other than the conditions of everyone who seeks expression.<sup>104</sup>

Their situations and emotional experiences illustrate "the primordial drama" which, like the curse haunting the family of Atreus, continues to plague our lives. It is the drama of the loss of inner unity and of the ability to love and to resist self-destruction and the scattering of the self.<sup>105</sup> In "Saturday," the poetic voice is a stage

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<sup>102</sup> Teucer, Ajax's brother, was the famous archer of the Trojan war. When Ajax loses the arms of Achilles to Odysseus, he kills himself with Teucer's sword. Upon his return home to Salamis after the war, Teucer is exiled by his father who holds him responsible for Ajax's suicide. Apollo then orders Teucer to go to Cyprus and found there a new Salamis, his second fatherland. Teucer thus provides the analogy for war and the killing of a brother, exile, the search for a lost fatherland, themes relating to both the poet's personal life and, in a wider aspect, to the fate of Greece and of man, in general.

<sup>103</sup> See Dokimes B', p. 32.

<sup>104</sup> "A Letter on 'The Thrush,'" *Αγγλο-ελληνική Επιθεώρηση* [Anglo-Greek Review] (July-August 1950) 501-506.

<sup>105</sup> The idea of scattering is expressed throughout Seferis's poetry through the symbol of the pomegranate, mutilated statues, shattered ruins, and Odysseus's companions who, dispersed among the elements never achieved *nostos*.

director preparing the performance which blends many myths and tragic characters who share the human drama and the experience of frustrated love which generates bitterness and disunity.

-- I haven't forgotten anything,  
 everything's in its place, waiting for the hand to choose;  
 only I couldn't find the childhood years  
 nor the place where the hero of the drama was born  
 nor the first impressions  
 those he recalls in the fifth act  
 at the height of the disaster.  
 All the rest, there it is, in order:  
 the masks for the three main emotions  
 and for the intermediary ones  
 the pleated costumes ready to move,  
 the curtains, the lights,  
 Medea's slaughtered children,  
 the poison and the knife.  
 In that box there's life when it starts getting unbearable:  
 If you put your ear close you'll hear it breathing;  
 Make sure you don't open it before the Furies whistle.  
 In that glass you'll find love of the body  
 and in that glass -- the blue one -- love of the soul:  
 make sure you don't confuse them.  
 And in that drawer is Nessus' shirt<sup>106</sup>  
 (Act Five Scene Three);  
 you remember the speech that begins:  
 "Enough of life! Io! Io!"<sup>107</sup>  
 Here's the trumpet that destroys the palace  
 revealing the queen in her iniquity;  
 that's the microphone switch --  
 they'll hear you at the far end of the world.  
 Let's go. Lights! Good luck!"

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<sup>106</sup> Nessus's shirt represents poisoned love and bitter memory as in the poem "In the Manner of G.S.": "Wherever I travel Greece wounds me. / On Pelion among the chestnut trees the Centaur's shirt / slipped through the leaves to fold around my body. Nessus, a centaur, had sexually attracted Deianira, the wife of Heracles. Responding to her cries, the hero fatally wounded the centaur but before dying, Nessus offers his blood to Deianira as a love charm. When Heracles returns from a war bringing with him a captive nymph, his wife smears a shirt with the centaur's blood and sends it to Heracles hoping that this would make him love her again. But the poisoned shirt, which the hero cannot remove without tearing his flesh with it, burns him to death.

<sup>107</sup> "Ἀρκείτω βίος," *Agamemnon* 1314. This is from Cassandra's speech, already mourning her own death and the death of Agamemnon, before walking into Clytemnestra's palace herself to be slaughtered.

--Just a moment, who am I going to play? Who will I kill?  
 And these people looking at me --  
 what will make them believe that justice protects me?  
 What will make them believe it?  
 O could we only love  
 like bees at least  
 not like pigeons  
 like shells at least  
 not like sirens  
 like ants at least  
 not like plane-trees...  
 But don't you see them, they're all blind!  
 The blind are sleeping..."

-- Wonderful. You can continue."

We have no choice but to keep moving in an exitless circle, as history repeats itself from murder to murder, war to war, violence to violence.

The earliest explicit use of mythical intertextuality appears in the form of Homeric allusions, first in the poem "The Companions in Hades" (1928) and later in "Reflections on a Foreign Line of Verse" (1931) where Odysseus appears for the first time. The most important mythical poems in Seferis's poetry mark the poet's interest in an Odysseus who combines the classical hero of nostos and the post-Dantean denial of *nostos*.<sup>108</sup> In his analysis of three mythical poems, "Mythistorema" (1935), "Thrush" (1947), and "Helen" (1955), all related to nostos and to lost fatherlands, Nikolaou shows a transition in the poet's evolution. In the first two poems Odysseus, Elpenor, and Circe hold a central part. In the last, a radical change occurs: Odysseus

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<sup>108</sup> Seferis seeks in literary expression the various incarnations of the Homeric hero -- from the classical Homeric view of Racine to the poetic use of the myth by the French symbolists, W.B. Yeats, Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, and James Joyce. A. Nikolaou. *Μυθολογία Γ. Σεφέρη* [G. Seferis's Mythology] (Athens: Daedalos, 1992) pp. 16-18.

disappears and is replaced by Teucer, a hero unknown so far to modern literature, who represents the negation of nostos and the loss of a fatherland.<sup>109</sup> The purpose of this substitution is the discovery of the only possible truth: that for contemporary man there is no homecoming but only exile and the endless quest for a new country.

Myth in the poetry of Seferis provides the characters and situations related to love and memory as weapons of resistance against time. The poet seeks to situate again these emotional and mental functions in the human soul so that humanity may become not a reminder of death but a condition for regeneration.

### c. The French Symbolists, Eliot, and Pound

The new technique the poet sought to express his ideas can be traced in the tenets of symbolism and the modernistic trends of the West. The French symbolists' preoccupation with the poet's task and with language, their rejection of description and specificity, the ambivalence and novelty of the symbol, the power of suggestion, all these answered Seferis's quest for a new technique. Valéry (whose idea of "pure poetry" had attracted Seferis) and Laforgue were the strongest influences on the Greek poet among the French Symbolists.

What basically characterizes Seferis's understanding of the function of language is the way he handles emotion. In his own words,

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid, p. 125 and passim.

the poet's sensitivity "is a welding that takes place deep inside him, of many emotional and intellectual elements, like stalactites in the depth of a cave."<sup>110</sup> Aesthetic emotion is for Seferis like any other everyday emotion. He sees the expression ripening in the depths of the soul, "there, where feeling and intellect meet upon a word and charge it with emotion."<sup>111</sup> This is where this poet clearly differentiates his position from that position from those among the French Symbolists who advocate impersonality, as Mallarmé's sonnet illustrates: The poet is like a swan caught in the icy dream of a frozen lake and trying, solipsistically (as he denies the existence of the outside world) to free himself. He turns into a ghost enveloped in the midst of his "useless exile," together with the linguistic sign (*signe*) which a pun equates to the swan (*cygne*).<sup>112</sup>

Seferis had translated, but never published, Valéry's essay "Propos sur la Poésie," in which the latter distinguishes between ordinary and poetic emotion: "Il nous importe d'opposer aussi nettement que possible l'émotion poétique à l'émotion ordinaire."<sup>113</sup> The doctrinal position that the autonomy of art demands that aesthetic

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<sup>110</sup> Seferis, "Erotokritos," in *Dokimes A'*, p. 32.

<sup>111</sup> Seferis, "Language in our Poetry," *Dokimes B'*, pp. 165-66, 170. For Seferis's views on the language of poetry see also his essays in *Dokimes A'*, and *B'*: "Dialogue on Poetry," and "Monologue on Poetry."

<sup>112</sup> Fantôme qu'à ce lieu son pur éclat assigne,  
Il s'immobilise au songe froid de mépris  
Qui vêt parmi l'exil inutile le Cygne.  
(Le vierge, le vivace et le bel aujourd'hui)

<sup>113</sup> *Oeuvres de Paul Valéry I*, Jean Hytier, ed., (Paris, 1957-1960) p. 1363.

emotion be independent from its cause is a position Seferis rejects. He tries, instead, to avoid "a dangerous separation between the language of poetry and that of life which would result in an adulteration of the poetic language through artificial elements unsuitable to express the entire range of human feelings."<sup>114</sup>

The poet, however, who accelerated the formation of Seferis's mature voice and brought him "back to a more temperate zone" after the experimentations he had witnessed in France,<sup>115</sup> was T.S. Eliot, whose dramatic manner of expression offered Seferis something much deeper and inevitably moving."<sup>116</sup> It is after his acquaintance with Eliot and his work that Seferis abandons rhyme and writes in free verse. In this respect, "Mythistorema" reflects the impact of the "Waste Land" on the Greek poet, both in terms of form and content.

Eliot's technique helped Seferis to perfect his mythical method, a method based on the power of the mythical word:

At a time when myth was common sensibility, the poet had at his disposal a living medium, an available emotional atmosphere, in which he could ... express himself.... We have nothing in our contemporary languages that can equal in impact, completeness, or emotional wealth Aeschylus's simple word *Σεμναί* (Furies) or Dante's "eterno dolore."<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> See Vayenas, *Ο Ποιητής και ο χορευτής* [The Poet and the Dancer]. p. 21

<sup>115</sup> Seferis, *On the Greek Style*, p. 167.

<sup>116</sup> G. Seferis, "Letter to a Foreign Friend," in *Journal of a Poet*, pp. 167-68. See also *Dokimes A'*, p. 139, and *B'*, p. 12.

<sup>117</sup> Seferis, *Dokimes A'*, pp. 43-44.

Eliot also instilled in Seferis a respect for language and its potential, and confirmed his conviction that the poet's role lies not in describing but in creating things by naming them.<sup>118</sup> The poet, believes Seferis, "must constantly develop the consciousness of the past as if it were present, sacrificing his own personality in a process of self-effacement."<sup>119</sup> Seferis's personal mythology involves the introduction of contemporary personas like Mathios Paschalis and Stratis Thalassinos [Stratis the Mariner], modern versions of Odysseus in search of an identity and a country. Like Eliot's Alfred J. Prufrock and Gerontion, these personae achieve a dramatizing, distancing, and self-obliterating effect.

Seferis had also read and admired Pound. Besides the latter's contribution to Imagism that had attracted him, as discussed above (p. 76), the Greek poet had translated "Canto 1" into Greek. Pound's "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley" had also influenced Seferis's view of Odysseus and Elpenor. For Pound, Elpenor is "a man of no fortune, and with a name to come;" Mauberly, a modern poet, is reduced to Elpenor's fortune because he is unable to resist Circe's deceptive promises for happiness. His life is epitomized in the inscription on his tomb:

"I was  
 "And I no more exist;  
 "Here drifted  
 "An hedonist."

Seferis too, calls his Elpenor a hedonist (*ηδονικός Ελληνωρ*).

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid, p. 139.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid, p. 43.

All these influences, seminal as they may have been, did not obscure Seferis's distinctive voice. They were adjusted and fused with the poet's own nature and experiences and transformed into Greek reality and universal symbols. Seferis combines the European symbolist and modernist traits with elements closely attached to the history, landscape, and psychology of contemporary Greece to create a diction that is characteristically his own.<sup>120</sup>

#### d. History and contemporary Greece

Seferis's view of the world is reflected in the images of exile, uprootedness, fragmentation and, most emphatically, war, the opposite of love as a symbol of unity. Having intensely experienced war and exile, the poet sees the past as sinking into the soil,<sup>121</sup> whereas the

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<sup>120</sup> This is characteristic also of other modern Greek poets, as is the case also with the poet Odysseus Elytis (1979 Nobel for literature). Influenced by Eluard and French Surrealism, Elytis mingles in a surrealist mode such concrete ideas as the Aegean sea and its islands which he constantly evokes to create a new image under the blinding light of Greece in an eternal present constantly revealed in expressions of the Greek landscape.

<sup>121</sup> When Seferis visited Anatolia in 1950, for the first time after 1922, he wrote:

"In these parts you cannot help but recall constantly the old Hellenism. Four or five archaeological periods in Asia Minor: Preclassical, Classical, Hellenistic, Byzantine -- and the Neohellenic. This last one you can grasp the very moment it sinks into the ground. You can still discern the umbilical cords that tie it to the world above and are severed one after another. Greek language, churches, houses, traditional gestures..."

See *Days 5, 1945-1951*, Athens, Ikaros [1977] 1986, p. 204, and *A Poet's Journal*, p. 171. The poet's Diaries (7 volumes) will be referred to hereafter as *Days 1 through 7*. A portion of them was translated by Athan Anagnostopoulos under the title *A Poet's Diary* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1974).

"house" becomes a metaphor for the soul and its serene existence, which the poet endlessly "seeks" to recapture.<sup>122</sup> The memory of this experience generates nostalgia and grief for a vanished life which can only be conceived in abstract terms through memory and art when the actual place ceases to exist.<sup>123</sup> As Macridge argues,

This sense of timelessness... seems to have developed in the writers from Asia Minor, into something akin to the Platonic sense of the eternal existence of the soul before birth: the reminiscence of childhood becomes the *anamnesis* of that other world," that "other life beyond the statues," for which Seferis's voyages are vainly seeking, a Garden of Eden from which they have been cast out.<sup>124</sup>

As Seferis writes, his generation that was "getting old between wars," was haunted by the feeling that everything in the soul and the spirit is eroded and ready to collapse any moment; it is a generation which "does not have the time until the other war that is coming."<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Gaston Bachelard, *La Poétique de l'Espace* (Paris, 1958), pp. 77 and 18. 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."

<sup>123</sup> The nostalgia for a house is characteristic of the writers of the Generation of the Thirties who found themselves caught in an intense longing for a return to a place that could enable them to recapture their lost childhood. But such a place had ceased to exist physically. See Peter Macridge, "The Two-Fold Nostalgia: Lost Homeland and Lost Time in the Work of G. Theotocas, E. Venezis, and K. Politis." *Journal of Modern Greek Studies*. Vol. 4, No. 2 (October, 1986) 75-83. Seferis's poem "The Return of the Exile" (1938) expresses the idea of nostalgia as a distorting force in the process of recapturing a past which has become unrecognizable.

<sup>124</sup> Macridge, "The Two-Fold Nostalgia...") p. 76.

<sup>125</sup> *Days 3*, p. 287.

His later poem "Euripides the Athenian" (1953), constitutes a commentary on war, pointing also in the direction of the poet.<sup>126</sup>

He grew old between the fires of Troy<sup>127</sup>  
and the quarries of Sicily.  
He liked seashore caves and pictures of the sea.  
He saw the veins of men  
as a net the gods made to catch us in like wild beasts:  
he tried to break through it.  
He was a sour man, his friends were few;  
when his time came he was torn to pieces by dogs.

Like the ancient tragic poet who grew old between the Trojan and the Peloponesian wars, the poets who matured between 1930 and 1940 in Greece grew old between the Balkan wars and the First World War, (1913-1918) on the one hand, and the Second World War followed by two civil wars, on the other (1940-1946). The Trojan war and the burning of Troy are often depicted in the writings of this generation as an analogy to the Asia Minor expedition and the burning of Smyrna, in 1922.<sup>128</sup> Both catastrophes took place on the same coast of Ionia, Homer's land, both

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<sup>126</sup> This poem had originally been written in the first person and later changed to the third. See X.A. Kokolis, *Seferika I*, 1982. pp. 63-75.

<sup>127</sup> Seferis is using here also a line from Paul Eluard's poem "Comme Beaucoup d'Autres," and specifically its line: "De guerre en guerre je vieillis / comme beaucoup d'autres."

<sup>128</sup> The personal experience of the burning of Smyrna in 1922, is for the poet "but one cruel episode in a more grave Odyssey." As Friar has put it,

Seferis is most Greek when his experiences in Europe and Asia and his involved awareness of the Greek past are related to the nostalgic longing for the homeland in an attempt to define what Greece is, under the light of timelessness. "No matter where I travel," he has written in one of his poems, "Greece wounds me still." This is one of the main reasons why Seferis's poetry is at once profoundly Greek and profoundly universal."

*Modern Greek Poetry*, trans. and with an Introduction by Kimon Friar (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973) pp. 66-67.

were the result of a military expedition, and both marked the end of an ancient civilization. Like Euripides, Seferis sees man trapped in his Fate and the intrigues of the gods, symbolically in the powerful nets from which we cannot escape.<sup>129</sup> The poem ends with the mention of the tragic poet's "sparagmos," [τον σπαράξαν τα σκυλιά] and the comment that he was a "sour man" and "his friends were few."<sup>130</sup> The inability to love is at the root of all wars. The anti-war commentary is sustained by the allusion to "sparagmos," which in the modern Greek language carries the meaning of the ancient Dionysian dismemberment over to the civil war experience commonly known as "έμφύλιος σπαραγμός," or "civil sparagmos," and in a more generalized sense to the massacre among fellow countrymen and fellow-men. Anti-war sentiment permeates the poetry of Seferis. Among the poet's most vociferous statements in this regard is his poem "Helen," (1953) in which Teucer kills his brother Ajax and the causes of war, since Homer, are reduced to "a linen undulation, a filmy cloud, a butterfly's flicker, a wisp of swan's down, an empty tunic, Helen" (entire text in the Annex).

The plight of Greece for survival during the centuries brings a sorrow which Seferis has called "*ο καημός της Ρωμιοσύνης*," -- a term roughly meaning "the grief of Greekness." It is identified with the awareness "of how vulnerable our world is where all achievements are suddenly ruined by war, destruction, exile... a feeling, so often

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<sup>129</sup> Agamemnon dying trapped in the nets of Clytemnestra comes to mind.

<sup>130</sup> Another short poem, "Pentheus," is linked with the Euripides poem through the idea of "sparagmos."

incomprehensible to nations with shorter and less tragic histories or with more superficial memories."<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Seferis, *Collected Poems*, Foreword, xii.

### 3. THEMES AND SYMBOLS: Myth, memory, and love

I would like now to introduce, in more detail, the themes and symbols of Seferis's poetry, starting with an early poem, "Reflections on a Foreign Line of Verse" (1931). This poem, uncomplicated by the intricate density of later works, affords a glimpse into Seferis's poetics and his mythical method, instituting his themes and symbols in the form of oppositions that guarantee their balanced function through a constant strife, as the Pre-Socratic model demonstrates. It establishes the themes and symbols that will appear again and again in the poet's attempt to articulate his quest for the "miracle" he anticipates.

#### *REFLECTIONS ON A FOREIGN LINE OF VERSE*<sup>132</sup>

Fortunate he who's made the voyage of Odysseus.  
 Fortunate if on setting out he's felt the rigging of a love  
 strong in his body, spreading there like veins where  
 the blood throbs.

5 A love of 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.

10 I ask God to help me say, at some moment of great happi-  
 ness, what that love is;  
 sometimes when I sit surrounded by exile I hear its distant  
 murmur like the sound of sea struck by an inexplicable  
 hurricane.  
 And again and again the shade of Odysseus appears before me,  
 his eyes red from the waves' salt,  
 15 from his ripe longing to see once more the smoke ascending  
 from his warm hearth and the dog grown old waiting by the door.

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<sup>132</sup> The foreign verse alluded to is, in fact, the first line of this poem. It is taken from Joachim du Bellay's (c.1525-1560) poem "Les Regrets" (1558), sonnet XXXI, which reads: "*Heureux qui, comme Ulysse, a fait un beau voyage.*"

20 A large man, whispering through his whitened beard words  
in our language spoken as it was three thousand year ago.  
He extends a palm calloused by the ropes and the tiller, his  
skin weathered by the dry north wind, by heat and snow.

25 It's as if he wants to expel from among us the superhuman  
one-eyed Cyclops, the Sirens who make you forget  
with their song, Scylla and Charybdis:  
so many complex monsters that prevent us from remembering  
that he too was a man struggling in the world with soul and body.

He is the mighty Odysseus: he who proposed the wooden  
horse with which the Achaeans captured Troy.  
I imagine he's coming to tell me how I too may build a  
wooden horse to capture my own Troy.

30 Because he speaks humbly and calmly, without effort, as  
though he were my father  
or certain old sailors of my childhood who, leaning on their  
nets with winter coming on and the wind raging,

35 used to recite, with tears in their eyes  
the song of Erotocritos;  
it was then I would shudder in my sleep at the unjust fate  
of Aretousa descending the marble steps.

40 He tells me of the harsh pain you feel when the ship's sails  
swell with memory and your soul becomes a rudder;  
of being alone, dark in the night, and helpless as chaff on  
the threshing floor;

45 of the bitterness of seeing your companions one by one  
pulled down into the elements and scattered;  
and of how strangely you gain strength conversing with the  
dead when the living who remain are no longer enough.

He speaks... I still see his hands that knew how to judge  
the carving of the mermaid at the prow  
presenting me the waveless blue sea in the heart of winter.

The themes introduced by this poem are love, memory and language,  
the journey into the past and knowledge; they articulate the poet's  
search into language and memory to recover knowledge and restore the  
unity that will enable him to resist the plunder of time. To express all

this, Odysseus's character is preserved, but the emphasis is placed on values which Homer had shown but not emphasized: the hero's ability to love and to remember correctly, to avoid excess, and to possess the right language to talk about love. Odysseus is the character who expresses Seferis the most, and with whom the poet identifies. Seeing himself as an exile most of the time away from Greece, the poet saw life as an Odyssey and man as a wanderer in search for the soul and, like Teucer, for a country. On the other hand, Odysseus is the complete man, with body and mind integrated harmoniously, who can achieve his purpose through the right use of memory and language.

Du Bellay, on whose verse Seferis constructs his poem, had detached himself from the post-Dantean image prevalent in Western literature, which was shaped according to Christian morality. Seferis chooses du Bellay for his pagan approach, to which the Greek poet felt closer. Seferis's paganism takes him deeper into the roots of his culture, embracing all of the influences it had received.

The poem's opening line introduces the reader immediately into the theme of love, the main focus of the poem: The anaphora of "fortunate" (*ευτυχισμένος*) in the first two lines and the repetition of its cognate "*ευδαιμονίας*" call attention to an anticipated moment of happiness that comes not only from the experience of love but also from the ability to speak about it (line 9). The issue of language is thus brought into the picture from the opening lines of the poem. If love is the motive for a man's journey to his Ithaca, this man is fortunate not because he

manages to find his destination, but because he is capable of loving.<sup>133</sup>

Love, the central metaphor in this poem, is identified with the sea voyage of Odysseus.<sup>134</sup> The poet describes this love in quasi-Platonic terms, as an innate quality of the human soul: "It is born with us and spreads in our body like veins where the blood throbs." The compound metaphor -- "the rigging of a love spreading like veins in his body"-- invites comparison with the Platonic wings nurtured by love which equip the soul for its journey. Like the chariot of the Platonic soul which is pulled by two horses, Odysseus's passion becomes the rigging that pushes the ship homeward, but also the net that traps the wanderer. A subtler intertextual allusion may be at work here if we think of the song of Demodocus relating the adultery of Aphrodite and Ares, whom Hephaistos caught in the nets he devised to prove their betrayal -- the nets of their destructive lust.<sup>135</sup> The symbol of nets appears again in the poem "Euripides the Athenian" (1953), discussed earlier in a different context, who "saw the veins of men / as a net the gods made to catch us in like wild beasts:/ he tried to break through it." Euripides, who was torn by wild dogs, is the poet who is trying to

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<sup>133</sup> This brings to mind Cavafy's "Ithaca" (1920), which sees Odysseus's achievement as lying not in the homecoming proper but in the experience and the knowledge gained on the way home.

<sup>134</sup> For a detailed study of the symbolism of the journey as a quest for love in Seferis's poetry, see C. Capri-Karka *Love and the Symbolic Journey in the Poetry of Cavafy, Eliot, and Seferis*. (New York: Pella, 1982).

<sup>135</sup> *The Odyssey*, 8. 266-332.

break through the net of the senses that entraps him. The ancient poet is torn apart by the Furies because of the hubris he has committed against the natural ability of man to love, as suggested by the comment "his friends were few."

In trying to define love, the speaker, like the interlocutors in the *Phaedrus*, declares his difficulty in finding words to explain this feeling. Like the ancient bard who invokes the Muse, daughter of *Mnemosyne*, the modern poet calls upon God to help him by giving him the actual experience of love and the language to put it into words and immortalize it: "I ask God to help me say at some moment of great happiness what that love is." Love is described as "unconquerable,"<sup>136</sup> "eandless" like music, and of an "indissoluble" rhythm.<sup>137</sup> The adjectives describe its eternal nature which lies beyond corruption and oblivion. It is human and divine at the same time, like Platonic love. It is like music,<sup>138</sup> or like the language of poetry, and it can transcend time. It has a tempo and a rhythm, sounds and silences, themes and motifs that are repeated in terms of sound and meaning that link

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<sup>136</sup> The word "ακατανίκητη," (unconquerable) is used by Sophocles to describe love in *Antigone*, 786 ("Ἔρως ἀνίκητε μάχαν...", Love unconquerable in battle). In fact, *Antigone* is used by Seferis in "Thrush" as a symbol of love.

<sup>137</sup> A Diary entry explains this further: "Things that can neither be described nor drawn in a painting, perhaps one could render them through musical images." *Days 3*, p. 189.

<sup>138</sup> N. Christodoulou shows in detail the relationship of Seferis's poetry to music. See "Ο Μουσικός Σεφέρης" [The Musical Seferis], *Ο Σεφέρης στην Πύλη της Αμμοχώστου* [Seferis at the Gate of Ammochostos], (Athens 1987).

past present and future through the events and the words remembered. In a sense it is like memory too.

The relation of rhythm to memory and love is ruled, as with all Seferis's symbols, by the principle of duality. We first saw it in "Erotikos Logos" (1929-1930) where the symbol of the rose is used to describe fate in the sense of a love that was lost and "remained in memory only, a heavy rhythm;" in "Mycenae," (1935) the ancestral glorious past erupts as the "memory of toil rooted in the rhythm / beaten upon the earth by feet / forgotten." The poet conceives as "rhythm" also the process of transformation of the "given language" which has taken root inside the self and becomes the language of emotion. But "rhythm" also describes death. The sense of a "deeper" rhythm of "Sirocco 7 Levante" (1936) is the hour "when the roses darken; it permeates with dew "our silence in the night." This hour is often related to the image of mutilated hands that reach out for something ("A Word for Summer," 1936, "Mycenae," "Mythistorema 4"). In "Engomi" (1953) the heavy and swift rhythm of the excavators' picks digging out a dead past is likened to "the wheel of fate ... passing through the ruins," whereas in "On a Ray of Winter Light" of "Three Secret Poems" (1966) the moment of the final consummation in fire, at the hour of death, is like

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

immovable.

The "Three Secret Poems," espousing a view closer to Heraclitean cosmology and Platonic metaphysics, show man struggling to capture the

rhythm into which he is transubstantiated at the hour of death -- the moment when the soul, free at last, can finally acquire self-knowledge in a single flash, at once, as in the poem of Solomos, above.

Love is felt through the senses like a "distant murmur," heard "like the sound of sea struck by an inexplicable hurricane." The identification of love with the sea is one of the central concepts in the poetry of Seferis. Even in "Reflections," the only poem in which the happiness of love dominates, love's negative side is not minimized: Love is a mysterious, sudden storm that frustrates the sea's endless strife for serenity. The sea, a polyvalent symbol in the poetry of Seferis, is related to love, justice, wisdom, and measure. In his essay on Makryannis, the poet writes:

Whoever goes beyond the measure is guilty of 'hubris,' and "hubris" is the worst thing that can befall a man... The image that I contemplate with the greatest emotion of all is to be found in The Persians. Xerxes, according to the old story, was defeated because he was guilty of "hubris," because he performed the outrageous act of flogging the sea. And so his ruin came to him from the sea, from this element that, although always tormented, never stops striving towards a balance, towards a "measure."<sup>139</sup>

The relationship between love and sea will be discussed in a wider context later in this chapter.

The poet reconstructs his hero by gradually putting together Odysseus facial characteristics, his calloused hands, his mind and the language he speaks-- "our language spoken as it was three thousand years

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<sup>139</sup> Seferis, *On the Greek Style*, pp. 57-58.

ago."<sup>140</sup> Seferis describes here a very human Odysseus, a man who won the strife against the waves, the nymphs, and the monsters because of the love he felt for his country and family. He is a symbol of completeness "struggling in the world with soul and body," who can teach us how to achieve our purpose in life (29), but also the victim of time: the signs of toil have branded his calloused hands and his skin is weathered by the elements. Seferis's Odysseus is mortal and "godlike," as Homer calls him -- as Plato understands the human soul.

The superhuman Homeric monsters are symbols of destruction caused by blindness, forgetfulness, and lust that constitutes hubris against love. The one-eyed Cyclops is a version of blindness or sleep that lull the senses; the Sirens, who make you forget with their song represent a negative side of love and forgetfulness; Scylla and Charybdis swallow the traveller in a whirlpool -- they represent greediness and lust. In *The Waste Land*, which Seferis translated some thirty five years later (in 1969), Phlebas the Phoenician, who has merged with the one-eyed merchant, drowns in a whirlpool, drawing his symbolic meaning from the sea dogs of Scylla and the whirlpool of Charybdis. Since the dog is seen as a symbol of lust throughout Eliot's poem, lust is the reason behind the shipwreck.<sup>141</sup> In order to fight the superhuman monsters we have to keep a willed memory alert, like the interlocutors in the "cicada"

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<sup>140</sup> This method of constituting the hero coincides with the technique Seferis uses to construct the unknown and never before described image of the king of Asine, in his later poem of the same title (1938-40).

<sup>141</sup> See Robert Sencourt, *T.S. Eliot: A Memoir* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1971) p.38.

passage of the *Phaedrus* who tend to fall asleep in the afternoon heat, running the risk of falling into the permanent sleep of forgetfulness. In Platonic language, "anamnesis" protects man from self-annihilation by reminding him of the divine potential in him. Like Plato, Seferis assigns memory the task of keeping alive in the individual the mind and the imperishable qualities of the human soul.

Memory transforms the Homeric hero, (in lines 30-31), into a father figure<sup>142</sup> that the poet/speaker confuses with the modern bards of his childhood who, in turn, awaken the memory of a more recent past preserved through the folk epic of *Erotokritos*.<sup>143</sup>

The reference to "the unjust fate of Aretousa descending the marble stairs" [*την αντίδικη μοίρα της Αρετής να κατεβαίνει τα μαρμαρένια σκαλοπάτια*, 31-37] probably refers to the maiden's imprisonment in a dungeon by her cruel father, who did not approve of her beloved. The protagonist of another poem is inspired by Pirandello's

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<sup>142</sup> Odysseus is a paternal figure also in "Stratis the Sailor Describes a Man," an autobiographical poem written in 1932 and published in the collection *Book of Exercises* in 1940. As a young man, Stratis the Sailor, the poet's persona, sails for a year with captain Odysseus, who takes him to the prostitutes, symbolically leading him on an initiatory journey in quest for a love that is neither satisfactory nor fulfilling. But, "They told us you'll conquer when you love. / We loved and found ashes," the poet concludes bitterly.

<sup>143</sup> This romance tells of the "power of love" and of "the trials of arms," of the trials and tribulations of the love of Aretousa, the daughter of a king, and the valiant *Erotokritos* (his name derives from *eros*). In his essay on *Erotokritos*, Seferis writes that this poem had created for him an atmosphere of "a live mythology" that he was breathing in his childhood years. See "Erotokritos," in *Dokimes A'*, p. 269.

novel *The Late Mattia Pascal*, a character who, in an act of self-destruction had rejected love. He is portrayed descending the stairs, symbolically sinking into the underworld, avoiding the roses that surround him. Aretousa -- like Aphrodite, and Antigone -- represents love and the possibility of regeneration. Descending the stairs stands for debased love and the decline of senses and moral values, in general.<sup>144</sup> The fact that in the original the poet uses the name "Arete" (*Αρετή*), meaning "Virtue," instead of "Aretousa," the more popular version of the heroine's name which the translator prefers here, may be of significance. Endowing love with positive and negative meaning evokes the Heraclitean cosmic balance in which unity subsists in apparent opposites.

Like love, memory operates on several levels and has dual implications. First, there is the mythical level: The memory of Ithaca that keeps alive Odysseus's desire to return home. The kind of love that enables his homecoming is related to the Penelope whom you cannot forget, not to the Circe who lulls you into forgetfulness. The hero's love is not lust and submission to the excesses of the senses, but a deeper, enduring love that involves the whole person. Odysseus yearns to see "once more the smoke ascending from his warm hearth and the dog grown old waiting by the door. Odysseus' desire is a product of memory; it is generated by the remembrance of what he had seen once. The image

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<sup>144</sup> T.S. Eliot's "Prufrock" comes to mind:  
 And indeed there will be time  
 To wonder, "Do I dare?" and, "Do I dare?"  
 Time to turn back and descend the stair,  
 With a bald spot in the middle of my hair ...

of the smoke ascending evokes the ascent of the Platonic soul to the realm of the Forms which it had seen once and wants to see again. Odysseus's desire is "ripened by time." This is an example of remembering correctly. Only by remembering correctly and self-consciously, man can defeat forgetfulness and acquire a sense of control over time's annihilating power.

Then, there are the narrator's memories revived by the sailors nostalgically recounting, with tears in their eyes, the love story of "Erotokritos, and the resurrection of folk literature. Homer's epic and the seventeenth century Cretan poem illustrate the process of memory's awakening when it is touched by language.

Past and present -- personal and national -- are brought together through "words of our language spoken as it was three thousand years ago," and the Cretan dialect in which Kornaros' romance epic is written,<sup>145</sup> while the themes of loss, war, exile, scattering, give the poem a diachronic and universal character.

But memory, the pharmakon against non-existence, also brings "harsh pain." The Platonic image of the soul's wings nourished by love cannot grow without pain. The companions scattered and perished because

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<sup>145</sup> Being under Ottoman rule from 1453 to 1821, Greece had no part in the European Renaissance, while Europe, ironically, was re-discovering the Greek and Roman models. Whereas the Renaissance had favored Latin in the place of ancient Greek, the Greek modern writers maintained a direct contact with classical antiquity, bypassing the patterns of the Renaissance.

they avoided the pain of memory. To forget their sufferings, Helen's guests drink her mixed drugs and Odysseus' companions eat the lotus fruit. With the pain of memory, they also forget their humanness. This is what Seferis warns against. The identification of the self with a ship sails swelling with painful memories shows precisely that suffering is a condition for the arrival at one's destination.

Further on in our poem, the appearance of the "shade" of Odysseus to the speaker constitutes a reversal of the Homeric Nekyia scene, where the shades of the dead appear to Odysseus. The one who is raised now from death and talks offering his wisdom to the living is Odysseus. In the modern poem, the poet/narrator converses with the dead Odysseus and learns from him about love. Odysseus is thus given the place of Tiresias whose inner vision and wisdom he appropriates because of his ability to love. Knowledge is thus acquired through the repeated imaginary encounter with Odysseus, whom the speaker sees "again and again." In the last three lines "He speaks... I still see his hands... presenting me (*να μου χαρίζουν*) the waveless blue sea in the heart of winter" the continuous subjunctive denotes continuation and repetition. Since the poem does not specify any particular season of the year, the "heart of winter" acquires symbolic value.

In his prayer to God, the poet asks for a language to describe the experience of love. Speech and language are repeatedly stressed through sentences such as: "whispering ... words in our language spoken as it was..." (17-18), "he is coming to tell me" (38), "he speaks humbly and

calmly" (30), "to recite," he tells me" (38), "conversing with the dead" (39), "He speaks..." (46). The poet seeks a language not only to articulate the deeper emotions love stirs, but to resurrect the profound memory that helps him reconstruct identity and continuity. In a country like the poet's own, where the layers of historical memory reach great depths, myth and history, present in the same enduring landscape and the same language that have prevailed through the centuries, become the natural language of emotion that is the same language for life as it is for poetry. The "rhythm" that is love becomes an inner attribute, like language pre-existing man-imposed meaning.

Odysseus speaks humbly and with serenity (*ταπεινά και με γαλήνη*), without effort, in the language of the past that teaches like that of a father or a bard. Homer's Odysseus is proud of his guileful rhetoric and Dante's Ulysses is burning in hell because he had sinned by glibness of tongue, wasting the divine gift of speech. Seferis's version of Odysseus is a model of balance and metron. He is incapable of hubris against either love or speech. That's why he "speaks humbly." This Odysseus incarnates balance of the opposite tensions, and a perfect harmony of feeling, words, and actions, the last represented by his hands. Whereas Odysseus speaks, the narrator looks at the hero's hands -- a motif with which the poem begins and ends: "He speaks... I still see his hands that knew how to judge / the carving of the mermaid at the prow / presenting me the waveless blue sea in the heart of winter." Man's claim, Seferis suggests, should be modest. All a mortal can ask is serenity -- a respite from toil. This moment of serenity that comes

with knowledge is a fleeting vision of integration and unity; it is nothing more than a momentary glimpse of immortality, transfixed in poetic logos.

As already seen in "Reflections," the unity and balance the poet seeks comes as a result of the duality of his symbols. In the poetry of Seferis, this equilibrium takes the form of a "rhythm" of life and death, a cycle in which nothing is lost and where the poet seeks the seeds of some kind of permanence after our short and ephemeral existence. Odysseus and Elpenor, memory, love, light, death, blood, justice, the sea, the rose, the statues, swans and angels, are symbols nesting their opposites and striving for balance, as it happens in nature. The struggle of the Platonic charioteer to maintain a straight upward flight in spite of his horses pulling in opposite directions is the philosophical analogy of the struggle for unity and integration.

I will attempt to look into the nexus of opposites that maintain the balance the poet seeks. Such opposites can be seen in the Odysseus/Elpenor polarity, memory and forgetfulness, love and non-love, to mention only the most important for my context. What characterizes these ideas is that they are not separate or autonomous but interlocking concepts with no clear boundaries separating them, often defining one another. They are held together in a dynamic and creative whole by the tension between inner and outer forces and between tendencies within each one of them -- the kinds of harmony Heraclitus has called *apahnēs* and *palintonos*, respectively. The interaction of these conceptual

elements can only be described in terms of an integrated and uniting rhythm -- something like love. Through "transition," or "modulation," the poet tries to transfer on to poetry a purely musical phenomenon. Modulation is in music the passing from one tonality on to another. Seferis himself points to the difficulty of this method when applied to poetry: "It is not so much the verses," he writes "but certain combinations, certain transitions that exhaust me."<sup>146</sup> The interdependence of my thematic concerns makes it difficult to treat them separately and avoid, altogether, redundancy and overlapping.

#### a. Odysseus and Elpenor

If Odysseus is for Seferis the example of wholeness, measure, balance, and the correct use of memory. Elpenor is the opposite, the negative embodiment of all these concepts. The two mythical characters thus serve as representations of conflicting ideas. The youngest of Odysseus's companions is described by Homer as weak-hearted and foolish. Drunk and overcome by sleep, he loses his balance and falls to his death from Circe's roof. He is the first shade that appears to Odysseus, whom he begs to return to Circe's island and bury his dead body, planting an "oar" on his grave.<sup>147</sup> As in Homer's epic, in asking for a marked grave, Elpenor asks for an act of memory to counterbalance the disaster of death. This is what the modern poet asks of us.

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<sup>146</sup> *Days B'*, p. 42 (Aug. 24 1931-Feb. 12, 1934).

<sup>147</sup> *Odyssey* 11.77-78.

The youngest of Odysseus's companions represents lack of measure, weakness, scattering, and lower intellect. In "Thrush" he is called "My poor, idiotic Elpenor!" Elpenor is the incarnation of our natural desire to be remembered when we leave this world. In Seferis's poetry he is the symbol of forgetfulness and hedonism, a man who cannot keep his balance. Seferis takes the literal meaning of the word and transforms it into a metaphor that has moral implications.<sup>148</sup> Contrary to Odysseus, Elpenor is incapable of measure. Being at the mercy of his instincts, he is closely related to Circe, the goddess who transforms man into beast. Circe is the vehicle for the journey to the world of the dead. "Circe," writes Seferis, "the senses of the body, pleasure, sends us to the other world, to the dead who will show us nostos."<sup>149</sup> People are sent to the underworld by their uncontrolled sensuality, he says elsewhere, like Elpenor who "did not know how to control his carnal desires, and he went through the metamorphosis of a pig during the first days on Circe's island... his nostalgia is for the pigsty."<sup>150</sup> This weak companion is the incarnation of mediocrity, a truly un-heroic man of our times.

But flawed as his humanity may be, the Elpenor character is sympathetic to the poet:

I do not say lovable or admirable, I say sympathetic,  
sentimental, mediocre, wasted... He symbolizes those to whom we

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<sup>148</sup> Intertextual embedding often relies on a transposition or reversal of figurative and literal speech. See Laurent Jenny, "The Strategy of Form." *French Literary Theory Today*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, New York, 1982), pp. 34-63, esp. 41.

<sup>149</sup> Seferis, "A Staging for 'Thrush.' *Dokimes B'*, pp. 49-50.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid*, p. 37.

refer in daily conversation with the expression: 'the poor devil.' However, let us not forget that these guileless men, exactly because they are 'easy,' are often the best carriers of an evil which has its source elsewhere."<sup>151</sup>

Elpenor's presence in the poetry of Seferis can be traced to his early poems "The Companions in Hades" and "Denial" of the "Turning Point" collection (1932). Later we find him in poem 4 of "Mythistorema," and in "Thrush." He appears either as an individual or as a collective character. Odysseus's companions were scattered in the elements because they did not respect the oxen of the sun as Tiresias had warned. They abused the light. In the symbolic language of Seferis, they offended love and mocked self-knowledge. They died *ανίδεοι και χορτάτοι*, mindless and with a full belly.<sup>152</sup> They are guilty of hubris committed against the moral balance of things and against *metron*, therefore they had to

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<sup>151</sup> *Dokimes B'*, p. 41 and Foreword n. 5, p. 502.

<sup>152</sup> "The Companions in Hades" uses an epigraph borrowed from the opening lines of *The Odyssey*:

*νήπιοι, οἱ κατὰ βοῦς ὕπερίονος Ἥελίοιο  
ἤσθιον· αὐτὰρ ὁ τοῖσιν δφείλετο νόστιμον ἡμᾶρ.  
(Odyssey I, 8-9).*

[The blind fools, they devoured the cattle of the Sungod  
and the Sungod blotted out the day of their return]  
(R. Fagles translation)

Homer attributes to the sacrilege the failure of Odysseus's companions to achieve *nostos*. Discussing this association in his essay "Seferis's Elpenor," Edmund Keeley notes: "The hedonistic violation of the just order of things literally precludes the return of these modern Elpenors to a lost Paradise. The implication is that no man can aspire toward spiritual liberation until he learns to control his animal appetites, the beast in him that Homer's Circe exploited so cruelly. *The Kenyon Review* (Summer 1966) 389.

pay. "They are not heroes, they are Elpenors,"<sup>153</sup> he says, and as such they are caught in an absurd world which hands them an absurd justice: to be forgotten. There is no redemption in memory for them:

*Their oars / mark the place where they sleep on the shore.  
No one remembers them. Justice.*

(Mythistorema 4)

It is just that they perish.<sup>154</sup>

The "Argonauts" subtitle of this poem identifies Odysseus's companions with Jason's. Seferis often refers to "the companions, by a sweeping generalization transforming the word into a metaphor for the qualities of all who are weak, slaves to their desires, and incapable to reconcile mind and body. The first person plural pronoun in the "Elpenor" poems -- a trait of Seferis's diction -- also enlists the poet himself in this category.<sup>155</sup> In fact, Seferis seems to have seen himself as struggling to harmonize his "*sensualité*" with his "*cérébralité*."<sup>156</sup> The poem "Denial," a contra-rima from the same collection ("Turning Point"), is one more example evoking images of

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<sup>153</sup> Seferis, "A Staging for 'The Thrush,' *Dokimes B'*, p.39.

<sup>154</sup> Seferis, *Days 5*, p. 54. A different view is expressed by L.V. Karapanayotis who does not see "Justice," this isolated word in the middle of a line, as a statement but as a voice of protest, or irony. L.V. Karapanayotis, "Mythistorema '61: A Reading," *Για τον Σεφέρη* [For Seferis], (Athens, n.p.) 215-230, esp. 224.

<sup>155</sup> Concerning Elpenor, the poet, significantly, comments: "Elpenor is me, as Bouvard and Pécuchet are Flaubert... [He] belongs to me as much as the color which the chameleon shows belongs to itself. Seferis, "A Staging for "Thrush," *Dokimes B'*, p. 41.

<sup>156</sup> Seferis, *Days B'*, p. 65.

thirst for an unnamed love that ends in frustration.<sup>157</sup> The protagonists are "Elpenors" who are involved in the drama of life, blindly without awareness, without love, or entangled in a complicated and destructive love relationship. The Elpenor theme, linked with the denial of *nostos*, excess, oblivion, and the decline of the senses expresses what Seferis calls "unauthentic life."

Seferis's modern wanderer is neither Odysseus nor Elpenor, but a combination of the two. The two characters exemplify the simultaneous existence in contemporary man of the noble and the base, the godlike potential for elevation and achievement of purpose and the all human tendency to succumb to lust and excess. These aspects exist undifferentiated in us as contraries in the perpetual strife for harmony.

#### **b. Memory and forgetfulness**

Torn by his tendency to forget and his need to preserve his bonds with the past, man is constantly tossed and hurled between these two poles of mental activity. For the poet, memory becomes a means of controlling time, history, and the fight within the individual, of

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<sup>157</sup> This poem became extremely popular since Mikis Theodorakis put it to music and endowed by the public with anti-dictatorship sentiments. It was sung at Seferis's funeral by thousands of young people voicing through its verses their protest against the military régime that had taken power in 1967. The poet had denounced the junta in a public statement issued on March 28, 1969.

resurrecting love, and creating art. Since Homer and his Muse, daughter of *Mnemosyne*, memory has been related to timelessness and immortality. Capable of moving both inside and outside temporal duration, memory allows freedom from "recorded time," to remember Shakespeare, which is precisely what the poet needs to create that brief moment of knowledge: the knowledge of death which comes at the moment of death and therefore is freedom from time. Memory affords the poet to be rooted in historical reality and also use it to show the possibility of a renewed sense of present. It becomes a model of transcendence and unity. But memory is also wilted by time which kills the senses and reduces the activity of the mind. It is often prompted by our conscious decision to forget, for we repress the memory of what is painful. Man is ambivalent between memory and forgetfulness, between a spontaneous, Proustian memory and a willed act of recreating an experience sunk in oblivion. On the other hand, the need to remember places suffering among the unavoidable consequences of the human condition.

All the above dimensions activated through intertextual images motifs and transitions from one thing remembered to another, describe the rhythm of life, the same rhythm that describes love. It is a rhythm that is conscious and unconscious at the same time, spontaneous and logical. It can be explained in logical terms or in terms of a foggy sensation, such as the bitter taste of injustice,

... A thought that is nourished by nothing new, but is made of memories, the most ardent nostalgia, and the sense of injustice that swells and drowns you. Nothing can name this condition better than Aeschylus's verse which roams in my mind since

yesterday: Still there drips in sleep against the heart /  
grief of memory.<sup>158</sup>

It "hurts wherever you touch it" the poet says ("Memory I"). It resembles the poisoned shirt of Nessus on your body, and is described as a nightmare:

I woke with this marble head in my hands; / it exhausts my elbows  
and I don't know where to put it down.. I look at the eyes:  
neither open nor closed / I speak to the mouth which keeps trying  
to speak... My hands disappear and come toward me mutilated.  
("Mythistorema 4").

Orestes's hands -- as contemporary man's -- cannot carry the weight of an inherited curse, a mutilated past, which appears in the form of a /marble head, representing life and history immortalized by art. It is a past from which the poet can neither free himself nor communicate with. Tormenting suppressed memories operate on all levels. They are linked to a childhood that was lost, ancient glories that vanished, moral values that cannot be regained, and painful war experiences we want to forget. At the same time, it represents the keen awareness of our short existence, the purpose of which evades us. The interaction of memory and love emphasizes further the qualities inherent

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<sup>158</sup> See *Days 4* (9.22.1941) p. 130. The last line, *Στάζει δ' ἀνθ' ὕπνου πρὸ καρδίας μνησιπήμων πόνος*, is taken from *Agamemnon* 179-180). The same line appears also in "Last Stop," a poem written while the poet was still in exile with the Greek Government, which had fled upon the Nazi invasion.

*And if I talk to you in fables and parables  
it's because it's more gentle for you that way; and horror  
really can't be talked about because it's alive,  
because it's mute and goes on growing:  
memory-wounding pain  
drips by day drips in sleep.*

in these concepts. Memory is associated with the disillusionment following a love relationship that could not defeat the passage of time. The end of a love relationship is often a self-conscious decision to forget. The only possible love is, in fact, the memory of a rhythm that emulates the short-lived happiness in love: "Red rose of the wind and of fate, / you remained in memory only, a heavy rhythm."

But for all the agony it generates, memory is the path that leads also to the discovery of love and of the "miracle" that reverses, if momentarily, the impact of time. The awakening of memory is lyrically expressed in "Erotikos Logos:"

The secrets of the sea are forgotten on the shores  
 the darkness of the depths is forgotten in the surf;  
 the corals of memory suddenly shine purple ...  
 O do not stir ... listen to hear its light

motion ... you touched the tree with the apples  
 the hand reached out, the thread points the way and guides you...  
 O dark shivering in the roots and the leaves  
 if it were but you who would bring the forgotten dawn!

The repeated caesuras and strong enjambment stress the emotion that the recovery of a forgotten moment of love arouses.

Among the poet's created symbols that activate memory are the gramophones that bring back the voice of dead friends. They function like a mirror that gives back the reflection of our decay as also exemplified in the image of the statues and the ruins, dominant symbols of Seferis's poetry. All these are examples of the different dimensions of memory, reminders of decay but also of endurance through time of a dead past that foretells our future presence in a world from which we

will be absent. Gramophones are true incarnations of memory. They function in the present but use material from the past; they create a moment of permanence -- an instance of immortality in which time stops. In this respect memory functions like love: it "cuts time in two." The way love can transcend time because it is an innate immortal quality of the human soul, so memory functions outside temporal duration, achieving freedom from time, necessary for a moment of epiphany, after which everything returns to the present.

Memory brings forth fragments of thought, life, and feeling that have to be meaningfully connected by the remembering individual, as if he were the reader of a text. It reminds the way intertextuality and music operate. It is touched by language with which it grows together in the dark corner of the soul, "at the root of a cry, there where one starts shouting "mother" or "help" or there where the small white cries of love" are born ("Matthios Paschalis among the Roses"). It is related to love. For Seferis language, love, and memory are offsprings of the deepest side of the human soul where mind and emotion meet.

The opening lines of "Mythistorema 1 (1935), written three years after the last lines of "Erotikos Logos, attempt to unite past and present time through memory awakened by language.

The Angel [τον άγγελο]  
 three years we waited intently for him...  
 we were searching to rediscover the first seed  
 so that the ancient drama could begin again.

"Angel" [ἄγγελος] is an ancient word that has survived through time into the modern Greek vocabulary constituting, like many others, an example of continuity with the past, which the poet exploits for his purposes. Whereas in classical Greek the word means "messenger," the actor who brings the news of death and disaster in Greek tragedy, its modern Greek meaning, while maintaining the ancient meaning, also refers to the angel, the Christian messenger of love and redemption. Classical and Christian, the two great traditions that took root in Greece, are here united in a word that fuses antiquity, Byzantium, and contemporary times retaining all the semantic and emotional layers of its diachronic meaning.<sup>159</sup> Such words, examples of endurance through time and of verbal economy, are the "messengers" who touch our profoundest memory and emerge on the surface with a specific halo around them.<sup>160</sup> Contrary to the effort of modernist texts to rid their language of the weight of tradition by collapsing syntax and destroying the linearity of the text, in the poetry of Seferis language and tradition become mirrors of each other. The fragmentation that characterizes this poet's work comes from the content rather than the textual dimension of his art.

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<sup>159</sup> In an essay explaining the poet's method of "charging the word," Alkis Angelou, using the word "ἄγαλμα" [statue], suggests that Seferis's method consists in two functions: a) the technical (emphatic juxtaposition of the highly symbolic with the literal meaning of the word) and b) the contextual (playing off a word against a meaning which the poet assigns it through repetition. The word, even when it is isolated from its content, retains the meaning the poet assigns it, without transporting us into an irrational or unrealistic realm. See "Ἡ φόρτιση της λέξης στον ποιητισμό του Σεφέρη." [The charging of the word in the poetry of Seferis]. *Χρονικό 1972* [Chroniko 1972] 16-20.

<sup>160</sup> Seferis, *Dokimes B'*, p. 178.

Words awakening the memory of a dead past is the subject of "The King of Asine," in which the poet tries to find what, if anything, is left beneath the "gold cover of our existence" in the country "with the ancient monuments and the contemporary sorrow," as Seferis's famous line goes. He seeks to define the "void" inside the poet, the "selva oscura" before he can name things and thus create them in his own voice. It is the moment the poet can say "let there be light" and light is created.<sup>161</sup> Based on a word from the description of the gathering of the Achaean ships in book II of the *Iliad*, the poet strives to resurrect this minor king:

we've been trying to find for two years now,  
 unknown, forgotten by all, even by Homer,  
 only one word in the *Iliad* and that uncertain,  
 thrown here like the gold burial mask.  
 You touched it, remember its sound? ...  
 The king of Asine a void under the mask  
 everywhere with us everywhere with us, under a name:  
 Ασίνην τε... Ασίνην τε...

The existential agony is illustrated by the emphatic anaphora and the repeated echo of the words *υπάρχει, υπάρχει, υπάρχουν, ύπαρξης* [exist, exist, exist, existence]:

does there really exist  
 among these ruined lines, edges, points, hollows, and curves  
 does there really exist  
 here where one meets the path of rain, wind, and ruin  
 does there exist the movement of the face, shape of the  
 tenderness  
 of those who've remained the shadow of waves and thoughts...  
 or perhaps no, nothing is left but the weight  
 the nostalgia for the weight of a living existence...

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid, p. 164.

The uncertainty surrounding the possibility of leaving a memory behind us includes the poet and his work:

... or perhaps no, nothing is left but the weight  
 the nostalgia for the weight of a living existence<sup>162</sup>  
 there where we now remain unsubstantial...  
 image of a form that the sentence to everlasting bitterness  
 has turned to stone:  
 the poet a void.

The poet is actually forgotten. All that is left is his art:

Your life is what you gave,  
 this void is what you gave:  
 the white sheet of paper.

("Summer Solstice, 8")

Memory enables art and immortalizes. Trying to resurrect both the forgotten king of Asine and Homer the poet urges us to remember. Starting with the sound of a word, he slowly turns the mythical fragment into a mental image, naming and thereby creating the king's large eyes, curved lips and curls.<sup>163</sup> By mentioning his imaginary children who became statues, his desires and thoughts which have now become the fluttering of birds, the poet endows him with emotions, going far beyond the Homeric scanty image of the king. The words are transformed into a

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<sup>162</sup> Only when Dante steps aboard the skiff of Phlegyas, the Boatman of Styx, does the boat settle into the water under his human weight (*Inferno*, VIII. 27-28).

<sup>163</sup> This artistic function of memory reminds Cavafy's "Kaisarion," in which the poet creates the image of the young son of Cleopatra:

Because so little is known about you from history,  
 I could fashion you more freely in my mind.  
 I made you good-looking and sensitive."  
*C.P. Cavafy: Collected Poems.*, Edmund Keeley and Philip Sherrard, trans.,  
 George Savidis, ed., (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975).

character, as the portrayal is complete with even a soul with which the ancient bard was unconcerned:

Shieldbearer, the sun climbed warring,  
and from the depths of the cave a startled bat  
hit the light as an arrow hits a shield:  
*Ασίνην ρε... Ασίνην ρε...* Would that it were the king of Asine  
we've been searching for so carefully on this acropolis  
sometimes touching with our fingers his touch upon the stones.

The two forgotten words, "*Ασίνην ρε*" repeated twice, imitate the sound of a startled bat dashing out of the cave of oblivion into the vibrant light of the Greek landscape. As with Odysseus in "Reflections," the resurrection is achieved through the sound of language (an ancient language which had existed before the poet) which now takes life from a real, living landscape: that of the citadel of Asine, near Argos, in which the poet is reportedly present. The word "touching," a key-word in Seferis repeated here twice, restates the poet's belief that "our ancient ancestors are part of our deep memory, a memory that has to be touched by the word to turn alive,"<sup>164</sup> while exemplifying the process of transmutation of the language of tradition into art.

The duality of memory is reflected in the ambiguous title of the poem "*Η Απόφαση της Λησμονιάς*" -- literally "the Decision of Forgetfulness" -- originally translated by Keeley and Sherrard as "The Decision to Forget" and later corrected to read: "The Decision to be Forgotten."<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> Seferis, "The Language in our Poetry" *Dokimes B*, 'p. 163ff.

<sup>165</sup> The title was borrowed from a phrase from "Mythistorema 7," rendered in English: "*Who will calculate for us the cost of our decision to forget?*"

Like the poet, so language and the past, sources of wisdom, should not be buried in an unmarked grave, Elpenor's nightmare. This failure of memory which is tantamount to death is what the poet urges us to fight against:

Those who will some day live here where we end --

.....  
let them not forget us, the weak souls among the asphodels,  
let them turn the heads of the victims towards Erebus:

We who had nothing will teach them peace.

("Mythistorema 24").

The "Decision to Forget"<sup>166</sup> begins with an invitation to the passerby, victim of forgetfulness, to stand before the calm lake and remember the myth of the swans "that slaughtered the village girls." The poem, written between 1939 and 1940, alludes, as suggested by a number of critics, to the Nazi invasion of Europe and the unbridled violence of war:

And night suddenly tightened around [the swans'] arched necks  
which didn't sing because there was no way to die  
but beat, threshing men's bones  
blindly. And their wings cooled the terror.

Our only possible reaction to the terror of history is engraving the experience in our memory, which is compared to the function of art. Our inability to control the destruction is to consider our power of "carving a few signs on the stones / which now have touched the depths under memory." Whereas Plato creates a memory, the supreme knowledge to

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<sup>166</sup> A detailed analysis of the poem appears in Nora Anagnostaki's "Ο Σεφέρης της Μνήμης και της Λησμονιάς" [Seferis of Memory and Forgetfulness] from which I'm borrowing here. In *Για τον Σεφέρη* [For Seferis], pp 231-142.

which man can keep returning in his effort to create a new life detached from the past, Seferis uses the memory of the past, and art, as a source of knowledge with the purpose of controlling and improving the quality of his present and future life.

The poem ends by apostrophizing, once again, the passer-by who is unaware of the drama of life and death buzzing in his veins which is compared to the sacrifice of life, necessary for life to go on:

--- stop, passer-by,  
beside the still lake with the spotless swans  
that travel like the white tatters through your mind  
and waken you to things you lived yet don't remember.

Nor do you remember as you read our characters on the stones;  
even so you're astonished together with your sheep  
that emerge your body with their wool  
now that you feel in your veins a sound of sacrifice.

The only way out of the impasse is remembering and with the poet's help translating our vague or confused memories into meaning. Like Plato, Seferis invites the reader, victim of forgetfulness, to transform a memory without shape into self-knowledge. The apostrophe to the passer-by brings to mind the statue of the bronze maiden on the tomb of Midas, who has no voice and relies on a reader to make meaning out of the epigraph.<sup>167</sup> The preservation of memory is the poet's mission, as is suggested by Hölderlin's line which Seferis uses as an epigraph to this collection: (*Logbook I*): "... and what is the use of poets in a mean-spirited [*dürftig*] time?"<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> *Phaedrus*, 264C-E.

<sup>168</sup> Hölderlin, "Bread and Wine".

The swan is related to the poet and the poem, memory and oblivion. For Seferis it also becomes the symbol of violence and death.<sup>169</sup> The bird's spotless wings wound us ("Mythistorema I"); Kyknos (the Greek word for "swan") was, after all, the son of Ares, god of war. The swan is also associated with Helen, a symbol of war and destructive love. She was born from the union of Leda and Zeus, who transformed himself into a Swan. The intensity of the symbol results from the intrinsic tension between smoothness and violence, purity and blood, and provides another example of the strife that maintains justice in the natural and moral order of the world. The point is to remember correctly, the poet reminds us:

He who will rediscover life ... will be someone like us, only with a slightly tougher memory. We ourselves can't help still remembering what we've given. He'll remember only what he's gained from each of his offerings" ("Man").

But who can remember correctly besides Odysseus? "... A flame," the poet says:<sup>170</sup>

If it remembers a little less than is necessary, it goes out; if it remembers a little more than is necessary, it goes out. If only it could teach us, while it burns, to remember correctly..."

("Mr. Stratis Thalassinos Describes a Man")

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<sup>169</sup> "The swans, whom I have always treated as very cruel creatures, are revengeful," writes Seferis. See Alex. Argyriou. "Γιώργος Σεφέρης, Ποιητική τέχνη και ιστορία", [George Seferis, Poetic Art and history] *Κύκλος Σεφέρη* [Seferis Cycle] pp. 45-46. The swan appears as a powerful symbol in Yeats, Mallarmé, and Rilke.

<sup>170</sup> One could detect here an intertextual affinity with Dante, whom Seferis read constantly but without the moral implications of the Florentine's allegorical verse. In Canto XXVI of the *Inferno*, Ulysses appears (with Diomedes) in hell, burning in the guilty conscience of his glib tongue.

In the same poem, he explains why:

The body dies the water clouds the soul hesitates  
and the wind forgets always forgets  
but the flame doesn't change." <sup>171</sup>

If correctly used, memory is the weapon against change. The failure of memory is a principal source of evil and the cause of various social and political ills throughout Seferis's poetry, against which Seferis gives warnings.<sup>172</sup> But perhaps his most ardent plea to remember correctly comes in "Salamis of Cyprus" of "Logbook III":

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...<sup>173</sup>

To which, a contemporary Elpenor retorts:

--... it's better to forget;  
talking doesn't do any good;  
who can change the attitude of those with power?

The poem's dialogue ends with a prophecy recalling, once again, Aeschylus's "Persians" and the destruction of Xerxes at Salamis:

-- True. But the messenger moves swiftly,  
and however long his journey, he'll bring  
to those who tried to shackle the Hellespont  
the terrible news from Salamis.

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<sup>171</sup> Three of the Heraclitean elements that compose the universe and are responsible for its constant renewal are present here: Fire, water, air (the fourth is earth). Cosmic fire is the great force in which everything must be consumed in order to assume a new form of existence.

<sup>172</sup> See for instance: "In the Manner of G.S.," "An Old Man on the River Bank," "Salamis in Cyprus," "On Aspalathoi."

<sup>173</sup> The poet explains in a note that he took this "prayer" from the ship of Commander Lord Hugh Beresford, R.N., who fell in the battle of Crete.

Fusing the ancient Salamis, where Xerxes was defeated by the Greeks, with contemporary Cyprus, where the poet had experienced war and injustice, Seferis fuses myth and history with the Aeschylean and Pre-socratic notion of justice in the sense of a debt that has to be paid every time measure is threatened. What the "terrible news of Salamis" teach is that self-knowledge is made possible through "correct" memory, which, like Platonic "anamnesis" is related to the soul's participation in knowledge.

### c. Love and non-love

Love is the announced object of the poet's quest. And it is a fact, as many instances show, that what we call eroticism weighs much on the nostalgia and man's effort to reach an ultimate redemption, which some call a return to a lost paradise and others a union with god.<sup>174</sup> Its unique power comes from its immortal nature and its capacity to unite the agents of separation -- violence, tyranny, war and injustice - - harmonizing them. Love, treated both on the referential level and as an abstraction, stands for the human ability for feeling. of both our humanity and our immortality. The quest for love is a quest for a balance between the perishable and the eternal. In the poetry of Seferis love appears to be a composite of several conflicting ideas and symbols striving for balance.

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<sup>174</sup> Seferis, ' "A Staging for "Thrush," in *Dokimes B'*, pp. 49-50.2

The speaker can only define love in terms of a "rhythm" which describes a feeling rather than an actual experience. Through the poem's transitions and modulations, however, love appears as a larger rhythm which encompasses justice and symbols such as the light, the house, the sea, all in their positive and negative aspects. Seferis's symbols do not have a single, unequivocal meaning; otherwise his poetry would be a two-dimensional didactic allegory. His symbols representing dramatized instances of the theme, embody its fundamental paradox. Seferis's method is comparable to Eliot's in *The Waste Land*, in which dual symbols dominate.

A positive vision of love is very rare in Seferis -- "Reflections" is an exception because Odysseus is an integrated personality therefore capable of loving. Love in Seferis's poems is usually crippled by the passage of time and wilted by habit. It erupts through memory as wasted, betrayed, or abused and a human relationship as a short moment of remembered happiness, or the mental image of a woman suddenly interrupting the speaker's thought to be forgotten immediately after ("Mythistorema 7," and "16"). On the level of abstraction, love stands for our ability to be whole. It represents human dignity, moral elevation, and respect for life and man. Abusing the natural gift of love constitutes injustice and hubris.

Like Plato, Seferis distinguishes between selfish love, or lust, and *agape*, the opening up to the other. The passage of time and our tendency to forget cripples the ability for feeling, turning

contemporary men into statues with blind eyes and amputated limbs, symbolic of the decline of the senses. The keen awareness of this bitter experience results in a sense of guilt emanating from the conviction that we are unable to love and that we are trapped in a circle from which no escape is possible:

If someone is born the circle will widen  
 if someone dies the circle will shrink .....  
 if we were to love, the circle would break,  
 we'd close our eyelashes a second  
 But we can't love.

(Wednesday)

Sartre's hell, in *A Huis Clos*, recreated through eyes that cannot blink in a pitiless artificial light comes to mind.

Chinese philosophy was crucial in Seferis's conception of love as justice and balance. He had read I.A. Richards' book *Mencius on the Mind*<sup>175</sup> dealing with the theories of Meng Tzu (372-289), the Chinese philosopher second in importance after Confucius, who believes in the power of good will as the only force that can harmonize the centrifugal tendencies of the body and of the soul that enable love and justice to reign. Man's happiness is contingent upon his good will and his ability to keep the opposite forces in balance. If justice, or inner harmony, reigns, then love and the external order of things will be maintained. Justice is not the achievement of an external order of things but the attainment of an inner harmony that will lead to this order. Ancient Chinese orthodoxy on matters of ethical and social order moves around two basic notions: that of love (*jen*) and that of justice (*yi*).

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<sup>175</sup> Seferis, "Notes on 'Thrush,' in *A Poet's Journal*, p. 42.

Injustice is the disruption of this balance; it is equated to the overstepping of measure that leads to hubris.<sup>176</sup> Mencius refers to love as "the serene house of man," a phrase Seferis quotes in his *Diary*.<sup>177</sup>

As love applies to the narrower, personal experience but also retains a wider abstract meaning, so justice in Seferis -- identified with love -- goes beyond its narrow social ends, that can be achieved through judgement and punishment, to a higher system of moral equilibrium. In this sense, justice is comparable to the Heraclitean cycle of life and death regulated by time: "Death has its own justice" ("Mythistorema 21")-- an absurd but nevertheless logical justice. The companions are caught between such a justice and their human desire to be remembered, but, "no one remembers them. Justice." Death and oblivion, after all, are necessary for the ever-renewed human sacrifice to time. This idea is taken up again in "Three Secret Poems"(1966), where old age and decay become synonyms of justice and art the means to redeem what time destroyed.

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

.....

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

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<sup>176</sup> See Nasos Vayenas. *The Poet and the Dancer*. Athens: Kedros, 1990, pp. 177-178 and 277. For a discussion of this influence on Seferis see also Mario Vitti's *Φθορά και Λόγος: Εισαγωγή στην Ποίηση του Γιώργου Σεφέρη* [Decay and Logos: An Introduction to the Poetry of George Seferis] (Athens: Hestia, 1989), pp.232-233.

<sup>177</sup> Seferis, *Days 5*, p. 54.

On the other hand, death constitutes injustice: "We sink in oblivion without the right even to choose our own death, or, "we found ourselves naked, holding / the scales that tipped towards injustice" (Santorini). Or, "Just a moment, who am I going to play? Who will I kill? / And these people looking at me -- / What will make them believe that justice protects me?" ("Saturday"). While espousing the Heraclitean conception of "debt" as a component of justice,<sup>178</sup> the poet admits the impossibility for human reason to accept death without the bitter feeling of one who suffers injustice. In perceiving death both as justice and injustice, Seferis was subscribing to the views of both Heraclitus and Anaximander who saw strife leading to death as justice and as injustice, respectively. At the same time he is attempting an act of reconciliation with death.

Among the array of dual symbols that define love, the most important perhaps is the sea. First in the list of nouns, the word "sea" occurs 80 times in the Seferian corpus.<sup>179</sup> It is not a coincidence that the poet chose the name "Logbook I, II, and III, for three of his major collections, and the name of Stratis Thalassinos (Stratis the Mariner) for one of his *dramatis personae*. The "Mythistorema" sequence ends with the identification of the sea with love: "Here end the works

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<sup>178</sup> "... And if catastrophe is to fall upon me, let it fall as it / is right -- in justice," writes Seferis in a poem which appeared only in his *Diary*. See *Days 3*, 1934-1940, pp. 193-94.

<sup>179</sup> See X.A. Kokolis, "Πίνακας Λέξεων των 'Ποιημάτων' του Γιώργου Σεφέρη" [Concordance of George Seferis's 'Poems'] (Athens: Hermes, 1975). The word *αγάπη* [love], it should be noted, occurs 33 times, while *eros* only three. *Μνήμη* [memory] appears 23 times and *δικαιοσύνη* [justice] three.

of the sea, the works of love." As already said, the sea is a result of strife as the poet's favorite example from Aeschylus's *The Persians* shows. The sea stands for such warring opposites as love and death, mother and death, serenity and strife; it is the unreachable and inexhaustible means of *nostos*, yet the only one that makes the journey possible. The identification of love with the journey is clearly established by the poet:

The first thing God made is love  
 then comes the blood  
 and the thirst for blood  
 roused by the body's sperm as by salt.  
 The first thing God made is the long journey."

("Stratis Thalassinos among the Agapanthi"<sup>180</sup>).

The identification of love with the sea and death finds its ultimate expression in the mythical character of the Aeschylean Clytemnestra. In "Reflections" we saw, through Odysseus, love and sea in their positive symbolism. To show their negative aspects, the poet turns to Aeschylus and to a different return myth -- that of Agamemnon. Agamemnon is himself a victim of a cruel fate and of his own *Ate*, and therefore has to pay a price for his hubris. Unlike Odysseus, he returned home an arrogant war hero, bringing along Cassandra, Apollo's priestess, as his slave-concubine. He was unmindful of the hubris he had committed in sacrificing Iphigenia, leading a war with countless dead, and offending Apollo. In *Agamemnon*, Clytemnestra, patiently waiting to take revenge, spreads out under the feet of her returning husband the

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<sup>180</sup> "Agapanthi" are the African lilies. The word means "flowers of love."

red carpet, symbol of his hubris, before slaughtering him. Clytemnestra's cry "the sea, the sea, who will be able to drain it",<sup>181</sup> becomes in Seferis's poetry a haunting echo of the primordial drama of blood vengeance, hubris and retribution; it is life and death *toujours recommencés*, like Valéry's sea.

Most characteristically in this respect, we see Clytemnestra in "Mythistorema 16," which depicts Orestes at the moment of his return, following Apollo's admonition, with the purpose of killing his mother. The poem's epigraph "*The name is Orestes*," taken from Sophocles's *Electra*, refers to the story the pedagogue tells Clytemnestra: that Orestes had been killed in a chariot race at the Pythian games. His purpose is to create an alibi for Orestes and thus thwart suspicion. Seferis uses the lie of the pedagogue to dramatize Orestes' dilemma. Here is an excerpt from "Mythistorema 16".

The name is Orestes

On the track, on the track again, on the track,  
how many times around, how many blood-stained laps

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<sup>181</sup> This line is taken from Clytemnestra's speech encouraging Agamemnon to tread on the crimson carpet and thus justify his death:

*There is the sea  
and who will drain it dry? Precious as silver,  
inexhaustible, ever-new, it breeds the more we reap it --  
tides of tides of crimson dye our robes blood-red.*

(Agamemnon 958-960).  
(Robert Fagles translation)

The ostensible connection between the sea and the carpet lies in the fact that shellfish from the sea furnish the crimson dye for the coloring of the tapestries.

.....  
 When will the reins break, when will the hooves  
 tread flush on the ground  
 on the soft grass, among the poppies  
 where, in the spring, you picked a daisy.  
 They were lovely, your eyes, but you didn't know where to look  
 nor did I know where to look, I, without a country,  
 I who go on struggling here, how many times around?  
 .....

no one can escape, there's no point in being strong, you  
 can't escape the sea that cradled you and that you search for  
 at this time of trial, with the horses panting,  
 .....

the sea you cannot find no matter how you run  
 no matter how you circle past the black, bored Eumenides,  
 unforgiven.

Orestes is trapped inside a circle that cannot be broken because he is involved in a loveless act, the endless drama of murder and revenge. The transformation of the tragic hero for the poet's purposes begins with a hypothesis: If Orestes had in fact been killed at this chariot race, as the pedagogue says, there would be no matricide. The lie of the tutor becomes a situation that the hero experiences in seeking his death at the race that would save him from murdering his mother. matricide. Whatever the result, Orestes can only move between death and murder. The agony of the racer and the violence of the race end suddenly on the grass when grammar shifts to the second person and memory turns momentarily to a love scene: "... but you didn't know where to look / nor did I know where to look...". Seferis often uses this image of lovers lowering their eyes in uneasiness, confusion, and a sense of guilt, because they cannot save their love from the decay of the senses, and themselves from self-exile, as the sudden shift to "I without a country," in the next line, suggests. Such scenes show the failure of love and memory to achieve wholeness and unity, for the

lovers are Elpenors. The drama of Orestes -- his inability to love and to break the circle of non-love is the drama of the individual of our times trapped in violence, war, and fate -- the debt to be paid to time.

The sea that "cradled" Orestes is Clytemnestra, the mother in her dual incarnation as the source of love and the life-giving principle, on the one hand, and her primal identification with death, on the other. Orestes and contemporary man cannot escape this double call of blood that the mother represents in the primordial drama that bores the Furies with its endless repetition.<sup>182</sup> On the other hand, he cannot find this sea, the "waveless blue sea" of "Reflections" as love and serenity, since inescapable death is waiting for him. For what else is living our life day by day than seeking our death? In another poem, the sea follows the poet wherever he goes: "... I climbed the slope and the sea came after me," writes the poet,<sup>183</sup> whereas elsewhere, he regrets that he "didn't follow the sea" ("Thursday"). The sea is inexhaustible for it contains birth and death at the same time. After all, life and death are one and the same thing, as Heraclitus says. Clytemnestra's agonizing

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<sup>182</sup> Gabriel García Márquez illustrates the relation between mother and son in terms of a blood call through an extraordinary image: When José Arcadio is murdered, mysteriously, in his bathroom, a thread of his blood rolls under the door and through houses, steps, and terraces finds his mother Ursula, who follows it back to a house she had never been before to find her son dead. *Cien Años de Soledad* [One Hundred Years of Solitude], (Barcelona: Plaza & Janes, S.A., 1975) pp. 129-30.

<sup>183</sup> "In the Manner of G.S." [the initials stand for George Seferis]. In the same poem, the sea is identified with the dead and the negation of *nostos*, through a line taken from Aeschylus ( *Κι' ἄν "ὄρωμεν ἀνθούην πέλαγος Αἰγαῖον νεκροῖς," Agamemnon 659*): "Meanwhile Greece goes on traveling, always traveling / and if we see 'the Aegean flower with corpses' / it will be with those who tried to catch the big ship / by swimming after it / those who got tired waiting for the ships that cannot move..."

question, "ἔστιν θάλασσα -- τις δέ νιν κατασβέσει;" [the sea, who is going to exhaust it?] keeps coming back, obsessively, in "Mythistorema 20," in "Monday," and in "Wednesday." As a chain of related or antithetical meanings activate one another, the symbol is charged with opposite meanings that deepen it. The poet's quest for love is a quest for an answer that would balance off, in language, these conflicting definitions of the human predicament and make some compromise with it.

But like the sea, love and its metonymic substitutions cannot be exhausted. Besides its identification with the sea and all the sea stands for, love is ultimately symbolized by light, and therefore identified with knowledge. The absence of love, and our inability to love, are often related to blindness, the absence of light and the decline and death of the senses. In "Monday" we see a crowd of blind people sleeping among the asphodels, the flowers of the dead. Everything around them has turned into marble and "the river doesn't roll, it has forgotten the sea/ and yet there is the sea and who will drain it dry?" These people are blind because they are involved in the drama of life without awareness, without love, or entangled in a complicated and destructive love relationship. They are like Odysseus's companions, "the blind fools, who ate the Sun's cattle and lost their homecoming. The poet's longing for a simple love is articulated in "Saturday:"

O could we only love  
 like bees at least  
 not like pigeons  
 like shells at least  
 not like sirens  
 like ants at least

not like plane-trees...  
 But don't you see them, they're all blind!  
 The blind are sleeping...<sup>184</sup>

The motif of blindness and love combined with the symbolism of the sea is developed fully in "Thrush," the poem which marks the first exit into the light (this poem will be discussed in detail later). Light in "Thrush" is "angelic" and "black," life and death, blindness and illumination. The recurrent imagery of black and white expresses this idea. It appears in the poem "Les Anges sont blancs:"

And yet everything was white because the great sleep is  
 white and the great death  
 calm and serene and isolated in an endless silence....  
 The whole sky, empty and white... and dolphins... dark like the  
 soul's movements....  
 "The angels are white flaming white and the eye  
 that would confront them shrivels"<sup>185</sup>  
 and there's no other way you've got to become like stone if  
 you want their company  
 and when you look for the miracle you've got to scatter your  
 blood to the eight points of the wind  
 because the miracle is nowhere but circulating in the veins  
 of man."

I will end with the poet's numerous compound symbols that compose the rhythm of life and death, memory and love: "Erotikos Logos,"

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<sup>184</sup> Capri-Karka offers an explanation for the choice of the three pairs of creatures. Bees, shells, and ants have a minimal preoccupation with sexual matters, whereas pigeons, sirens, and palm-trees represent destructive eroticism. *Love and the Symbolic Journey in the Poetry of Cavafy, Eliot, and Seferis* (New York: Pella, 1982) pp. 221-22.

<sup>185</sup> The Miltonic imagery of light and darkness and particularly the image of God "whose top / Brightness had made invisible..." (PL V, 599) comes to mind. The flaming Angels, Progeny of Light, who burn the eye when looked at, is particularly suggestive in view of the English poet's own physical blindness -- and of the traditional idea of the poet-prophet, in general.

apostrophizes the rose as a symbol of love, fate, knowledge, life and death. As all binary oppositions that form the poet's language, the rose has a dual function:

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

and again in the closing lines of the same poem:

... Red rose of the wind and of fate,  
 you remained in memory only, a heavy rhythm  
 rose of the night, you passed, undulating purple  
 undulation of the sea ...

The rose is not only the symbol of love and fate. It also stands for the great secret, a secret well-kept in the heart of its tightly folded petals and revealed when the rose dies and its petals, withered, open and fall off. It is like knowledge revealed at the hour of death, when man has exhausted the "tragic hour glass" and the soul, free of its bonds, acquires the knowledge of its completeness. The moment of our death is identified in "Erotikos Logos" with the time when we are patiently waiting for the miracle:

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  
 at the moment when the open roses of twilight

disappear ...

The hour of death is often related to images of separation, silence, hands that stretch to touch something, but also to the knowledge acquired through a sudden illumination as the great secret is revealed at that last moment of consciousness, a moment of wholeness, when the cycle of human life is complete.

#### 4. "LET THERE BE LIGHT!"

The struggle with darkness and the movement toward light constitutes a metaphor for the arrival of love. Light is the "miracle" that heralds the resurrection of love, the hour of death when the human life becomes complete, and the moment when the poet is able to say "let there be light" and light there is;<sup>186</sup> when he creates things by naming them. It is the moment that coincides with the celebration of the arrival at the language the poet seeks in order to express, in his own inner voice, the conditions of our world "which are none other than the conditions of everyone who seeks expression."<sup>187</sup>

##### a. "Thrush"

The poet has been anticipating this "miracle" since "Erotikos Logos:"

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,

but the first attempt to turn in the direction of the light appears with "Thrush" (*Κίχλη*) -- see annex for full, bilingual text. Written in 1946 (published in 1947), two years after the end of the Second World War,

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<sup>186</sup> Seferis, *Dokimes B'*, p. 164.

<sup>187</sup> Seferis, "'Ενα γράμμα για την Κίχλη [A Letter on "Thrush"], *Αγγλοελληνική Επιθεώρηση IV* [Anglo-American Review, IV], (July-August 1950), 501-506.

"Thrush" is a poem of war memories, a return to the dead of the past, who will guide us into the future. The poet's essays "A Letter on 'The Thrush,'" and "A Staging for 'The Thrush'" illuminate some obscure parts of this poem, in spite of Seferis's claim that he is not trying to give "an authentic interpretation" of his work.<sup>188</sup>

This poem mixes the characters and situations of Odysseus, Elpenor, Circe, Socrates, Antigone, and Oedipus with the purpose of accomplishing a step toward love represented by Socrates and Antigone. Its major symbols are the house and the light.<sup>189</sup> Both signify love, which is made possible when man's soul is liberated from any blinding separation.

"Thrush" (*Κίχλη*) is the name for a small unimportant bird (*κίχλη*), the victim of hunters; our world, as Seferis puts it, is a world of hunters and hunted. "Thrush" was also the name of a small ship serving as a ferry between the island of Poros and Piraeus, which was sunk outside the island of Poros during the war. Its wreck remained at the bottom of the sea, visible through transparent waters.

The poem is divided into three parts: "The house near the sea," "Sensual Elpenor-The Radio," and "The Wreck "Thrush"-The Light." The two central and intersecting symbols of this poem are the house and the

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<sup>188</sup> Seferis, *On the Greek Style*, p. 101

<sup>189</sup> As the poet writes, light is symbolic of the conceptual world of his house. Seferis, "Μία Σκηνοθεσία για την "Κίχλη," [A Staging for "Thrush," *Dokimes B'*, p.30ff.

light, attributes of love. The narrator is, again, a modern Odysseus who has no home to return to. He is a man devastated by the memory of the past; his acts and dreams are represented by the houses he has lived in, that place of unity that can defy fragmentation and scattering; it is the place of "galini," where the self, memory, and love seek shelter.

Part One -- "The house near the sea" -- opens on a house, or hotel, on Poros, named, significantly, "Galini."<sup>190</sup> Like every other binary symbol, houses evoke conflicting memories: The protagonist "remember[s]" "their joy and their sorrow." The mood of the first part is set by the opening line: "the houses I had they took away from me. The times / happened to be unpropitious: war, destruction, exile;" and the statement, a few lines later, that "the world's become an endless hotel."

"Sensual Elpenor," the second part, opens with a modern Odysseus observing and hearing from his window the conversation of two shadows: a man -- obviously Elpenor, as the title suggests -- and a woman. The Hesiodic epithets "έλικοβλέφαρη" (with quivering eyelashes) and "βαθύζωνη" (slim-waisted) identify her with Circe. Elpenor, stereotype

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<sup>190</sup> Poros is an island near Athens. Seferis had spent in "Galini," once a hotel, part of the autumn of 1946, after his return, with the Greek Government, from Egypt and Africa, where the political leaders of the country had fled during the German occupation. This island is associated with hedonism, sensuality, and marriage, particularly when its fragrant lemon grove is in blossom, as is confirmed also by the poet in his essay on "Thrush." It creates an analogy with the palace of Circe. Referring to "Galini," Seferis writes: "... that Victorian house in Pompeian red gave me, for the first time in many years, the feeling of a solid building rather than of a temporary tent." See "A Letter on 'Thrush,'" *Αγγλοελληνική Επιθεώρηση*, IV, (July-August 1950), 501-506.

of hedonism, is preoccupied with his passions and memories, trying in vain to make Circe listen to him. The Circe of "Thrush" is, like Odysseus and Elpenor, a free adaptation of the Homeric enchantress. Circe, the daughter of Sun, is also an incarnation of "pandemos" Aphrodite -- the embodiment of "a common symbol of pleasure, the instinct and the sorrow of sensualism."<sup>191</sup> As Thaniel comments, she is "a figure between the seductress and the priestess whose sexual gratification is the only concern."<sup>192</sup> In the second section of part II, the song heard over the radio is a kind of commentary on the situation of waste and corruption that precedes all wars. It is interrupted by a news break acknowledging the superiority of war over love: "overwhelmingly stronger/ The war... 'SOULMONGER."<sup>193</sup>

Elpenor and Circe carry out a conversation which proves their inability to communicate -- a consequence of senses declining. They are experiencing the alienation of a frustrated, unsatisfying love. The familiar image of their inability to look into each other's eyes is evoked here, once again. Unresponsive to Elpenor's sentimentality,

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<sup>191</sup> Seferis, "A Staging for 'Thrush,'" *Dokimes B'*, p.36.

<sup>192</sup> George Thaniel, "George Seferis's 'Thrush:' A Modern Descent," *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature*, 4, 1 (1977) pp. 89-102.

<sup>193</sup> "Soulmonger" is a coinage by Seferis. The word "ψυχαμοιβός," is a modification of the Aeschylean "χρυσαιομοιβός," an epithet of Ares, the war god. "Χρυσαιομοιβός δ' Ἄρης σωμάτων" [war... gold-broker of corpses] refers to the trade Ares was carrying out accepting gold and giving back the ashes of dead men (*Agamemnon*, 438). In Seferis's transcription "ψυχαμοιβός πόλεμος" (soulmonger war) refers to the selling out of souls by war, "to reap reward from the blood of the others" ("Last Stop").

"Circe" walks away along the beach toward corruption and lack of values, as suggested by the song heard over the radio.<sup>194</sup>

The last part of the poem describes the wreck of the ship "Thrush." It opens with the voice of Elpenor, the first companion Odysseus meets in Hades. From the wreck of the ship, sea voices of the dead rise. They are the memories of a past that demands blood to come alive. Around the "black ship" the calm (*galini*) of the dead spreads.<sup>195</sup> Let us say, Seferis writes, that the black ship is "The Thrush." It is the wreck which the poet calls "memory of dreams" that will take us to the Homeric "country of dreams" (*Παρά δῆμον δνειρων, Od. 24.12*),<sup>196</sup> and teach us.

Among the confused whispers emerging "from the other side of the sun, the dark side," a recognizable voice reaches Odysseus:

And then the voice of the old man reached me; I felt it  
quietly falling into the heart of day,  
as though motionless:  
"And if you condemn me to drink poison, I thank you.  
Your law will be my law; how can I go  
wandering from one foreign country to another, a rolling stone.

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<sup>194</sup> The song evokes the theme of declining senses and decay: "O woman deprived of your eyes, / Hear me, the singer is blind. See Alexandros Argyriou, "Προτάσεις για την Κίχλη" [Suggestions for 'The Thrush'], pp. 250-291, esp. 274.

<sup>195</sup> When Circe advised Odysseus to visit the underworld to learn from Tiresias how to return home, the hero asks her: "Circe, who will be our guide on that journey? No one / has ever yet in a black ship gone all the way to Hades." *Odyssey*, 10, 501-2 (Lattimore translation).

<sup>196</sup> See "A Staging for "The Thrush," *Dokimes B'*, p. 51. The Homeric phrase describes the silence of the underworld also in "Stratis Thalassinos Among the Agapanthi."

I prefer death.  
Who'll come out best only God knows."

The old man speaking is not Tiresias whom the Homeric hero seeks, but Socrates speaking the words by which he accepts his sentence to death. These words are based on Plato's *Apology* and Socrates's final statement.<sup>197</sup> In his own words, Socrates dies "a victim of the injustice, not of the laws, but of men;" this is a distinction that keeps him from "paying injustice with injustice in a shameful way."<sup>198</sup> Odysseus's homecoming is related to knowledge and memory.<sup>199</sup>

Socrates's defense is complemented by a bitter two-line statement which links, through its syntactical structure and grammatical equivalences, love with light: "Countries of the sun yet you can't face the sun. / Countries of men yet you can't face man." Justice, harmony, self-knowledge are the prerequisites of elevation above our human limitations and weaknesses.

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<sup>197</sup> Ἀλλά γὰρ ἤδη ὥρα ἀπιέναι, ἐμοὶ μὲν ἀποθανομένῳ, ὑμῖν δὲ βιωσομένοις ὁπότεροι δ' ἐῖς ἡμῶν ἔρχονται ἐπὶ δμεινὸν πρᾶγμα, ἀδελόν παντὶ πλὴν ἢ τῷ θεῷ." (*Apology*, 42).

[But now the time has come, to go away. I to die, and you to live; but which of us goes to the better lot, is known to God alone].

<sup>198</sup> Plato, *Crito* XVI.54. (H.B. Fowler trans.).

<sup>199</sup> On the relation of the Socratic sense of justice and the concept of homecoming, see the myth of Er in *The Republic*, J.-P. Vernant's *Mythe et pensée chez les Grecs* (Paris, 1985) p.108, Seferis's *Six Nights on the Acropolis* (p. 16) and Nikolaou's *Μυθολογία Γ. Σεφέρη* [The Mythology of G. Seferis], p. 90 and n.58.

The interpreter of *nostos*, here, is not Tiresias, but Socrates -- a person who is more human and closer to the poet's own convictions. The way of return that Socrates is called to show is the way to love, self-knowledge, and justice. Seferis prefers Socrates to Tiresias because, as he says, "he was human, the just man."<sup>200</sup> We should keep in mind that a central role Plato assigns Socrates is the discussion and definition of love and justice (*The Symposium, Phaedrus, Euthyphro*). By turning to Socrates, Seferis turns to the Platonic view of absolute justice which enables Odysseus to look at the road leading to light.<sup>201</sup> Tiresias's warning to Odysseus -- that the only condition for his and his companions' return and his companions was that they respect the oxen of the sun -- is echoed by Anticleia's urging her son to return to light and keep the memory of the dead alive. "I also believe," writes the poet,

that the whole matter is how one can respect the light of every day that God gives him. The companions did not respect it, they ate them, the fools, and they vanished. Now they remain "mindless and their belly is full, "ανίδεοι και χορτάτοι," forever with no return *αὐτὰρ ὁ τοῖσιν δφείλετο νόστιμον ἡμᾶρ* [but he took from them the day of their homecoming.] (*Od.* 1.9) scattered, wasted; they can face neither the sun nor man.<sup>202</sup>

Odysseus is traditionally identified with the qualities of the Old Man of the Sea, Proteus -- the *par excellence* symbol of disguise and

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<sup>200</sup> "A Staging for 'The Thrush,'" *Dokimes B'*, p. 52. The *Apology* had influenced Seferis deeply, perhaps because his generation "had grown up and lived in an age of injustice," as he says in the same essay.

<sup>201</sup> Nikolaou, *Μυθολογία Γ. Σεφέρη* [The Mythology of G. Seferis]. p. 89.

<sup>202</sup> Seferis, *On the Greek Style*, pp. 101-105.

deceit, and the one applying justice.<sup>203</sup> We are dealing with justice as a kind of harmony progressively achieved through successive transitions among contradictions that move the rhetoric of the text. From the Elpenor/Odysseus antinomy, and the world of Proteus and the sea we have moved to the Socratic truth on what constitutes absolute justice. It is a transition from cosmic justice to social justice with the self as the center.

"Light," the last section of "Thrush," throws into bold relief the antithesis inherent in the concept of light, itself. This part opens with a description of darkness and light, followed by images of death and the descent to the underworld:

And the boys who dived from the bowsprits  
 go like spindles twisting still,  
 naked bodies plunging into black light  
 with a coin between the teeth, swimming still,  
 while the sun with golden needles sews  
 sails and wet wood and colors of the sea;  
 even now they are going down obliquely,  
 the white lekythoi,  
 towards the pebbles on the sea floor.

With a coin between their teeth to pay the fee to Charon who will transport them across the lake of Acheron to the land of the dead, young men, victims of war and violence, go down into the water like "lekythoi" -- ancient funereal urns. "You gaze at the sun," says the poet a few

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<sup>203</sup> The association between the sea and the concept of justice is traced back to archetypal Indoeuropean symbolism, which had already formulated a literary topos relating the Old Man of the Sea divinity with a sense of cosmic justice. See D. Briquel, "Vieux de la mer grecs et Descendant des eaux indo-européen." In *D'Héraklès à Poseidon: Mythologie et Protohistoire* (Geneva-Paris: R. Block, 1985), pp. 141-158.

lines earlier, "then you're lost in darkness." It is the same light that is angelic and black, dark and bright, as punctuation suggests:

Light, angelic and black  
 laughter of waves on the sea's highways,  
 tear-stained laughter,  
 the old suppliant sees you  
 as he moves to cross the invisible fields---  
 light mirrored in his blood,  
 the blood that gave birth to Eteocles and Polynices.  
 Day, angelic and black;  
 the brackish taste of woman that poisons the prisoner  
 emerges from the wave a cool branch adorned with drops.

This is a passage of striking oppositions, dense mythical intertextuality, and intricate symbolism. As Savidis points out,<sup>204</sup> the "tear-stained laughter" -- a contradictory image -- is taken from Homer;<sup>205</sup> the "laughter of ways on the sea's highways" is borrowed from Aeschylus;<sup>206</sup> and the "old suppliant sees you as he moves to cross the invisible fields" is Sophocles' Oedipus walking in the direction of his mysterious death.<sup>207</sup> The first two allusions link through their verbal echoes war and the sea. The third presents the sea

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<sup>204</sup> See Γιώργος Σεφέρης. *Ποιήματα* [Poems], G. P. Savidis ed. (Athens: Ikaros, 1992), p. 334.

<sup>205</sup> "δακρυόεν γελάσσα" [smiling in her tears]. *Iliad*, VI. 484 (Lattimore). It refers to Hector going to war and bidding farewell to his wife and child.

<sup>206</sup> "ποντίων τε κυμάτων ἀνήριθμον γέλασμα," [The complete sentence reads: O River-spring, and multitudinous gleam /of smiling Ocean] Thompson translation. Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound* 89-90.

<sup>207</sup> "μήτε πόντος ἀντέκυσεν, / ἄσκοποι δὲ πλάκες ἔμαρψαν / ἐν δφανεί τινι μόρῳ φερόμενον." [... neither war / nor the crashing waves struck him down but he was snatched away by the fields unseen ...]. It is Antigone describing the sudden and mysterious disappearance of her father "swept away by a strange, swift doom." *Oedipus at Colonus* 1680-81 and 1907-1910 (Fagles translation).

as a possible cause of death. The sea is evoked as laughing and deadly, preparing us for the poem's final turn and the rebirth of "smiling Aphrodite" from the sea.

This passage relates also blood to light. Blood carries positive and negative meaning. It denotes life, "that current which goes its way and which is not so / different from the blood of men," and is the nourishment of memory ("Mythistorema 24 "). Statues cannot see or talk but they "are dripping blood" ("Summer Solstice," 3) like human beings whose senses are decaying. In "Reflections," the throbbing blood in Odysseus' veins is identified with love; in "Our Sun" beauty is likened to "veins alive beneath the skin, / with love;" in "Les anges song blancs:"

... when you look for the miracle you've got to scatter your blood to the eight points of the wind because the miracle is nowhere but circulating in the veins of man.

But blood also stands for the opposites of love: violence, and war. Man's instinct for violence is born with our blood: "The first thing God made is love, then comes blood / and the thirst for blood / roused by / the body's sperm as by salt" ("Stratis the Mariner among the Agapanthi"). It is from the salty water, however, that Aphrodite was born. In the "divided" blood of Oedipus, standing for his two sons who killed each other, light angelic and black is reflected, love that was spoiled. By merely pronouncing the word "man," the poet says, Oedipus

had solved the riddle of the Sphinx and destroyed the monster.<sup>208</sup>  
 Now he is seeing crossing "the invisible fields." At the hour of his death "the old suppliant" acquires the knowledge of life, the secret that the rose reveals as it dies. In one of his "Secret Poems," Seferis returns to the idea of blood fusing with light as life ends and a new existence is about to begin:

The blood surges now  
 as heat swells  
 the veins of the inflamed sky.  
 It is trying to go beyond death,  
 to discover joy.  
 The light is a pulse beating ever more slowly  
 as though about to stop.

(Summer Solstice 12)

Seferis' particular interest in the Platonic idea of memory as knowledge is corroborated by the fact that he transcribed passage 274c-275a from the myth of Theuth in the *Phaedrus*, referring to writing as a visual representation of memory and a "pharmakon" of wisdom -- "μνήμης τε...και σοφίας φάρμακον."<sup>209</sup>

Seferis's "Mythistorema 4" turns to a Platonic text to constitute self-knowledge as an object of a contemporary Odysseus's quest:

And if the soul  
 is to know itself  
 it must look

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<sup>208</sup> Seferis, "Acceptance speech at Stockholm" *Dokimes B'*, p. 161.

<sup>209</sup> George Seferis, *Μεταγραφές* [Transcriptions], Yiorgis Yiatromanolakis ed., (Athens: Leschi, 1980) pp. 98-101 and 286.

into a soul:<sup>210</sup>  
 the stranger (*xenos*) and enemy, we've seen him in the mirror.

The opening line of this poem focuses on the impossibility of achieving self-knowledge if in the mirror of the soul -- or in the soul of a loved one -- the companions" can only see the reflection of self-alienation. This is a statement of the impossibility of love in an estranged world. The word "xenos" in Greek denotes both a stranger and an exile. The singular of the personal pronoun (him) tells us they are one and the same person.

Self-knowledge is the prerequisite for the elevation of the soul toward what Plato envisioned as immutable Forms -- among them Justice and Love. In reaching its goal -- seeing again the Beings in their orbit in a space the description of which is outside the conventional conception of space -- the soul which has achieved self-knowledge elevates itself above the domain of change and decay, entering the realm of eternity.

But let us return to "Thrush" and its most interesting passage, the last part of the poem. It is exactly after the apostrophe to Day, angelic and black" that the metamorphosis begins and the tone shifts to a hope for resurrection. An entry on Seferis's Diary informs us that

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<sup>210</sup> From Plato's *Alcibiades*, 133B. In a note on the poem, Seferis also draws attention to the poem's intertextuality with Baudelaire's "La mort des amants":

Nos deux coeurs seront deus vastes flambeaux,  
 Qui réfléchiront leurs doubles lumières  
 Dans nos deux esprits, ces miroirs jumeaux.



concrète, la durée au sens bergsonien. On ne peut revivre les durée abolies. On ne peut que les penser, que les penser sur la ligne d'un temps abstrait privé de toute épaisseur. C'est par l'espace, c'est dans l'espace que nous trouvons les beaux fossiles de durée concrétisés par de longs séjours."<sup>212</sup>

The turn from a dark past to a future that restores man to his lost humanity is marked by the introduction of Antigone. Antigone embodies love. Through love she unites her two brothers who are separated in the blood of their father by their mutual hatred, war, and by the father's curse. Love will return with the emergence of Aphrodite, as in the celestial phenomenon of the rising of the constellation of Aphrodite on the one side of the sky when the heart of Scorpio has set on the other side. Symbolically, Scorpio, associated with poison and death, is defeated by love.<sup>213</sup> In its strife with tyranny, "unconquerable" love reasserts its unifying strength.<sup>214</sup>

The departure of the tyrant restores the lost balance in the soul, a balance that can be maintained only when there is unity and harmony between the senses and the mind. Seferis seeks this equilibrium in the pagan image of Aphrodite rising from the water and the nymphs of the sea, the Nereids and the Graeae, running toward the "shimmering of the

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<sup>212</sup> Bachelard, *La Poétique de l'Espace*, p. 27-28

<sup>213</sup> Alexandre Argyriou, "Προτάσεις για την Κίχλη," [Suggestions for 'Thrush'] p. 228-289.

<sup>214</sup> A long note by the poet on the margin of the poem's first edition includes the explanation: "The tyrant inside man has gone" and refers the reader to I.A. Richards' book concluding that "In the Chinese mind, there is no officially recognized war between the soul and the body." I.R. Richards, *Mencius on the Mind*, 74-5. See also Argyriou "Προτάσεις για την Κίχλη" ["Suggestions for Thrush"] p.287.

rising goddess." It is a vision of Aphrodite rising in the light. The love symbolism is enhanced by another intertextual allusion, through a line paraphrased from the Latin poem "Pervigilium Veneris" [Eve of Venus].<sup>215</sup> The poem "celebrates the triumph of spring, the resurgence of life in the world, and the next day's festival; its spirit is summed up by the passionate refrain "*cras amet qui numquam amavit, quique amavit cras amet*" [tomorrow he who has never loved and he who has loved, let them both love'].<sup>216</sup> The poet substitutes here the word "tomorrow" with "in the light." The next line shifts to a verb in the present tense and to the second person singular to include the reader: "*καὶ εἶσαι*," and you find yourself, followed by three more verbs in the future (will vanish, will drain dry, will empty) which simulate prophetic utterance. It is a vision of the future when the senses will have fallen silent.

The arrival of love is a vision described in the present tense: the sea nymphs "hurry," (*τρέχουν*), and you find yourself (*εἶσαι*), whereas in the last ten lines of the poem, the dominant tense is that of the future: "will love," (*θα ἀγαπήσει*), will vanish (*θα φύγουν*), will drain dry (*θα ἀδειάσει*), will empty (*θα ἀδειάσουν*). The rebirth of love thus coincides with the arrival to light, but also with the end of light, when the eyes are emptied from light. The moment of revelation falls together with the hour of death. The serenity that the house offers

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<sup>215</sup> A Latin poem of author unknown, written after the second century AD.

<sup>216</sup> *The Oxford Companion to Classical Literature*, p.425.

becomes one with the sudden silence of the cicadas. It is the hour when past, present, and future transcend the limits of existential time and enter the realm of eternity.

The hour when light becomes angelic and black is the moment when the secret is revealed. In this poem this crucial moment is marked by an intensified compression of the poetic properties of the text: Strong enjambment, a progression of long and short syllables (/a/ and /i/ vowels) and the alliterative patterns of the /θ/, /φ, and /ζ/ sounds now take over, multiplying the echo of key words like "agapise" (loved] "th'agapisi" [will love], fos (light) and thalassa (sea). Here is the closest possible visual representation of these echoes: φώς... πολλά παράθυρα ανοιχτά ... από κάμαρα σε κάμαρα... θα φύγουν... καθρεφτισμένα... τσιτίβισμα...θ'αδειάσει η θάλασσα θρυμματισμένο γυαλί... θ'αδειάσουν τα μάτια... φώς ... σταματούν ξαφνικά κι' όλα μαζί τα τζιτζικια.

The polysyllabic words and the dominant /a/ sound slow down the rhythm and heighten the timbre as it befits a prophetic utterance and the eruption of an apocalyptic moment in which the divine and human are revealed and fused. At the same time and by the same act the poetic process is brought to completion, as the poem ends. In his essay on the language of poetry, he describes the words emerging from the poet's deeper self with the same word he uses to describe the rising goddess (αναδυομένη): "The messengers, I would say, who can show that an object has touched [the poet's] profoundest self, are the words, "the rising

ones" (*αυτές οι αναδυόμενες*), which emerge on the surface with a specific halo around them."<sup>217</sup>

As he did in the case of love, when it comes to light the poet employs a vague but enlarged definition: "We arrived at the light. And the light cannot be explained; it can only be seen."<sup>218</sup> Light has a humanizing effect. The Erinyes will hunt down the sun, just as they hunted down Orestes, he says, elsewhere, "just think of these Words which unite man with the elements of nature... Suppose the light were suddenly to become Orestes? it's so easy, just think: if the light of the day and the blood of man were one and the same thing?"<sup>219</sup> In the same symbolic nexus love and light, house and blood explain one another.

"Thrush" is a clear example of the way mythological elements, memory, and the opposites strive for balance and meaning. It is a multi-layered composition, in which the poet's distinctive voice dominates through polyphonic intertextuality. He brings together Homer, Heraclitus, Aeschylus, Hesiod, Sophocles, Socrates, Meng Tzu and Jen, "Pervigilium Veneris," and many more, breaking and reuniting the temporal sequence of the narrative, as he does with time on the semantic level. Through the relentless charging of the symbols through their internal and external tensions, the text is held together in a deep meaningful thought that can retain all its intensity. Everything exists

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<sup>217</sup> Seferis, *Dokimes B,* p. 178.

<sup>218</sup> Seferis, Letter on "The Thrush," *On the Greek Style*, p. 105.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid*, p. 104.

as a result of if inherent oppositions striving for equilibrium. Love is thus perceived in the totality of its possibilities, but is it always evoked through memory: it is defined by happy memories, memories of betrayal, of war, of a house lost, or destroyed. Only the light is a sensation related to present time and a future hope. The light is the double redemption that involves the reader as a participant and the poet as a creator. The arrival of light as love and knowledge, the completeness that the hour of death brings, and the moment the poet can create things by naming them constitute the "miracle," the "angel" the poet has been patiently anticipating.

#### b. The 'Cypriot poems'

In the poems of *Logbook III*" a process comparable to the one demonstrated in the case of "Thrush" takes place. The seventeen poems of this collection constitute yet another turning point in the poetry of Seferis; With the exception of "Memory A'" and "Memory B'", these poems were written in Cyprus where he was posted, mostly between 1953 and 1955, and are also known as the "Cypriot poems." The poet has dedicated this collection "To the [world] of Cyprus: Memory and Love."<sup>220</sup> Lost but remembered, as Seferis writes, Cyprus stands for him as the revelation of a world which unveils the experience of a drama that awakens the memory of our humanity. He finds in Cyprus "Homer's world,

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<sup>220</sup> I have chosen "world" rather than the translators' "people," since the word "cosmos" of the original Greek connotes more than the inhabitants of the island.

not ours,"<sup>221</sup> a world of cohesion, organic unity, where gods and men, life and death ripen and begin again, simultaneously.<sup>222</sup> Cyprus offered the poet a vision on a scale "small enough to prevent it from evaporating and at the same time wide enough to contain the miracle." Myth and history, past and present, the poet goes on to say, met there. Cyprus was a place where "the miracle was still possible."<sup>223</sup> As Maronitis notes, in *Logbook III* Seferis evokes ancient myth in only eight poems, often correcting it.<sup>224</sup> The intertextual sources of the poet become here more historical-oriented, descriptive, didactic, literal, with political overtones; in general, they move away from erudite symbolism, staying closer to history.<sup>225</sup>

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<sup>221</sup> This phrase is borrowed from W.H. Auden's "Sketch for an 'idyll,' which Seferis uses as an epigraph to his poem "In the Kyrenia District."

<sup>222</sup> See G.P. Savidis, "Μιά Περιδιάβαση" [A Wandering], "Για τον Σεφέρη" [For Seferis] pp. 304-408, esp. 305.

<sup>223</sup> See Seferis's "Note" in the first edition of this collection whose original title, taken from Euripides's *Helena* 148-150, was "... Κύπρον, οὐ μ'έθ'εσπισεν..." [Cyprus, where it was decreed by Apollo that I should live...] See Seferis's Note in the First edition quoted by the editor in *Γιώργος Σεφέρης, Ποιήματα* (Athens: Ikaros, 1992) p. 336. To the wars the poet had experienced, now the drama of Cyprus itself had to be added. Maronitis reads the Cypriot poems as "a progress from a mythological hearing and touching of the light to a real and historical sight." *Πίσω Μπρός* [Backward-Forward] pp. 95-99.

<sup>224</sup> See D.N. Maronitis, *Πίσω-Μπρός* [Backward-Forward] (Athens: Stigmi, 1986). Maronitis uses the poem "Agianapa a'" as an example of the new "apocalyptic poetry" that Cyprus offered to Seferis. The opening line of this poem immediately following "Thrush" constitutes such a revelation as the poet now sees in a different light the things he had seen through myth: "And you see the light of the sun, as the ancients used to say. / And yet I thought I was seeing ... It was the blood that forced them to talk, the ram / that I slaughtered and spread at their feet; / but that red carpet was not the light..."

<sup>225</sup> D.N. Maronitis, *Η Ποίηση του Γιώργου Σεφέρη* [The Poetry of George Seferis] (Athens: Hermes, 1989) p. 135.

During this period, Seferis turns away from Aescylean and Sophoclean drama to Euripides, the New Testament, and the chronicle, borrowing, often, from the Byzantine years and the Frankish occupation of the island. The poem "Helen" of this collection voices the poet's agony on the problems of man's fate, today. Helen is the heroine of Euripides's play which assumes that it was only her *eidolon* who went with Paris to Troy, while the real Helen was in Egypt. The Greeks' honor was thus saved through a poet's tale which reversed myth. Didn't Stesichorus in the *Phaedrus* find his sight after writing his Palinode to Helen? This poem illustrates love as the cause of war, and deals with questions as to what is truth and what deception, what is god and what not;<sup>226</sup> its themes include also exile and the search for a lost fatherland, and man's fate ruled by warmongers -- the equivalent of the crafty ancient gods. It seeks love to heal "some much suffering," and to prevent so much life, from going "into the abyss, for an empty tunic." Struggling with a "blind voice" that "gropes in the darkness of memory / for footsteps and gestures," the poet questions his own effectiveness in engraving the lessons of history. Memory serves to retain in mind knowledge that will prevent future suffering. Like Plato, Seferis sees the human mind, and art, as having a mission: to alleviate suffering and elevate the quality of human life. But for the sake of man not of the city-state. Whereas Plato sees freedom from the bonds of the past as necessary for the soul's new life, Seferis urges that we retain past experience and history in our mind as a guide for the future.

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<sup>226</sup> Expressed in Teucer's question "What is god? What is not god? And what is there in between them?" (taken from Euripides', *Helen*, line 1137).

The "miracle" the poet longs for is related, as already said, to the enlarged moment alluded to in "Thrush" and fully revealed in *Logbook III*, especially in "Engomi." In literature, memory has often been articulated as a moment of unity suddenly revealed to the mind -- it is a moment of heightened emotion. As Vayenas observes, Yeats sees the self and non-self united through a vision he calls "great memory"; Ungaretti calls "Moment" the recapturing of a lost innocence. It functions in the sphere of myth. In Baudelaire, memory is recaptured in a moment of intoxication which transcends time lost.<sup>227</sup> Bergson finds a similar function in memory: "By allowing us to grasp in a single intuition multiple moments of duration, it frees us from the movement of the flow of things, that is to say, from the rhythm of necessity... An individual consciousness, continuing and retaining the past in a present enriched by it, thus escapes the law of necessity."<sup>228</sup> Proust, lastly, recovers through the senses the time which was lost because of habit and of the failure of memory. For Proust, Genette writes, "lost time" is not the 'past' but time in a pure state, which is regained by the fusion of an instant of the present with an instant of the past, evoking the contrary of time that flows: the extra-temporal, eternity. He seeks to find the "common essence" of the objects that awaken the memory of the sensation. In *Le Temps retrouvé*, this relationship between present and past sensation is the effacement of the temporal distances necessary to

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<sup>227</sup> Vayenas, *The Poet and the Dancer*, p. 285-286.

<sup>228</sup> Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, Nancy Margaret Paul and W. Scott Palmer trans., (New York: Humanity Press, Inc., 1970) pp. 303, and 313.

the blossoming of a "minute freed from the order of time."<sup>229</sup>

Proust's use of spatial form, argues, Frank, arose from an attempt to communicate the extratemporal quality of his revelatory moments.<sup>230</sup>

Curtius calls Proust "a Platonist;" for his ultimate value, like that of Plato, was an existence freed from all submission to the flux of the temporal.<sup>231</sup>

In the poetry of Seferis the notion of "moment" (*στιγμή*) is linked to memory and related to the poetic act of escaping temporality subject to decay. If memory is a "rhythm" that preserves the relationship between past and present, the moment, says the poet, is "an infinitesimal obstacle, a grain of sand, shrinking and shrinking yet unable to disappear completely" ("Man"). The same phrase appears in an entry under Sunday, 6 February 1944: "... the universe is a grain of sand and inside this speck an eye in which the universe is contained."<sup>232</sup> But this idea had been preoccupying Seferis even at an earlier time. In the "Turning Point" (1931), he writes:

Moment, sent by a hand  
I had loved so much,  
you reached me just at sunset  
like a black pigeon  
.....  
at the close of a last supper  
Moment, grain of sand,

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<sup>229</sup> Gerard Genette, *Figures of Literary Discourse*, Alan Sheridan trans. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982) pp. 40 and 209.

<sup>230</sup> Frank, *The Idea of Spatial Form*, p. 61.

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid*, 352.

<sup>232</sup> *Days 4'*, p. 324.

.....  
 alone you kept the whole  
 tragic clepsydra dumb  
 as though it had seen the Hydra  
 in the heavenly garden.

The memory of betrayed love appears as an intense moment that makes the hourglass turn "dumb." In this unspecified stretched moment, the hourglass appears to stop its backward and forward movement, time stands still as if stunned by the gaze of a mythological snake. This terrible moment sustained by the tension of opposites, changes our entire life ("the whole tragic clepsydra").<sup>233</sup> Eliot's conception of such an overwhelming moment as a surrender to lust, justifies the existence of his solipsistic protagonist while defining his inability to love:

... what have we given?  
 My friend, blood shaking my heart  
 The awful daring of a moment's surrender  
 which an age of prudence can never retract  
 By this, and this only, we have existed.

(*"The Waste Land"*)

In Seferis's "Three Secret Poems," which stand closer to Eliot's "Four Quartets," the "moment" is identified with cosmic justice and the hour of death:

And even what has not passed  
 must burn  
 this noon when the sun is riveted  
 to the heart of the many-petalled rose.

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<sup>233</sup> "One grain of sand can change a whole life," writes Seferis in *Days 1*, p. 135.

It is also linked to the resurrection following this moment of transition which the poet calls "birth-pang of resurrection," -- "*Αναστάσιμη ωδίνη*" ("Summer Solstice 13").

Seferis's verse seeks to capture and reveal such a moment in which time is expanded into a vision of wordly immortality. As the poet writes,

the idea of immortality... appears like an interruption of our worldly life, a lightening which strikes us inside the present moment, rather than an endless temporal unfolding...<sup>234</sup>

The experiencing and revelation of such a moment of eternity is the highest point of "Engomi" (full text in the Annex). This poem opens on a scene of archaeologists excavating an ancient village of Engomi, in Cyprus. Using the language of "The Book of James"<sup>235</sup> relating to the Virgin's birth of Christ, the poet describes the emergence of an ancient statue -- perhaps of Aphrodite.

Suddenly I was walking and did not walk  
 I looked at the flying birds, and they had stopped stone dead  
 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.  
     .... and the body  
 emerged from the struggling arms stripped  
 with the unripe breasts of the Virgin,  
 a motionless dance.

And I lowered my eyes to look all around:  
 girls kneaded, but they didn't touch the dough  
 women spun, but the spindles didn't turn  
 lambs were drinking, but their tongues hung still  
 above green waters that seemed asleep

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<sup>234</sup> Seferis, *Dokimes A'*, p. 122.

<sup>235</sup> or Protoevangelium, XVIII, 2, of the *Apocryphal New Testament*.



with an abrupt jolt in the rhythm of the poem through an unexpected decapentasyllabic line (25) -- the only one in the poem -- our familiar world of time and clay, senses and memory, dryness and thirst, rushes back into the momentarily paralyzed consciousness of the nostalgic reader.

The emergence of love in the figure of Aphrodite appears as a hopeful prophecy in "Thrush" in 1946, and predicted again in "Memory I" (1953):

and again I whispered: Some morning the resurrection will come  
 dawns's light will blossom red as trees glow in spring,  
 the sea will be born again, and the wave will again fling  
 forth Aphrodite.  
 We are the seed that dies. And I entered my empty house.

In fact, the poet's earliest quest for love goes back to 1924: "Love, where's your church?" he exclaims in "Fog;" In one of his essays, he speaks of the "desiccated solitude" after Helen's (love's) departure:

ὄμμάτων δ' ἐν ἀχηνίαις  
 ἔρρει πᾶσ' Ἀφροδίτα...

[and from the empty gaze of the eyes  
 all Aphrodites fled] (*Agamemnon* 418).<sup>236</sup>

Almost all of the poet's nostalgia for love anticipates a redemption that comes through the experience of love that brings about the "miracle" of time: "Where is love that with one stroke cuts time in two and stuns it?" ("The Mood of a Day"); Or, in "Erotikos Logos:"

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<sup>236</sup> Seferis, *Dokimes B'*, p. 238.

Where is the double-edged day that had changed every-thing? ...  
 Won't there be a sky to drop refreshing dew  
 for the soul benumbed and nourished by the lotus?

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....

In "Fires of St. John" we see this experience as "the hour when one day ends and the next has not begun / at the hour when time is suspended," and in "Thrush" as a "night that split open, a blue pomegranate, / a dark breast, and filled you with stars, cleaving time." All these moments are returns through memory to a lived Platonic-like experience which is endlessly sought as a redemptive revelation of immortality. The poet's comment in the Introduction to his translation of the *Waste Land* is elucidating in this respect:

it is not without merit to ask ourselves whether it wouldn't be better to approach [the meaning of the "redemption of time"] more directly by turning to the experience we had at moments when love stunned us.<sup>237</sup>

The experience of love is equated to immortality. "I ask God to help me say, at some moment of great happiness, what love is," says the poet in "Reflections," praying for the experience of love and the ability to put it into words and immortalize it. Art resembles an *hierophany* through which we can return to *illo tempore*, annihilating decay. Logos, creating the eruption of the numinous into the

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<sup>237</sup> T.S. Eliot, *The Waste Land and other poems*, George Seferis transl., (Athens: Ikaros, 1969).

profane,<sup>238</sup> constitutes immortality as part of human experience. At this moment, time becomes dilated as "On Stage 7" of the metaphysical "Three Secret Poems:"

Yet there, on the other shore,  
 under the cave's black state,  
 suns in your eyes, birds on your shoulders,  
 you were there; you suffered  
 the other labor, love,  
 the other dawns, 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.

In "On a Ray of Winter Light 7" of the same group of poems, that "rhythm," that is existential time, becomes almost visibly "immovable" as if frozen in the middle of the line:

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.<sup>239</sup>

To resurrect love -- a metaphor for bringing into light the attributes of our humanity that can defeat decay -- the poet has first to awaken the deep memory lying in the collective knowledge beyond

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<sup>238</sup> Mircea Eliade considers "sacred" time as "an ontological, Parmenidean time; it always remains equal to itself, it neither changes nor is exhausted," as opposed to existential time which has a beginning and an end and cannot repeat itself. See *The Sacred and the Profane*, Willard R. Trask trans. (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovic, 1959) pp. 69-71 and passim.

<sup>239</sup> Cf. Heraclitos, "All things are ruled by the thunderbolt."

personal experience. To reach these deep layers, he turns to myth and language in which this profound memory dwells. His plea for happiness is essentially a way of strengthening our faith in the human potential which is stifled in an emotionally sterile world. Memory will bring to light this forgotten ability to feel and be whole, which the poet calls "love." If we can achieve a supreme act of memory we will be able to "cut through time" and discover, beyond the cycle of history, the creative power of love. If memory can be activated, an ideal love and even resurrection may be glimpsed and the means to salvation in the social and even political sphere may be found. The synthesis Seferis attempts brings to mind Plato. It reconfirms the struggle to recapture through a vision of truth and permanence kept alive by memory the lost balance of the moral world. The poet articulates this lucidly in his Diary:

Try every day to remember and to materialize your beliefs. And if you have, for the sake of your life, to forget, to turn on the other side and take a breath, then abandon yourself entirely and live as a blind man for some time. Perhaps the tranquility you are seeking is to be found exactly in the balance of such a position and its reversal. Live as a whole human being.<sup>240</sup>

### c. Historical poems

Certain poems from among those of *Logbook III*, turn to chronicle to establishing some kind of parable that reveals a concealed but clear political commentary. Even so, they too evoke love as a sense of balance and memory as the means of learning from history and the past, that

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<sup>240</sup> *Days 3'*, pp. 22-24.

preserves our humanity. As an example, I would like to cite "The Cats of St. Nicholas."

This poem was written in 1969 when the military dictatorship was in power (full text in Annex). It draws upon material from diary entries on Cyprus by French travellers around the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, it employs multiple levels of narration, two levels of time (past and present), mixes chronicle, folktale, the oral tradition, and history, and uses memory operating in a Proustian way. The poem's epigraph, a quotation from *Agamemnon* 990-994, recreates the moment when Agamemnon is ready to walk on the crimson carpet and the chorus voices its premonitions of pending doom. As Krikou-Davis observes, the poem seems to illustrate "the strife arising and the heavy price paid as the result of a struggle between the forces of good and evil".<sup>241</sup> In the captain's unnamed interlocutor the poet depicts himself as a traveler. The captain, the actual poet D. Antoniou, Seferis's friend, is relating the story, as his ship is sailing past the Cape of Cats in Cyprus, on Christmas day:

There was a monastery on that promontory built by the Duke of Cyprus who gave the monks one hundred cats to fight the serpents that ravaged the area.<sup>242</sup> There was a great war every day between the cats

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<sup>241</sup> Katerina Krikou-Davis, "Cats, Snakes and Poetry: A Study of Seferis' "The Cats of Saint Nicholas," *Journal of Modern Greek Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (October 1984) 225-240, p. 236.

<sup>242</sup> Popular imagination has it that the snakes were sent by St. Catherine.

and millions of poisonous snakes, a war that lasted an eternity. After centuries of fighting, the cats "'annihilated the snakes; but in the end they disappeared themselves; They just couldn't stand that much poison ... Generations of poison; centuries of poison.'" The cats had to pay with their own lives for the destruction they had caused. This is the natural process whereby elements in the universe have to pay with their annihilation to maintain the world in balance. The poem ends in an impersonal tone, echoing the captain's distant command, "Steady as you go," which, in fact, repeats an earlier line: "Don't stop, traveler." / "Left ten degrees rudder," muttered the helmsman."<sup>243</sup>

In the "Decision to Forget" (1939-1940), the poet emphasizes the need to remember by inviting the passerby (*διαβάτης*) to stand by the lake and remember the war and history. In "The Cats" the poet addresses the historical traveler (*ταξιδιώτης*) to go on living with the examples of history in mind. "The Decision to Forget" was written at the time Germany was invading Europe; "The Cats of St. Nicholas," at the height of the power of the military dictatorship which had seized power in 1967 and ruled over the country until 1974. Katerina Krikou-Davis shows that the poem adumbrates ideas expressed openly in the public "Declaration" of the poet against the junta on March 28, 1969. Both poems evoke an image of Greece under oppression, prophesy the future, and evoke the

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<sup>243</sup> Seferis, as his wife confirmed after his death, had in mind Breughel's painting "Landscape with the Fall of Icarus" in which a ploughman, a shepherd, a fisherman, and a passing ship, turn away leisurely from the scene of Icarus who is drowning unhelped, with one leg out of the water. W.H. Auden's "Musée des Beaux Arts" and W.C. Williams's "Landscape with the Fall of Icarus" depict this cycle of life that continues oblivious to suffering.



In this way Ardiaios, the terrible Pamphylian tyrant,  
paid for his crimes in the nether world.

31 March 1971

The title and content of the poem are taken from Plato's *Republic* X 616, specifically from the myth of Er and his description of what he saw in the other world. According to what Er remembers when he returns to the mortal world, Ardiaios, a tyrant who had killed his father and elder brother, was punished for his crimes when he died by being flayed and dragged along the thorny bush of aspalathoi. In Seferis's poem it is spring, the time of the Feast of the Annunciation, March 25th, which is also the day on which Greece's national Independence day from Ottoman Turks is celebrated. The connection between nature's rebirth and the resurrection of his country is emphasized also by the date that ends the poem. The poem constitutes a veiled protest against the colonels who were still in power and are here equated with the ancient tyrant. As seen in "Thrush," the tyrant -- an allusion to Creon there -- is a symbol of oppression and a result of men's inability to feel that inner harmony which leads to the external order of things. The crime for which Ardiaios has to pay becomes one with those of the contemporary oppressors of freedom at the historical moment the poet was writing -- tyranny and the desiccation of love. The Erinyes, whom the poet mentions to his interviewer as part of a landscape that links diachronically the past with the present, are the agents of moral justice still alive among us.

The process of remembering occurs through a movement that embraces the entire time span of the Greek tradition. The ancient and Christian traditions are harmoniously united with the modern nation under the ancient columns, "strings of a harp still vibrating..." What generates the association of the contemporary oppressors with the ancient tyrant is memory awakened by language and the longing for balance. The memory of Ardiaios is revived by "a word in Plato, buried in the mind's furrows," the word "Aspalathoi," which reinforces the relationship between nature, landscape, and language all three unchanged through time setting them in juxtaposition with history which, although constantly changing, it always returns to an equilibrium, like life in the universe. As with the word *Ασίνην τε*, which was borrowed from a Homeric text, the Platonic "*ἐπ' ἀσπαλάθων*" has been preserved, unchanged, through time, the way the passion for democracy and freedom has remained alive in the hearts of men, instilling faith in the human potential for happiness and human dignity.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

Plato and Seferis use the themes of love, memory, justice, self-knowledge, the polarity of opposites, immortality, and language in a comparable way. For both of them love and memory are inner attributes serving as proofs of man's potential to transcend his own limitations, symbolically to make man capable of immortality. Both authors use memory and love as means of human perfection, philosophical, moral, or emotional, while they describe the creative process of writing.

For Plato it is love that strengthens the soul's wings enabling its ascent to the Forms, in other words to what is permanent and unchangeable. Similarly, for Seferis love grows in the human soul and we don't know if it dies with it. For him, too, love is a testimony of man's divine potential which involves not only the soul but also the senses. If we become aware of our ability to love, we can save the senses from decline transcending time and rising above human weakness; symbolically we can reverse the effects of time and make the miracle of immortality happen.

Plato establishes *anamnesis*, or reflective memory, as the means of preserving intelligence and arriving at the absolute knowledge represented by Sophrosyne, Justice, and Episteme, the immutable and immortal Ideas lying beyond conceptualized space and time. *Anamnesis*, like love is an effort to arrive at what is permanent and lies in the future, for the purpose of improving the human lot. Similarly, for

Seferis, "correct memory" emanates from previous experience. It is close to Plato's contemplative reflective since its purpose is inner knowledge. However, it is not a means of reaching into the future for the inaccessible, as Plato envisaged the plight of the soul, but a reworking of the past, in spite of the pain this evolves, to improve our sense of self in present time. Seferis's ascent is at all times attached to the pain of living. Plato creates a memory that will eternalize, through repeated recalls the potential of the soul for insight, and detach itself from the earth, whereas Seferis creates a balance between the corporeal and spiritual dynamics of love and memory in order to control time's ruinous impact. For Plato "anamnesis" is infinitely repeatable; for Seferis is only a brief respite that only breaks the intensity of toil, for a moment; Plato creates an idiom to serve the ethics promoted by his philosophy by purifying the language of the existing tradition, whereas Seferis stresses the corporeal quality of man's natural language -- treasury of our memories and emotions.

In Seferis's poetry the "rhythm" that describes love is also the "rhythm" that describes death, memory, light, blood, music, and poetry. The harmonious integration of these concepts is dependent upon their interaction with one another. In Seferis memory and love, and what they represent become metaphors that cross over into their opposite meaning. This creates polyvalent and images that enlarge and deepen the emotional impact of the poem. Hence the tension in a poetry that strives to reconstruct a self scattered in fragments by the failure of memory and the impossibility of love, yet held together precisely by memory and

love. It is the fusion of these contraries that transforms love and memory into the "miracle" the poet seeks in his effort to alleviate existential agony. Poetry can indeed transform the ephemeral and transient into permanent -- those words engraved in stone. What the poet does here is place under art's control the object of man's anxiety, his overpowering sense of impotence in the face of decay and death.

Is there a grain of optimism in Seferis's verse generally termed as "guardedly pessimistic" poetry? Seferis venerates human dignity as he respects the power of poetry to transform. He believes that one should reverse the haiku. Instead of saying

A dragonfly;  
remove its wings --  
pepper,

why not rearrange the words to create a moment of transformation - a moment of epiphany?

a pepper;  
add wings to it --  
a dragonfly.

"We shouldn't humiliate God's creatures," the poet concludes. This is a rather modest way of elevating the artist to the level of God, something Joyce does, albeit with a cheek-in-tongue attitude.

In the darkness and corruption surrounding the human condition, Seferis agrees that there is always a hope of brightness and purity. In

his essay "Our Seafaring Friend" (1936), devoted to his friend the poet D.I. Antoniou, the captain of a cargo ship, Seferis writes:

And we thought of that distant night in the fog when, speaking of the coal that had to be loaded next morning, we agreed that, after all, at the bottom of every coal pit there is always a white horse, and that the duty of every one of us is to find his white horse, at any cost.<sup>246</sup>

The white horse coming out of the black coal pit is the light of hope in the midst of darkness. The poet is telling us to live the light of the day with awareness: "The light is a pulse / beating ever more slowly / as though about to stop ("Summer Solstice 12"<sup>247</sup>). We want from the poet to discover and show us this white horse, to seek and reveal to us this moment, which makes death appear a just continuation of life. As Rilke concludes,

What they want of me is that I gently remove the appearance of injustice about their death -- which at time slightly hinders their souls from proceeding onward.<sup>248</sup>

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<sup>246</sup> Seferis, "Our Seafaring Friend," *On the Greek Style*, p. 71, and *Dokimes A'*, p. 49.

<sup>247</sup> The title of this late collection of fourteen short poems refers to the period beginning on July 22, the heart of the summer, which marks the completion of the ripening of time. After this date and up until December 22 daylight declines gradually. The solar system thus becomes a metaphor for life which after bodily and spiritual maturation declines toward death. The summer solstice, the eve of the longest day, is the "noon when the sun is riveted / to the heart of the many-petalled rose" (poem 14). This is described as a moment outside temporal duration belonging neither to the before nor to the after. See Anthoula Daniel, *The Three Secret Poems of George Seferis*, (Athens: Epikairoitita, 1988) p. 67.

<sup>248</sup> "Was sie mir wollen? leise soll ich des Unrechts  
Anschein abtun, der ihrer Geister  
reine Bewegung manchmal ein wenig behindert."

This moment of transcendence that the poet creates is his solution for a way to "rise a little higher," above the senses that have declined and the love that has died in the hearts, in the direction of a life he calls "authentic."

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Rainer Maria Rilke, "The First Elegy," trans. by Stephen Mitchell, *Duino Elegies* (New York: Vintage, 1982) p. 153.

### III. JAMES JOYCE: *ULYSSES*<sup>249</sup>

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

Joyce's themes are not different from those of Plato and Seferis. Among the basic themes *Ulysses* evokes are the clash with history, the problems of the artist seeking a language, the strife of opposites, and man's essential survival in the face of time and change. Plato evokes love and memory to prove man's divine potential that makes the soul immortal. Seferis identifies love with humanity's salvation from

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<sup>249</sup> I'm using Hans Gabler's *Ulysses: The Corrected Text* edition, New York: Random House, 1986. The number and lines of episodes will be given in parenthesis, in the text.

Gabler's *Ulysses: A Critical and Synoptic Edition* (1984), and *Ulysses: The Corrected Text* (1986) have been consistently under fire, mainly by John Kidd, who accused Gabler of faulty use of copytext, (photoreproductions of the Rosenbaum MS), factual errors and spelling inconsistencies. Among the claims Gabler and his associates have put forth in defense of their edition is that it offers a "dramatically new reading experience," which creates a new understanding of the novel by elucidating passages and words not treated before. The energy of the style that has enhanced character illustration has also been cited by pro-Gabler critics. See Michael Groden, "A Response to John Kidd's "An Inquiry Into *Ulysses: The Corrected Text*," and John Kidd, "Gabler's Errors in Context: A Reply to Michael Groden on Editing *Ulysses*," both in *James Joyce Quarterly*, vol. 28, No. 1 (Fall 1990) 81-110 and 111-151. Referring to "Eumaeus," Brockman notes: The changes [Gabler's edition] makes to the text of [the Random House edition] bear on critical issues... : the identity of the narrator, the role of ambiguity and error, the relationship between Bloom and Stephen, and the wordy and cluttered style of the episode." See William S. Brockman, "The new Bloom in "Eumaeus:" The Emendations of *Ulysses: A Critical and Synoptic Edition*. In *James Joyce Quarterly*, vol. 28, No. 1 (Fall 1990) 153-168, esp. 154.

I have opted for the "Corrected text" which I was studying before Kidd published his attacks, in view of the inconclusiveness of the debate around it, the more practical format it employs, and especially because it gives prominence to the theme of love. After all, Kidd has claimed that the "Corrected Text" incorporates the corrections he himself had suggested, which should mitigate the "irreverence" of which Gabler is accused.

dehumanization and memory with emotion and knowledge; since poetry is for him the language of emotion, memory becomes the means of poetic creation. How is Joyce treating these concepts?

Joyce sees human nature as neither divine nor heroic. Love and memory are mainly words that enable art, the only possible answer to man's predicament. Love and memory, plot elements that move the story on the pragmatic and the symbolic levels, are, unlike in Plato and Seferis, words and texts that form other words and texts. They are the art of writing into which life is transformed and into which the writer escapes.

Love is the creative force of life that unites its fragments. It is contextualized in *Ulysses* as the nostalgia for completeness and artistic freedom. Something is missing from the life of Stephen Dedalus and Leopold Bloom that prevents the artist's evolution and the practical man's happiness. What is missing is the artist's freedom to grow, the mother's failure to love, the son's longing for an absent father and what he stands for, the betrayal of a wife, the loss of a beloved son, and the frustrated desire for integration into a prejudiced society. For Stephen the quest for love represents self-assertion; For Bloom it is the struggle for survival, in Homeric terms, a homecoming.

Memory has an analogous effect, as it unites present and past, resisting disintegration. Memory is history. The recalling of one's cultural past for the purpose of illustrating possibilities, are crucial

tools for the artist. Writing and reading presupposes memory. Remembering is the force behind what Plato calls the collecting together of the particles of writing in one kind, that is, logos. Like memory, history -- what has happened, as opposed to what might happen, according to the Aristotelian definition<sup>250</sup>-- limits one's possibilities and keeps us imprisoned in the past. It is the nightmare from which Stephen is trying to awaken,<sup>251</sup> the memory of a personal and national past that arrests his artistic and emotional development.<sup>252</sup> Like Seferis, Joyce acknowledges the pain of memory but, unlike the Greek poet who is trying to keep memory alive to control history, he is striving to escape from it. Stephen's plight may point to Joyce's own struggle to find a balance between the pain of memory and the need to remember.

Contrary to its simple plot, *Ulysses's* narrative method depends heavily on intertextuality, intricately entwined cross references, kaleidoscopic images, and complex literary echoes. Joyce had, in effect, characterized his novel as a work of "enormous bulk and more

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<sup>250</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics*, Chapter 9

<sup>251</sup> Among the sources of Stephen's subversive metaphor, Laforgue is cited as the most important: "L'histoire est un vieux cauchemar bariolé qui ne se doute pas que les meilleures plaisanteries sont les plus courtes." Another source "was World War I, during which "nightmare" was used widely as an expression of cultural malaise." See Spoo, *James Joyce and the Language of History: Dedalus's Nightmare* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978) pp. 99 and 177; also Gifford, *Ulysses Annotated*, p. 39.

<sup>252</sup> Ireland's long struggle for political independence from England, its bitterness over losing its original language and national heritage, and the inability of the Irish to restore their country to its autonomy are reflected in Joyce's anger and rejection of Ireland which, though, never managed to quell his nostalgia for his country.

than enormous complexity."<sup>253</sup> The proliferating intertextual sources that continually enlarge the frame of the work are drawn from Irish history, myth and folklore, sensational journalism, Dante, Vico, Bruno, Pater, Shakespeare, the Bible, popular songs, Jewish tales, nursery rhymes, Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, Blake, Yeats, Aristotle, Aquinas, Plato, and the general stock of late nineteenth-century ideas. These allusions to philosophy, literature, music, religion, and mass culture constitute the *langue* on which the author draws for his idiom.

*Ulysses* works not only through the contextualization of intertextual allusions but also through the detextualization of these same sources. The realistic level, dealing with the facts of the characters' lives, unfolds in parallel with the symbolic level, whereas the linguistic constantly undercuts them both. The ensuing polyphony establishes multiple layers of semantic relationships that permit the author to retreat behind the text and let the proliferating words, styles, and meanings take over, as the artist becomes increasingly self-effaced and unobtrusive.

Everything in Joyce appears to be words arranged and rearranged, quoted and misquoted, remembered and misremembered. The quest for experience, Stephen's quest, remains the unresolved drama of the man of words, whereas Bloom, better equipped to survive than the intellectual artist, comes home to face, with "equanimity" the enigma of life. Love

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<sup>253</sup> *Letters of James Joyce*, Stuart Gilbert ed., (New York: Viking Press, 1957), p. 146.

is thus the quest for a word or the memory of songs and stories telling about love and betrayal, or a love letter -- Boylan's or Martha's -- haunting Bloom's memory. The union of father and son is a word uniting their two names; the forward and backward movement of life and death is words in a chiasmic arrangement. Thought is texts remembered; death is the memory of a tongue-twister, or words replayed by gramophones; All is words, written or spoken, remembered. The great "truths" of life are words, words, words. The answer can only be words, a torrent of words in a language that imitates the sound and noises of life.

Joyce's themes are the same ones that have puzzled man since times immemorial. Only that the Irishman handles them in a way that brings to the fore a pervading skepticism and doubt, characteristic of modernist writing, that seeks justification in the indeterminacy of language, making any attempt at providing an answer superfluous.

Joyce's language is composed of everything that defines man -- his speech, thought, emotions, body, the stuff of life. In employing such a wide array of intertexts, Joyce voices his doubt whether anything can be original, anticipated or predicted, whether man can explain life at all, and whether ideas expressed long ago say the same thing today. The new language created for this purpose, *Ulysses* seems to be suggesting, cannot be a text but the disintegration of many texts. In short, Joyce points at the difficulties of novelistic writing since emotions, thoughts, and knowledge are like everything else affected by change. The result can only be irony, parody, and a "jocoserious" representation of

life. Such treatment creates the effect of a distance from what is represented, making it possible for the author to sidestep clearly defined and unbending conclusions. In Joycean discourse the artist is transformed into God who is indifferently paring his fingernails,<sup>254</sup> while the world keeps spinning, full speed ahead.

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<sup>254</sup> In "Hades," the apparent seriousness of this remark is undercut by the replacement of God not by Stephen, the artist, but by Bloom! Joyce says something, then laughs at what the words have said. It is the detextualization of the source that often moves the text.

## 2. JOYCEAN INTERTEXTS

The *Ulysses* text is composed of various intertexts -- mythical, philosophical, literary -- and of an infinite number of styles and words in constant transformation. Intertextual harmonization, as Jenny writes, unifies form and content. The bridges the text creates, or isotopies, either "multiply the links introduced to integrate the borrowing on several levels at once, or else the intertextual fragments will profit from their ambiguity to project a range of combinatory possibilities towards the context. ... These isotopies are more stylistic in nature than narrative, says Jenny.<sup>255</sup> It is, I think, this constant interplay of overdetermination and ambiguity that moves Joyce's technique sometimes toward creating such semantic or metaphorical analogies, and some other times toward allowing the intertextual fragments to freely create combinations of possibilities that project the power and also the indeterminacy of language.

Myth, literature, philosophical and humanistic thought, music, songs, the city of Dublin, Irish history, and contemporary ideas are the author's textual sources for plot and characterization and particularly the symbolic dimension of his work. Joyce's preoccupation with symbols which he constantly juxtaposes to reality underlines his interest in a language that emphasizes the duality of things. Gabriel Conroy's gazing at his wife Greta descending the stairs, and "asking himself what is a

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<sup>255</sup> Jenny, "The Strategy of Form," p. 53

woman standing on the stairs in the shadow, listening to distant music, a symbol of<sup>256</sup> is an example of the author's with symbol.

I will focus on the way myth, particularly the Odyssean myth is used in Joyce's novel, then I will discuss the utility of philosophical thought as an important source of intertextuality; finally, I will look into language and the way it forms an intertext which functions like a theme. All these intertexts become the means that establish the Joycean themes, and particularly, for my purposes, the themes of memory and love.

#### a. Homeric intertextuality

The two keys, in *Ulysses* are Dublin and *The Odyssey*, corresponding to the realistic and the symbolic levels on which the novel moves. The Dublin guide reveals a literal-minded itinerary of street life, whereas the *Odyssey* enables the author to manipulate "a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity," and to give shape "to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history," as T.S. Eliot had described Joyce's mythical method.

The Homeric themes are developed intertextually and simultaneously with many other stories, all of which tell basically the same tale; but Odysseus's legend is the novel's most carefully elaborated intertext. It offers a medium that affords thematic

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<sup>256</sup> Joyce, *The Dead*, (New York: Penguin, 1988) p. 210.

polyphony and economy. The Odyssean myth is closely related to the themes of love and memory, and provides the masks needed for the textual disguises and the parodic function of the text. The referential analogies with the Homeric epic, however, are meager and whimsical. Joyce had given indeed to Budgen and Gilbert detailed information on his motives for choosing *The Odyssey* as his key narrative, information, though, which cannot be taken entirely seriously, since the author himself, on other occasions, saw to it that it be undermined.<sup>257</sup> Such conflicting statements have resulted in disbelief in Joyce's intentions to apply a deeper meaning through the use of the epic, which, it seems, interests him more as a structural framework.

Joyce had prepared, indeed, two schemas to help his biographer. He sent one to Carlo Linati in 1920 and the other he gave to Benoist-Méchin in 1921, which was published by Stuart Gilbert in 1931. These schemata assigned the name of a Homeric episode to each of the novel's eighteen chapters.<sup>258</sup> Although deleted by the author prior to the work's publication in 1922, these Homeric headings are still used by the

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<sup>257</sup> Ellmann refers, characteristically, to a conversation during which Joyce had said to Nabokov "something disparaging about the use of mythology in modern literature. 'But you employed Homer!' Nabokov retorted in amazement. 'A whim,' Joyce's answered. "But you collaborated with Gilbert,' Nabokov insisted. 'A terrible mistake,' said Joyce, 'an advertisement for the book. I regret it very much.'" Ellmann, *James Joyce*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982) p. 616.

<sup>258</sup> Ellmann, *Ulysses on the Liffey* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972) p. 186ff; also Stuart Gilbert, *James Joyce's "Ulysses,"* rev. ed., (New York: Vintage, 1952). Besides the Homeric headings, Gilbert tells us that the author also assigned the name of a bodily organ, an art, a symbol, and a technic for each chapter.

critics as working titles. But the title has remained.<sup>259</sup> As Kenner has put it, Joyce "permitted himself one extraneous element only, attached to the book itself: one word of seven letters: the title: *Ulysses*. That title we may describe as an auctorial comment, the sole remark the author (otherwise invisible, paring his fingernails) permits himself amid a quarter-million words."<sup>260</sup> In *Ulysses*, the foundational intertextual trope comes from the realm of literary myth and particularly the legend of Odysseus. Joyce had confided to Valéry Larbaud that the title of his novel was a key and that "the epic conception would impress its form upon the confusing substance of modern life."<sup>261</sup> The myth of the wanderer and exile in search of home and all that home stands for -- sets not only a structural -- but also a semantic and, to a certain extent, interpretive frame. *The Odyssey* focuses on the hero's homecoming, the son's coming of age and his quest for the father and identity, the wife's faithfulness, exile, return, and usurpation. *The Odyssey* is a domestic epic, a story focused on family which, according to Vico, is the force that moves society.

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<sup>259</sup> The latinized version of the name of Odysseus suggests the use of a translation. Not knowing classical Greek -- though he could speak modern Greek -- Joyce worked with a translation, the S.H. Butcher and Andrew Lang prose rendition of *The Odyssey*, published in 1879. On Joyce's knowledge of the Greek language see Manto Aravantinou, *Τα Ελληνικά του Τζαίημς Τζόυς* [James Joyce's Greek], (Athens: Hermes, 1977. See also Ellmann, *James Joyce*, pp. 408 and 512.

<sup>260</sup> Hugh Kenner, *Joyce's Voices* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978) p. 59.

<sup>261</sup> Harry Levin, *James Joyce*, rev. ed. (New York: New Directions, 1960) p. 65

The twenty-four books of the Homeric epic are compressed into eighteen chapters loosely dealing with the Homeric material. The text is divided into three parts, one for each one of its main characters. The three opening chapters thus form the "Telemachiad" in which Stephen Dedalus is introduced; the central twelve chapters form the Joycean *Odyssey* proper, or "Bloomiad," which focuses primarily on Bloom and brings Stephen into a relationship with him, whereas the last three chapters, referred to as "Nostos," return Bloom to his home and to Molly.

The *Odyssey* seems to have attracted Joyce because it is a story involving homecoming, love, memory, self-assertion and social identity which become metaphors for artistic fulfillment. Joyce admired Odysseus because of his "completeness" and crafty mind. "Odysseus, compared to Faust, Hamlet, or Christ," the author had told Budgen, is the only complete man, not in the sense of a perfect man, because he has all the defects of the ordinary man, but as a man who is

"all-round" and "kindly." Ulysses is son to Laertes... father to Telemachus, husband to Penelope, lover of Calypso, companion in arms of the Greek warriors around Troy, and King of Ithaca. He was subjected to many trials, but with wisdom and courage came through them all. Don't forget that he was a war dodger who tried to evade military service by simulating madness.<sup>262</sup>

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<sup>262</sup> Frank Budgen, *James Joyce and the Making of Ulysses*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989) pp. 15-18, 191.

Moreover, he is surrounded by a family, but can also be alone, as opposed to Faust, who "can't be complete because he's never alone. Mephistopheles is always hanging round him at his side or heels."<sup>263</sup>

The identification with the Homeric hero enables Bloom's portrayal not only as the universal "Everyman," but also as *Οὔτις*, or No-man, a quality that brands the unheroic twentieth-century individual. Through the use of the Odyssean model, traditional models are thus juxtaposed with the inadequate, and incomplete qualities of today's life. Moreover, the epic form offers another escape from history. According to what Havelock observes about the epic, is "innocent of any concept of time in the abstract [as] the epic depicts [a] course of events in terms of a single stream," as is the 'day,' "Homer's preferred symbol."<sup>264</sup>

*Ulysses* tells the same story as Homer, albeit in a different way and tone: He tells of a family seeking reunion, of a sexually estranged wife surrounded by suitors, exile, alienation, usurpation, the persistent memory of home and of the past, and of the psychological and physical ordeals that the contemporary hero has to overcome with resourcefulness, practical sense, and humor. The Homeric situations and epic tone are played down as the contemporary situation emerges. The sharpened stake with which Odysseus bravely takes out the eye of Polyphemus becomes, for example, the cigar which Bloom keeps brandishing in front of the citizen's eye.

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<sup>263</sup> Ellmann, *James Joyce*, p. 435.

<sup>264</sup> Havelock, *Preface to Plato*, p. 193n.

But Homer's epic is by no means the only myth Joyce uses. Cosmological myth relying on archetypal images, other ancient Greek and Irish myths and tales, or any tales for that matter, are evoked for the same purpose. Like Plato, Joyce sometimes creates his own stories -- his epiphanies: "The Parable of the Plums," for example, recounted on two different occasions (7.920ff and 17.640) is contextualized from the merging of a street scene in Dublin ("Aeolus") and the epiphany of the two "mid-wives" crossing the beach that Stephen had seen in "Proteus." Contrary to the invented Platonic myths, such concocted tales are examples of art created out of personal experience.

I would like now to turn to the characters that Joyce borrows from Homer. This will also serve the purpose of an introduction of the protagonists and their respective situations, particularly in connection with the themes of memory and love. Besides Odysseus, represented by Leopold Bloom, this contemporary epic has its own Penelope, Telemachus, Circe, Elpenor, Calypso, Nausicaa, Polyphemus, Sirens, and Agamemnon.

Leopold Bloom is "polytropos," like his mythical counterpart. Although his thought is less complex and profound than Stephen's, he is more interesting than the young poet because his mind can range over the whole of experience. The thoughts that preoccupy Bloom are centered around love, friendship, and human relations. He is Odysseus, wandering in the turn-of-the century Dublin and fighting the monsters of his jealousy and doubts stirred up by his wife's infidelity. Looking at life with openness, practicality, generosity, and kindness, Bloom represents

aspects of maturity that set him apart from Stephen. Taking the longest way round to find the shortest way home, as he muses (13.1110), he delays his homecoming, unwilling to break into Molly's interview with Boylan, which Leopold knew would take place at 4:30 p.m. Bloom is, in reality, trying to give himself time to deal, psychologically, with the situation and the pain that memory breeds. While struggling to come to terms with reality, his mind drifts over his lost son Rudy, who died ten years ago at the age of ten, and whom he seeks to replace with a new son -- presumably Stephen. The thoughts that preoccupy Bloom are centered around love, friendship, and human relations.

Penelope is evoked in the character of Molly Bloom, who, contrary to the Homeric heroine, cuckolds her husband earlier that same afternoon with the "suitor" Blazes Boylan. Bloom has avoided for ten years a full sexual relationship with his wife to avert another pregnancy, unwanted after the death of their son Rudy.

The Telemachus of the story is Stephen Dedalus, the young artist of *A Portrait*. His name, uniting the Christian and the pagan myth, is important in that it establishes a symbolic analogy with the father/creator. Stephen was the first Christian martyr<sup>265</sup> and Dedalus the "cunning artificer" of Greek mythology, who escaped from his prison

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<sup>265</sup> St. Stephen Protomartyr, a Jew educated in Greek, was the dominant figure in Christianity before Paul's conversion. Gifford with Seidman, *Ulysses Annotated* (Berkeley: Univ. of Calif. Press, 1989) p. 14.

on wings of wax.<sup>266</sup> Daedalus is known for works of genius like the labyrinth and the wings, which Stephen has in mind when he refers to his father as "the hawklike man" and "the fabulous artificer." These are the two qualities in the symbolic father figure that interest Joyce -- the first is related to freedom, the second to art. Icarus was the young idealist who was given wings by his father to soar skyward. We know how central the theme of fall in Joyce's work is. Stephen, identified with Icarus, represents the young artist's quest for freedom away from his country, family, and church and from the ideas that threatened to keep him a prisoner of the Irish "paralysis." This identification also associates him with falling, the artist's failure to create leading to his spiritual death. Daedalus becomes a symbol of the artist, the cunning craftsman, who flies, as Joyce had vowed to do, by the nets that hold him down. Icarus associates Stephen with falling -- the artist's failure to create and his spiritual death. As the son of Simon Dedalus in *Ulysses*, a father who is constantly absent, Stephen is the poet striving for artistic maturation through atonement with the only one who can create. By combining the Icarus myth with that of Telemachus who sets out on a trip to seek the absent father, Joyce allows his interlocking symbols to speak for one another.

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<sup>266</sup> Dedalus, the crafty artificer exiled in Crete, was commissioned by King Minos to build the Labyrinth in which he was subsequently imprisoned with his son Icarus for having displeased the king. To escape from the Labyrinth Dedalus fashioned wings which he glued with wax and feathers to his body and the body of his son. The father managed to escape to Sicily where he was re-established as the fabulous artificer, whereas Icarus, flying in his youthful enthusiasm too close to the sun, caused his wings to melt. He fell in the Aegean sea and drowned.

Other minor Homeric characters have also symbolic functions. They are employed to throw into bold relief the Joycean image of everyday life and human relations, particularly regarding love. The "Circe" episode dramatizes the chaotic workings of the unconscious. Placed near the end of the journey, and marking the meeting of father and son, this episode constitutes the climax of the novel. The Homeric Circe is incarnated by Bella Cohen, the owner of a brothel in Dublin's Nighttown. The goddess of magic who turns men into beasts stands for instinctual life, lust, and the uncontrollable, suppressed emotions in the human psyche. "Circe" epitomizes what Seferis has seen as abused love, except that in Joyce there are no moral undertones.

The Homeric Elpenor has his Joycean counterpart in "poor Paddy Dignam," the embodiment of excess and weakness, who died unexpectedly because of too much drinking. Bloom will go to his funeral at 11:00 am that day. Like Odysseus, he meets his dead companion in the underworld, appropriately the "Hades" episode of the book. Bloom has feelings of compassion toward Dignam, who died like Elpenor:

- As decent a little man as ever wore a hat...
- Blazing face: redhot. Too much John Barleycorn. Cure for a red nose. Drink like the devil till it turns adelite...
- No suffering, he said. A moment and all is over. Like dying in sleep (6.303-314).

Similarly, Nausicaa, the Phaeacian princess, is evoked in the character of Gerty MacDowell whose self-conscious exhibitionism on the beach wakes the voyeur in Bloom. She embodies another kind of love -- incomplete and wasted. Agamemnon, identified with Parnell, completes the

picture with betrayed love. Both he and Parnell were ruined by a woman.<sup>267</sup>

Other Homeric characters, nymphs, and monsters, include Calypso -- represented by Martha Clifford, Bloom's pen-pal whom he never met and prefers to love from a distance. Calypso, the Cyclops, the Sirens, the Lestrygonians, and Scylla and Charybdis also give their names to various chapters of *Ulysses*. They all have rather thin and arbitrary analogies with the novel's situations and characters but sustain, through an established symbolic pattern, the work's thematic orientation. The "Cyclops" chapter, thus depicts a scene in Kiernan's bar, in which Bloom meets the "citizen," the incarnation of the intolerant Irish militant who abuses Bloom in a violent way, verbally and physically. The "Sirens" episode features two flirting female singers in a bar called "The Mermaids." "Lestrygonians" likens Bloom's fellow Irishmen at lunch time to cannibals; "Scylla and Charybdis" refers to the two poles of Western philosophy: Plato and Aristotle, mysticism and scholasticism, according to the Linati schema.

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<sup>267</sup> Charles Stewart Parnell (1846-91) was the leader of a nationalist majority of the Irish members of Parliament and the hero of the Irish struggle for independence. His career was destroyed when his ten-year liaison with Kitty O'Shea was revealed and her husband, Captain William Henry O'Shea, brought divorce action against her on the grounds of her adultery with Parnell. Parnell was deposed as a leader and denounced by the Catholic church and three weeks later died brokenhearted in a divided country. Joyce, who increasingly identified his own plight with Parnell's, never forgave the Irish Roman Catholic church and his countrymen for Parnell's "betrayal." The word "betrayal" became central in the author's work and thought, ever after.

Comparing Seferis's treatment of the Homeric monsters with Joyce's, we could say that the former sees them as symbols of forgetfulness and lust that make *nostos* impossible because they destroy love and obliterate memory, whereas in Joyce these monsters describe, parodically, a certain behavior, a thought, or an aspect of life. In effect, they serve as metaphors, styles, and modes of expression that describe human actions. The citizen, for example, blinded by his radical nationalism, appears as one-eyed, literally and metaphorically. One of the isotopies enabling intertextual embedding is the passage from figurative to literal meaning.<sup>268</sup> To convey the idea of one-eyed perspective, Joyce transforms his character literally, into the one-eyed mythical monster. Monsters in *Ulysses* are in fact the words when, detached from feeling, are left to take over.

This idiosyncratic drawing of Homeric characters and situational analogies contributes, most of the time, to an ironic, parodic, or satirical effect. The author's intention was to enlarge, through comparison, Dublin's everyday life in order to generalize meaning. But with myth as a backdrop, the serious side of what is handled playfully is at all times impressed upon the reader's mind without the need to be articulated. Joyce's loose treatment of myth allows flexibility in the transformation of traditional mythical symbols and enables the simultaneous operation of multiple intertextual references which are ultimately fused together in the mind of the reader through sound, style, and even the visual image of the words on the printed page. If

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<sup>268</sup> Jenny, p. 41.

Joyce's use of myth fails to go beyond the surface, it must be because life experience is subjective and therefore arbitrary, complex and ungraspable, like language. Situations involving love, betrayal, memory, and other expressions of life thus offer a modified myth of return that is open-ended.

#### b. Philosophy and literature

Philosophy and literature serve in a way analogous to myth, allowing the themes that interest Joyce to emerge. Philosophy and literature serve to constitute his characters and project the artist's dilemma. Stephen's language, for example, is a product of what he reads. His vertiginous syllogisms on love, death, art and the artist, religion, nationalism, and paternity are based on established philosophical, literary and religious narratives in which he is well versed. Having read everything, the young intellectual thinks in words and sentences borrowed from his literary sources -- Thomas Aquinas, Shakespeare, Swift, Aristotle, Bruno, and Vico. By contrast, Bloom's soliloquies, are "a jumble of bits of advertisements, popular science, music hall refrains."<sup>269</sup> Among several examples of literary intertextuality related to love are the story of Shakespeare and Hamlet, victims of betrayal, usurpation, paternal and filial identity, and countless fragments borrowed from poetry, the opera, proverbs, nursery rhymes, folk tales, and so on. In this respect, the author also uses myth in its

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<sup>269</sup> Gilbert, p. 77.

wider context, the Bible, history, and contemporary life: The story of Helen of Troy, the triangle Aphrodite-Ares-Hephaestus, Adam and Eve, Parnell and Kitty O'Shea, Admiral Nelson, Penelope Rich, and others, all symbolic of love and betrayal.

The use of literary and philosophical intertextuality is better illustrated in *Scylla and Charybdis*." In the National Library scene that this chapter depicts, Stephen seems to be impatient with Plato: "Aristotle, Plato's schoolboy," he argues emphatically, "would find Hamlet's musings about the afterlife of his princely soul, the improbably, insignificant and undramatic monologue, as shallow as Plato's" (9.76-78). Stephen rejects Platonic abstract thinking in favor of Aristotelian concrete life experience: "Hold to the now, the here, through which all future plunges to the past" (9.89).<sup>270</sup> *Scylla and Charybdis*, the two monsters between which Odysseus struggles to pass unharmed, become in chapter nine Plato and Aristotle -- the two minds from which philosophy sprouted. Stephen does not know which of the two "monsters" better serves the purposes of the artist: Aristotle, or Plato? "Which of the two," Stephen asks his Platonist friend A.E. (the poet George Russell) "would have banished me from his commonwealth?" (9.82). Odysseus wouldn't have known how to stay alive had not Circe told him to stay close to Scylla or otherwise Charybdis would swallow him. Stephen clearly steers away from Plato, the whirlpool, staying closer to Scylla's crag, opting for the freedom of individual experience

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<sup>270</sup> Kenner identifies Joyce's "synchronicity" with his aversion for the "diachronic" and the past, which goes, as he says, as far as the memory of his father. See *Joyce's Voices*, pp. 49-50.

rather than be assimilated in the "cauldron over a raging fire" that describes Charybdis.<sup>271</sup> The chapter ends by suddenly shifting to literature and a revealing poetic language which ends the heated dispute. From Plato and Aristotle the text moves to Homer and Shakespeare: "Frail from the housetops two plumes of smoke ascended, pluming, and in a flaw of softness softly were blown. Cease to strive. Peace of the druid priests of Cymbeline: hierophantic: from wide earth an altar" (9.1219-1222). The Heraclitean strife ends and peace ensues.

This transition, effected through intertextual allusions from *The Odyssey*, Blake, and Shakespeare (*Macbeth*, and *Cymbeline*) refers to the fulfillment of a prophecy.<sup>272</sup> The smoke ascending from Odysseus's home signals the end of the journey, the end of the strife about which Blake and Circe speak. The augury and prophetic revelation of peace enhanced through the Shakespearean references, suggest the possibility of balance and unity.

In a comparable mode Joyce adopts the thought of later philosophers and historians, such as Giordano Bruno (1548-1600) and Giambattista Vico (1668-1744), who combine Pre-Socratic, neoplatonic, and cosmological thought. The dualism of things promoted by Bruno, Vico's notion that history occurs in cycles and that language mirror history and social institutions, the centrality of human experience in

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<sup>271</sup> *The Odyssey*, 12.237 (line 256 in Fagles translation).

<sup>272</sup> The intertextuality of this passage is explained in detail in Gifford's *Ulysses Annotated*, p. 256.

which Aristotle and Bruno believed,<sup>273</sup> Plato's and Bruno's idea of a universal intellect<sup>274</sup> -- all converge and digress in *Ulysses*. They compose the material that separates and brings together the rationalist and the mystic, the real and the magic, sustaining the work's symbolic dimension. In terms of our protagonists, it is manifested in the union of Bloom and Stephen, the rational bourgeois and the dreamy poet.

Bruno's theory of an ultimate unity divided into opposites is another key to the structure of *Ulysses*. In Joyce's words, Bruno's system is "by turns rationalist and mystic, theistic and pantheistic," -

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<sup>273</sup> For a detailed discussion of the relationship between Bruno, Aristotle, and Joyce see Theoharis Contantine Theoharis, *Joyce's Ulysses: An Anatomy of the Soul* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988) passim. Joyce and Stephen sought the reality of loss through experience. As Theoharis observes; Joyce's unusual identification of symbolic and realistic representation follows the distinct identification of the soul by Aristotle and Bruno. The two theories appear in Stephen's and Bloom's way of thinking, respectively, and in the symbolism surrounding them. "Relying on both theories," this critic concludes, "Joyce recapitulates in his art Bruno's antithetical development of Aristotle's conception of the soul and so dramatizes his own conviction that all being is unified, and that its unity is preeminently displayed and understood in the human soul." Ibid, p. 55

<sup>274</sup> The idea of the "world-soul," a kind of universal intellect is neoplatonic. In his *Timaeus*, Plato fosters the notion of a "world soul" compounded by the Demiurge (*Timaeus* 34A-36B). *Timaeus*, developing a cosmology based on a central force that envelops the human body and soul was crucial in the formation of later cosmogonic beliefs. Unlike Bruno, Aristotle has no concept of "world-soul." For Plato's disciple, the soul has no power of unity. For Aristotle nature was undergoing physical permutations to perfect itself, which leads to the idea of God: "All human history moves towards one great goal, the manifestation of God," says Mr Deasy in "Proteus" (2.380-811). Joyce, of course, undercuts the word by replacing it with the function of the creative artist. The evolutionary process that replaces God is a nineteenth century idea that modified the sense of time, as Bergson's *élan vital* theory exemplifies.

- a system of opposites.<sup>275</sup> As Ellmann has shown in a schema of *Ulysses* which he proposed, *Ulysses* is largely constructed on contraries and their balancing coincidences.<sup>276</sup> In *Ulysses* this union of opposites is portrayed in its three characters and what they symbolize: intellect, experience, flesh. The union the text is seeking culminates in the brief union of Stephen and Bloom -- the antihistorical poet and the practical man concerned with historical time, thus uniting words and experience, the artist and the scientist, the old and the young.

Giambattista Vico had fascinated Joyce because of his views of history and particularly his idea that language is a means of discovering the forgotten human institutions. Vico's theories share Joyce's preoccupation with language, family, myth, history, and human experience. In his *New Science*, Vico propounds a natural law of growth, decay, and regrowth through which all nations and civilizations must pass.<sup>277</sup> He found history cyclical; each revolution of history's cycle consists of four ages eternally repeated: a divine age, a heroic age, a human age, and a period of confusion, the *ricorso*, at once the end of the old cycle and the beginning of the new. The last heralds renewal and is represented by the darkness that follows the fall of civilizations and precedes a new divine age. *Finnegans Wake* (1939) turns

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<sup>275</sup> James Joyce: *The Critical Writings*, Ellsworth Mason and Richard Ellmann eds., (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1989) p. 133.

<sup>276</sup> Ellmann, *Ulysses on the Liffey*, pp. 177-183.

<sup>277</sup> Giambattista Vico, *La scienza nuova, 1725-30. The New Science of Giambattista Vico*, trans. Thomas Goddard Bergin and Max Harold Fisch (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, [1948] 1988) p. 106.

on this Vichonian metaphysical pivot of the corso-ricorso theme. Reproducing a dream or an allegory about fall and resurrection, Joyce's last work features such Heraclitean elements as the river and the thunderbolt -- the voice of God that terminates the old age and starts the cycle of history anew. The story moves against a cosmic backdrop, in a circle, with the last word merging into the first: "riverrun." This first word, the essence of the book, is not only a beginning but becomes a continuation of the sentence with which the novel ends, offering an eloquent example of words transformed into themes.

In *Ulysses*, Vico's thought is evoked in the cyclical reappearance of objects that go through their individual Odysseys in time, but do not always return. Bloom had once marked a coin with three notches "for circulation on the waters of civic finance for possible, circuitous or direct, return" (17.980-84). "Had Bloom's coin returned?" the "Ithaca" narrator asks, and the answer comes without hesitation: "Never" (17.987-88). The lemon soap that Bloom keeps in his pocket, the potato he carries around, the man in the Macintosh, the clown in search of paternity, Throwaway -- a race horse -- all become motifs with unexplained functions. They make their appearance in the narrative as detached, isolated words that imitate the trajectory of the lonely wanderers of the book. Vico's deep look into the historical structure through the public language of those who recorded it was a stimulating aspect that Joyce adopted and used for his purposes. For Vico, history is inseparable from the performative aspects of language in the etymologies of which we find the mental vocabulary of human social

institutions.<sup>278</sup> In Joyce's statement that it was Vico who made his imagination grow the writer was acknowledging the linguistic medium of the social context of Vico's science which was based on human experience.

The Joycean pattern of forward and backward movement, recreated through the arrangement of words describing action, evokes Vico's principle of cyclical repetition. It is a motif constantly recurring throughout the novel. At Prospect Cemetery Bloom contemplates the image of a rat and muses about the endless cycle of transformation that follows disintegration of matter, which reminds us of the Pre-Socratic conception of cosmic justice: "Of course the cells of whatever they are go on living. Changing about. Live for ever practically. Nothing to feed on, they feed on themselves" (6.78-82). The idea is picked up later as Bloom watches a typesetter at the newspaper office read backwards, which in turns triggers the memory of his father reading his Hagadah book backwards, and now prompts a nursery tale: "And then the lamb and the cat and the dog and the stick and the water and the butcher and then the angel of death kills the butcher and he kills the ox and the dog kills the cat. Sounds a bit silly till you come to look into it well. Justice it means but it's everybody eating everyone else. That's what life is after all" (7.210-214).<sup>279</sup> While expressing his skepticism on

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<sup>278</sup> Ibid, p. 106

<sup>279</sup> Joyce had expressed his usual skepticism during a party in Zurich where the guests were admiring the perfection of the starry sky, which was evoked by a priest as a cosmological explanation of God and cosmic order. "What a pity," remarked Joyce, "that the whole thing depends upon reciprocal destruction." Ellmann, *James Joyce*, p. 299.

cosmological and philosophical attempts to explain life, Joyce uses here Vico's idea of circular motion illustrated through the backward/forward movement which appears again in Rudy's reading Hebrew, in "Circe." The train at Amiens Station in "Ithaca" (17.2085-89), or the following passage in "Aeolus" are further examples of the chiasmic use of language and the sound of the words for the purpose of creating a theme:

"Grossbooted draymen rolled barrels dullthudding out of Prince's stores and bumped them up on the brewery float. On the brewery float bumped dullthudding barrels rolled by grossbooted draymen out of Prince's stores" (7.22-24).

Whereas Bruno and Vico provide models for patterns of speech, Platonic intertextuality is a source of characterization and theme, often in relation to love.<sup>280</sup> June W. Allison posits that the *Symposium* is a source for the "Oxen of the Sun," as the structural, thematic, conceptual, and stylistic similarities of the two works show. Central in both of them is the theme of "Eros," which a group of drinking men is trying to define. But contrary to Plato's idealistic drawing of Eros, Joyce evokes in this episode the mundane, materialistic, even monstrous experiences of human sexuality. "What is conspicuously absent from the "Oxen," Allison argues, "is love."<sup>281</sup> Ussher, who sees in Joyce "a hyperborean incarnation of Plato," finds

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<sup>280</sup> Some Platonic allusions occur at 7.1035, 9.52-53, 9.76-78, 9.82-83, 9.84-85, 9.86, 9.233-37, 9.1139, and 14.1111, most of them in "Scylla and Charybdis."

<sup>281</sup> June W. Allison, "A Literary Coincidence? Joyce and Plato," *James Joyce Quarterly*, Vol. 25 No. 3 (Spring 1988) pp. 267-282, esp. 270

that Leopold Bloom resembles less the wily Odysseus than the Platonic Socrates.<sup>282</sup> A slightly different view of Bloom is presented also by Whittaker and Jordan who see Bloom as an incarnation of Odysseus via Book X of *The Republic*, precisely the myth of Er. In this myth, Er, who has just come back from the other world, describes the immortality of the soul and its reincarnation. When Odysseus's soul comes to choose a pattern of life, Er recounts, "the memory of his former sufferings had cured him of all ambitions and he chooses the uneventful life of an ordinary man" literally, "the life of a private and idle man" (620c-d). The description can apply either to Socrates, or to Bloom. "Joyce reincarnates this same soul as one Leopold Bloom," Whittaker and Jordan conclude.<sup>283</sup>

But while heavily depending on mythical, philosophical, and literary intertexts, Joyce, with a sudden stroke of the "lancet of his art" (1.152), subverts the reference as though he were trying to stop himself short of treating life seriously. The uniqueness of human coupled with the inadequacy of the language makes representation a dubious self-defeating effort.

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<sup>282</sup> See Arland Ussher, *Three Great Irishmen* (London: Victor Gollanz, Ltd., 1952) p. 120.

<sup>283</sup> Whittaker Stephen and Jordan Francis X., "The Three Whistles and the Aesthetic of Mediation: Modern Physics and Platonic Metaphysics in Joyce's *Ulysses*," *James Joyce Quarterly* Vol. 33, No. 1 (Fall 1996) 27-47.

### c. Language and linguistic intertextuality

Plot, characterization, and point of view are achieved not only through thematic intertextuality but also by means of stylistic intertextuality -- the borrowing of stylistic and linguistic elements from other texts -- which, together with the work's "*modulations d'écriture*," the invention of "portmanteau words," puns, reversed syntax, and invented lexicon, act as if they were themes. In this way, the author demonstrates the process by which life is transformed into art.

Whereas the early chapters, as Lawrence observes, are concerned with plot and character, the second half of the book breaks into an opaque and self-dramatizing language; from story the text shifts, increasingly, to the process of writing. As the surplus of detail takes over, she argues, an imitation of life takes effect. She concurs that if nothing virtually happens in the end, it is that life is arbitrary and plurisignificant and concludes that if there is not an absolute pattern of meaning but only a choice of possibilities, it is because life is meaningless and inexplicable.<sup>284</sup>

Joyce had expressed his intention to "prove the inadequacy of English."<sup>285</sup> In the process, he underlines the power of the word and

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<sup>284</sup> Lawrence, pp. 9-13.

<sup>285</sup> Ellmann, *James Joyce*, p. 155.

the polysemeity that results from linguistic ambiguity. This double function of language is consciously exploited by the artist. Through his iconoclastic treatment of all linguistic aspects, syntax, vocabulary, sound, and style, and especially through the use of various narrators, he proved that the linguistic medium is more than words and sentences. Language becomes life, alive and vibrant. As Beckett wrote with reference to *Finnegans Wake* -- and this applies also to *Ulysses* -- "here form IS content, content IS form... [Joyce's] writing is not about something; it is that something itself. ... Here words are not the polite contortions of 20th century printer's ink. They are alive. They elbow their way on to the page, and glow and glaze and fade and disappear."<sup>286</sup> But this life is represented as inexplicable, unpredictable and opaque beyond the reach of any language. Ultimately, what Joyce shows is that language and life are parts of the same puzzle. Otherwise, we would be witnessing Joyce's confessed failure in proving, as he had intended, the inadequacy of the English idiom.

Style changes the way life changes -- it wanders, veers and bends according to the character speaking. This is what Hugh Kenner has called the "Uncle Charles Principle," defined as "the narrative idiom [that] need not be the narrator's."<sup>287</sup> The style constantly shifts to mock, to parody, or to accommodate a new narrator. In "Nausicaa," for

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<sup>286</sup> "Dante... Bruno. Vico... Joyce." Cited by Marjorie Perloff, in *The Poetics of Indeterminacy: Rimbaud to Cage* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1981) p. 213.

<sup>287</sup> Kenner, *Joyce's Voices*, p.18.

example, the romantic style used to convey Gerty MacDowell's thinking pattern substitutes the romantic love the Phaeacean princess feels toward Odysseus. This chapter is written in two different styles, the first adopting Gerty's Skaz idiom (normal human speech not uttered in formal situations), a sentimental, woman's magazine style which blends satire and pathos to reproduce the romantically dramatized thinking of a young uneducated girl.<sup>288</sup> The second half of the same chapter is expressed in Bloom's characteristic narrative mode: the movement through metonymic associations from theme to theme. In "Oxen of the Sun," the entire development of English prose style is jammed into forty paragraphs parodying English prose from its Gaelic origins of the fourteenth century to our times. It corresponds to the forty weeks of human gestation which is the theme of the chapter. Through the evolution of language which ends with the birth of the "Word," the episode develops simultaneously the theme of the birth of a child at the "Maternity Hospital" of Dublin. As Lawrence notes, written under the sign of Vico, the chapter ends in ricorso (chaos), where all languages are present in a breakdown of linguistic form:<sup>289</sup> "Telemachus" introduces a series of stylistic masks which assign to language a "public" role and contradicting the conventional concept of language as

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<sup>288</sup> Ellmann refers to it as "a namby-pamby jammy marmalady drawersy (alto la!) style with effects of incense, mariolatry, masturbation, stewed cocklers, painter's palette, chitchat, circumlocutions, etc., etc." See Ellmann, *James Joyce*, p. 473.

<sup>289</sup> Lawrence, p. 113

the "signature" of the writer;<sup>290</sup> "Proteus," using the stream of consciousness<sup>291</sup> (or male internal monologue technique) to convey Stephen's thoughts is an exploration into the pre-verbal, simulating unshaped and ever-changing patterns of thought and language, as the mythical title of the episode implies. "Aeolus" is an inventory of rhetorical figures (Gifford and Seidman count at least 113 of them);<sup>292</sup> The "Sirens" episode abandons English syntax in favor of sound and rhythmic combinations; "Eumaeus" gives a catalogue of commonplaces, employing a tired rhythm that imitates the mood of the exhausted protagonists at the end of their wanderings. In "Ithaca," constructed in the fashion of a catechistic dialogue, Joyce uses the language of science and mathematics to develop the illusion of objective reliability, then shatters his own bombastic pose by introducing errors and inconsistencies into the text;" and "Penelope" reproduces the outpouring of the subconscious into words in disorderly juggled across 1610 lines of a virtually unpunctuated text arranged in eight sentences!

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<sup>290</sup> Ibid, p.8

<sup>291</sup> The term was coined by William James in *Principles of Psychology* (1890) to denote the flow of inner experiences. In literary criticism it refers to that technique which seeks to depict the multitudinous thoughts and feelings which pass through the mind. Joyce took, in fact, Flaubert's "style indirect libre" and applied it on a gigantic scale in *Ulysses*, developing it into "internal" or "silent monologue," which proceeds by free association to reproduce the flow of unconscious thoughts striving to become words.

<sup>292</sup> Gifford with Seidman, *Ulysses Annotated*, p. 642.

During the writing of *Ulysses*, Joyce was obsessively preoccupied with the arrangement of the words on the printed page.<sup>293</sup> Budgen recalls a characteristic dialogue he had with the author one night in Zurich:

"I've been working hard on [*Ulysses*] all day," said Joyce.  
 "Does that mean that you have written a great lot?" I said.  
 "Two sentences," said Joyce.  
 "I looked sideways but Joyce was not smiling. I thought of Flaubert.  
 "You've been seeking the *mot juste*?" I said.  
 "No." said Joyce. "I have the words already. What I am seeking is the perfect order of words in the sentence."<sup>294</sup>

According to another anecdote, Joyce "spent hours rearranging fifteen words, but knew from the start what each of the words was to be."<sup>295</sup> In *Ulysses* linguistic imagination becomes even more important than thematic imagination. Joyce relegates metaphysical questions to language: The only way of insuring immortality, he tells Budgen, would be to insert so many enigmas and puzzles in his novel that would keep the scholars busy for centuries arguing over what he meant! Narcissism, not skepticism, one could retort. But beneath the apparent superficiality of such statements, one can suspect the thinker's pondering about the uncertainty of metaphysical truths and the artist's

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<sup>293</sup> The "Arranger," an established Joycean term referring to a kind of authorial voice behind the ingenuity of the text's organization, is eloquent enough in this respect. The term was first proposed by David Hayman in *"Ulysses": The Mechanics of Meaning* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1970), and later taken up by other critics, notably Hugh Kenner.

<sup>294</sup> Budgen, *James Joyce and the Making of Ulysses*, pp. 19-20.

<sup>295</sup> Hugh Kenner, *The Pound Era*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971) p. 67. Elsewhere Kenner refers to *Ulysses* as a book of "words arranged and rearranged." *Joyce's Voices*, p. 49.

ambivalence between the object of representation and the way to represent it. Whereas Plato rewrites traditional language to serve educational purposes and to perfect the soul for the aims of philosophy, and Seferis identifies language with memory, Joyce reveals "the labyrinth and ambivalence of [man's] thought and emotions."<sup>296</sup>

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<sup>296</sup> Lawrence, p. 10

#### 4. EPIPHANIES<sup>297</sup>

The Joycean epiphany is an example of the way the artist uses memory to convert autobiographical material to art.<sup>298</sup> They are paths of escaping into art, moments brought together through simultaneity and correspondence. A discussion of the nature of this Joycean peculiarity will enable a better illustration of the way memory turns experience into art in Joycean poetics, and also help differentiate Joyce's notion of revelation from that of Plato and Seferis.

The epiphanies included dreams and reveries, visions and hallucinations, and were predominantly based on memory. As Day has pointed out, the Joycean epiphany has, most likely, as its source the method of the *ars memoriae*, a vital tool throughout antiquity for organizing vast masses of heterogeneous material in your head... [a tool] which survived in the teachings of Loyola and the Jesuits." Joyce's practice, Day goes on to say, is based on the principle of "the composition of place," organized "by association around vivid images, or

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<sup>297</sup> This theological term comes from the Greek word "Epiphaneia" meaning manifestation, especially of a divinity. It refers, particularly, to the manifestation of Christ on the Feast of the Epiphany, on January 6.

<sup>298</sup> Joyce had also used another term for epiphany: *epiclisis*, the word for the invocation of the Holy Ghost to transform the host into the body and blood of Christ. Referring to this term, Joyce had said to his brother Stanislaus: "Don't you see there is a certain resemblance between the mystery of the Mass and what I am trying to do? I mean that I am trying ... to give people some kind of intellectual pleasure or spiritual enjoyment by converting the bread of everyday life into something that has a permanent artistic life of its own... for their mental, moral, and spiritual uplift. S. Joyce, *My Brother's Keeper*, pp. 103-4.

little pictures ... which are very personal and arbitrary."<sup>299</sup> The modernists rediscovered this ancient tool of the artist which was apparently invented by the Greek poet Simonides.<sup>300</sup> Eliot's objective correlative, Wordsworth's "spots of time," Hemingway's "moment of truth," Yeats's "great memory," Ungaretti's "Moment," and Seferis's "Moment," discussed above, are, like Joyce's epiphanies, moments of revelations based on image-strings that stimulate the memory and control the imagination.

Joyce collected the epiphanies from the experience of his own life and later numbered and renumbered them according to a certain progression. In *The Workshop of Daedalus*, Scholes and Kain reproduced forty epiphanies from Joyce's manuscripts at Buffalo and Cornell, the only ones that remain of an estimated of seventy-one originally recorded by Joyce. A study of the purpose of their treatment leads to the conclusion that their "arrangement was not a historical or biographical one but a creative one, in which the materials were organized according to their esthetic relevance."<sup>301</sup>

The actual epiphanies that Joyce recorded are described as "life observed caught in a kind of camera eye which reproduced a significant

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<sup>299</sup> Robert Adams Day, "Dante, Ibsen, Joyce, Epiphanies, and the Art of Memory," *James Joyce Quarterly*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (Spring 1988) 357-362, esp. 358. On Joyce's Jesuit memory training see Kevin Sullivan, *Joyce Among the Jesuits* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1957), pp. 81-83.

<sup>300</sup> The story of Simonides is found in Cicero's *De oratore*, 2.86.351-54.

<sup>301</sup> Scholes and Kain, *The Workshop of Daedalus*, p. 31.

moment without comment. But such moments, once recorded, could be placed in an artistic framework and used to enrich with reality a fictional narrative."<sup>302</sup> Stanislaus, confirms that his brother's "angle of vision was new. The revelation and importance of the subconscious had caught his interest. The epiphanies became more frequently subjective and included dreams which he considered in some way revelatory."<sup>303</sup> The epiphanies included dreams and reveries, visions, and hallucinations, and were predominantly based on memories. The only definition of epiphany that we have is the one from Stephen Dedalus: "a sudden spiritual manifestation, whether in the vulgarity of speech or of gesture or in a memorable phase of the mind itself," when the metaphoric potential of an object, a moment, gesture, phrase, is realized.<sup>304</sup> Those which involve the writer's mind (its "memorable phases") are the most important.<sup>305</sup> Stephen's definition does not describe what the critics mean by the term today. In *Dubliners*, for instance -- in which there is not even one epiphany among those recorded by Joyce -- scholars have found many, the most well known, perhaps, among them, in the closing scene of the "Dead," when the true meaning of love is revealed

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<sup>302</sup> Ibid, p. 4.

<sup>303</sup> Stanislaus Joyce, *My Brother's Keeper*, pp. 125.

<sup>304</sup> James Joyce, *Stephen Hero* (New York: New Direction, 1963) p. 211.

<sup>305</sup> As Scholes and Kain write, in a variegated work like *A Portrait*, Joyce's peculiar concept of the epiphany as a moment in which is revealed either the vulgarity of the non-artist or a memorable phase of the artist's mind," may have derived from "Flaubert's emphasis on impersonality and his careful avoidance of the autobiographical, balanced against Wilde's assertion that autobiography is irresistible." *The Workshop of Daedalus*, p. 241.

to Gabriel Conroy through his wife's confession that the young boy who loved her died for her.

Most of the epiphanies Joyce recorded found their way into his earlier works. *A Portrait* is largely based on a series of epiphanies, as the so-called "pull out his eyes" epiphany exemplifies.<sup>306</sup> A good number of images from *A Portrait* and *Stephen Hero* surface as major motifs in different episodes of *Ulysses*: The apparition of Stephen's dead mother, for instance, the inability to pray at his brother's deathbed, scenes at a bordello, recorded by the author as early as 1902, foreshadow major motifs in *Ulysses*.<sup>307</sup> Epiphany #21 describing the funeral of Joyce's mother was used in *Stephen Hero* (p. 167) and later as part of Bloom's interior monologue at Paddy Dignam's funeral (6.517-20).<sup>308</sup> The smashing of the chandelier in "Circe," or Gerty's suddenly revealed lameness on the beach, or the two midwives that find their way into the Plums Parable, or the woman and "the girl with the fish's face bloodless and livid" at the cemetery, or Rudy's apparition in "Circe" respond to the principle of simultaneity that describes an epiphany as a moment where correspondences bring certain ideas together.

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<sup>306</sup> I'm referring to the scene where Mr Vance tells Mrs. Joyce that her son has to apologize or "the eagles'll come and pull out his eyes," used later in *A Portrait*, exemplifies the way Stephen finds refuge from authority in art turning his predicament into a poem chiasmically arranged: "Apologise, Apologise, Pull out his eyes / apologise, Pull out his eyes, Apologise." See Scholes and Kain, *The Workshop of Daedalus*, p. 11.

<sup>307</sup> See epiphanies Nos. 33, 34, 35, 20, 22, 23 in Scholes and Kain.

<sup>308</sup> Stanislaus Joyce, *My Brother's Keeper: James Joyce's Early Years*. (New York: The Viking Press, 1958) p. 235. See also Scholes and Kain, *The Workshop of Daedalus*, p. 31.

An epiphany has to do with some kind of "magic" illumination, coincidence, and correspondence. As Tindall notes,

Magical in origin, the correspondence, whether magical or literary, is an evocative agreement among things, one more or less related to others. ... Epiphany, correspondence, symbol, image, metaphor -- call it what you will -- this happy combination of things came down to men of letters from the magicians. Baudelaire got it from Swedenborg and he from Thoth.<sup>309</sup>

The idea goes back to the imagist technique, discussed in connection with Seferis's poetry, consisting in the unification of distinct images into a complex presented spatially in an instant of time, which produces a sense of sudden liberation (see page 232, above).

As seen in Seferis's poetry, the moment of revelation is often associated with an impression of sudden stillness. In Joyce, however, this moment is aesthetic. In *A Portrait*, Stephen advances the theory that "aesthetic emotion" is "static." This term comes from Stephen's interpretation of Aristotle who emphasized "catharsis," or purgation, as the result of pure emotions such as those aroused by tragedy. The kind of aesthetic emotion, which causes catharsis, constitutes a "stasis," or arrest of the emotions, as opposed to those emotions excited by "improper art" which are "kinetic." This state of the mind which is "arrested and raised above desire and loathing," (p. 205) brings our

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<sup>309</sup> William York Tindall, *A Reader's Guide to James Joyce*, p. 82  
As Yates also notes in this connection, the Renaissance ideas, involving alchemy and magic derive from Hermes Trismegistus - identified with the Egyptian Thoth (Theuth), inventor of language, whom Plato depicts in the *Phaedrus*. The epiphany is thus related to language. Frances A. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (Chicago: Chicago Univ. Press, 1964). pp.191-92, 48 and passim. See also note 50, above.

emotions "into a state of balance or equilibrium" -- a state of stability.<sup>310</sup> The preponderant image of "epiphany" in *A Portrait* is the vision of the wading birdgirl who seems to stand immobile: She "seemed like one whom magic had changed into the likeness of a strange and beautiful seabird," and stands "alone and still." She appears just when Stephen realizes that he has found his vocation and represents art calling him to "live, to err, to fall, to triumph, to recreate life out of life!" (171-73).

Contrary to Seferis and Plato, who reveal a philosophical or poetic "truth" to make a point in their argument, the Joycean epiphany is an example of a minute piece of art transfixing the experience of life into writing and eternalizing it. Rather than predictive apocalypses of a deterministic end, they often come to nought.<sup>311</sup> If the Joycean epiphany reveals something, it is change transformed into permanence made possible by art.

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<sup>310</sup> Joseph Brennan, *Three Philosophical Novelists: Gide, Joyce, Mann* (New York: MacMillan, 1964) 6-7.

<sup>311</sup> Lawrence, in effect, finds *Ulysses* "deliberately antirevelatory," a book that does not arrive "at even a Pisgah sight of meaning. Or, to put it differently, Joyce presents possibilities of meaning rather than a final revelation." *The Odyssey of Style*, p. 7.

#### 4. LOVE AND MEMORY: Stephen and Bloom

In *Ulysses* the quest for love and memory is a quest for wholeness and self-assertion. Functioning in a different way for each one of the protagonists, this quest represents man's struggle for intellectual, emotional, sexual, and artistic fulfillment.

The fact that *Ulysses* commemorates the 16th of June 1904 (10.376)<sup>312</sup> has often been cited as a proof that the novel's central theme is love. Love, "a subtle insinuating fire," according to Joyce,<sup>313</sup> is the creative force against the dividing tendencies that prevent completeness and self-assertion. Kristeva identifies love with "a process of identification," which "presupposes the tendency specific to the speaking subject to assimilate, in symbolic and real terms, another being separate from itself." It consists, she goes on to say, in

the two variants of amorous experience as they are illustrated by Stephen Dedalus and Leopold Bloom -- in Stephen's *Agape* and Bloom's *Eros*-- that I would see the most pertinent and, analytically, the most *successful* attempt that Joyce undertook in order to explain the identificatory movement specific to artistic existence... Amorous experience and artistic experience, as two interdependent aspects of the identificatory process, are our only means of preserving our psychic space as a 'living system,' that is, open to the other, capable of adaptation and change.

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<sup>312</sup> "Bloomsday," as this day is called today, was the day of Joyce's first meeting with Nora Barnacle. Several aspects of Joyce's life converge upon this day which he chose for the action of *Ulysses*. Ellmann, *James Joyce*, p. 155.

<sup>313</sup> *Ibid*, p. 139.

To achieve this, Kristeva argues, Joyce resorts to polyphonic identifications such as the ultimate identification with an archaic mother, the supreme authority in which the identity of the constantly defiant narrator takes refuge, and, persistently, the law of paternal identity, the guarantee of all normative identity.<sup>314</sup>

Love in *Ulysses* comprises the full array of the word's denotation. It refers to biological, intellectual, sentimental, psychological, and family love, to friendship, compassion for humanity, unselfish love that transcends racial and religious discrimination, and "Good Samaritan" love. Joyce sponsors a universal concept of love.<sup>315</sup> In Joyce, as with our other authors, love resists equation with a simple positive meaning or function: it refers to positive love as much as it connotes self-centered, calculated, wasted, empty, or incomplete love, betrayal, bigotry, and hatred, in short it encompasses the totality of the positive and negative meanings of the word. The quest for love coincides with the individual's yearning for equilibrium, selfhood, and artistic fulfillment.

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<sup>314</sup> Julia Kristeva, "Identification and the Real," trans. by Shaun Whiteside, in *Literary Theory Today*, Peter Collier and Helga Geyer-Ryan eds., (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1990) pp. 168, 172-73.

<sup>315</sup> In the love treatises of the Renaissance, "love is a concept of multiple derivation: Christian charity, Plato's love, the friendship of Aristotle and of Cicero, and the love of stilnuovo poets and of Petrarch are all importantly represented." John Charles Nelson, *Renaissance Theory of Love: The context of Giordano Bruno's Eroici furori* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958) p. 73.

One of the most examined -- and most disputed -- passages of *Ulysses* is the so-called "love passage:" "Love, yes. Word known to all men" (9.429-30), a phrase uttered by Stephen as he begs his dead mother's ghost to confirm her love for him. The image that is constantly evoked in Stephen's memory involves his dying mother's request that he kneel by her deathbed and pray. Reacting to Stephen's refusal to please her, she had cursed him before dying. This frightful scene is usually accompanied by the memory of the Fergus song, a song about love Stephen had sung for her.<sup>316</sup> The disputed phrase, omitted by Joyce but existing in the Rosenbaum manuscript marginal notes, was restored by Gabler, as authentic, in 1984. It has become, ever since, the source of interminable discussions about love in *Ulysses*, art and life, fathers and sons, and mothers and sons.<sup>317</sup> In looking for love, Stephen seeks selfhood, as Seferis seeks to resurrect love in the hearts of men to give them back their lost faith in man.

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<sup>316</sup> "... And no more turn aside and brood  
 Upon love's bitter mystery  
 For Fergus rules the brazen cars."  
 From W.B. Yeats's poem "Who goes with Fergus." It is a song about abused love, love's power and redeemed time. *Collected Poems* (New York, Macmillan, 1956).

<sup>317</sup> The idea, however, was not entirely new. Ellmann had in 1972 identified the word known to all men as "love." By contrast, while accepting love as a possible answer, Kenner retained his original position that the word was "perhaps," "death." Kenner, *Ulysses*, (London: Allen and Unwin, 1980, p. 129). Kimball finds the middle road in admitting both words, love and death, as the answer. See "Love and Death in *Ulysses*: "Word known to all men," *James Joyce Quarterly*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (Winter, 1987) 143-160; and Fox is convinced that the word known to all is not "love" but the word "yes" -- the admission by which we affirm ourselves and others, thereby achieving selfhood. See Cheryl Fox, "Absolutely: Redefining the word Known to All Men." *James Joyce Quarterly*, Vol. 29, No. 4 (Summer 1992) pp 779-804, esp. 803.

The opposite tensions within the concept of love are linked with its positive sides in every turn of the Joycean text. The Latin phrase which follows the controversial passage in "Scylla and Charybdis" bears this out: "Word known to all men *Amor vero aliquid alicui bonum vult unde et ea quae concupiscimus* (9.429-30). The Latin phrase, as Gifford comments, conjoins two sentences from Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Contra Gentiles*, "That in God there is Love." Aquinas is distinguishing here between "true love," which "requires one to will another's good," and self love, which "wills another's good for one's own pleasure."<sup>318</sup> Desiring a thing and not loving it, is equal to loving oneself. This passage gives ironically opposed definitions of love. Love, therefore in Joyce evokes the same polarity between the "nonlover" and the "beloved" exemplified in the *Phaedrus*, and encompasses what Seferis calls "degraded," "abused," and "wasted" love.

In *Ulysses*, Joyce refers, at 14.1494 and 15.1705, to "Venus Pandemos," who, as a goddess of lust, belongs to all people. She stands in contrast to Aphrodite Urania, "the goddess of the highest and purer love."<sup>319</sup> Aphrodite is also related to Helen of Troy whom she gave as a gift to Paris in return for his choosing her as the most beautiful among the goddesses. Helen and Aphrodite are symbols of love, adultery, and destruction (see 3,483, 9,268, 12.1271). According to Homer, Aphrodite was caught in bed with Ares by her husband Hephaestos, who had

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<sup>318</sup> For the full translation of Aquinas passage see Gifford with Seidman. *Ulysses Annotated*. Cheryl Fox also discusses this phrase p. 799.

<sup>319</sup> Gifford with Seidman, p. 444

devised invisible nets to trap the adulterers and expose them to the laughter of the Olympians.<sup>320</sup> Similarly, Helen is a symbol of love and betrayal -- also related to the ability to heal the pain of memory.<sup>321</sup> They are both symbols of love and beauty. Love relations subject to human frailty cannot be perfect, but like life and beauty, love should be worshiped, Homer and Joyce preach.

Regarding memory, Joyce equates it to imagination -- the working over of what is remembered -- and regrets having not enough imagination.<sup>322</sup> The apparent controversy is but a confirmation of his preference for the creative wanderings of the mind over the mere return to an already lived and known experience, perhaps an attempt to escape history. Memory is the tool of the writer and the reader alike. Crucial in the process of selecting and recording, and also of unravelling the codes guiding our reading, it makes permanent what would have been swallowed by oblivion. Memory, providing the evidence of cultural continuity establishes identity liberating and enslaving, as Stephen's longing for freedom and bitterness over exile underlines. The history of Ireland, "an immortal serving her conqueror" (1.405), the fate of Parnell, the loss of the Irish language and dignity are bitter memories from which Stephen -- and Joyce -- are trying to escape through the art of writing, very much the way Seferis is trying through his art to

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<sup>320</sup> *The Odyssey*, 8:265ff

<sup>321</sup> *Ibid*, 4:221.

<sup>322</sup> Ellmann, *James Joyce*, pp. 66ln. and 250.

reconcile the pain of a memory that wounds with the need of remembering, in the "country with the ancient monuments and contemporary grief."

I will now turn to a more analytical discussion of the symbolic meaning memory and love have for Stephen and Bloom.

### A. Stephen

In *Ulysses* Stephen sets out to attain the prophetic mission the young poet envisioned in *A Portrait*, expressed more clearly in *Stephen Hero*: To live his own life according to what he recognized as the voice of a new humanity, active, unafraid and unashamed, and to create his own authority by the light of his senses, free from an oppressive family, country, and church as expressed in his famous "*Non serviam*":

I will not serve that in which I no longer believe, whether it call itself my home, my fatherland or my church: and I will try to express myself in some mode of life or art as freely as I can and as wholly as I can, using for my defence the only arms I allow myself to use, silence, exile and cunning. (*Portrait*, 246-47).

Stephen is obeying an inner command to express himself "free in some mode of life or art." "I go," he says, "to encounter for the millionth time the reality of experience and to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race" (P. 252-53). As Kain writes, *Ulysses's* deeper purpose "beneath the complex of ribaldry and sentiment, blasphemy and aspiration, mockery and tenderness, so

strangely compounded... is to analyze the reasons why Stephen's hopes have been buried."<sup>323</sup>

The mother and father are symbols of the past that limits the young man's growth into maturity. This is why he had left Ireland, but a misspelled telegram from the father, "Nother dying come home father," brings him back from Paris to the mother's deathbed. This is where *Ulysses* picks up. In "Telemachus," Stephen is dealing exactly with these two things: the longing for the mother and the father and at the same time the desire to set himself free from them and all they stand for. His struggle is an attempt to run away from history and memory, to detach himself from time. This is textualized through the nightmares, visions, and ghosts of the past that haunt him: The specter of the dead mother who had cursed him, the "ghost" of the father, evoked through the ghost of Hamlet's father, and the "nightmare of history."

In fact, it is his dreams that have turned into ghosts and haunt Stephen. In *Ulysses*, he defines a ghost as "one who has faded into impalpability through death, through absence, through change of manners" (9.147-149). His mother is dead, the father is absent, the culture he abandoned is now alienated from him. Himself an exile, he is a ghost too, a ghost by absence. Stephen's symbolic quest for the mother and the father represents his longing for experience, selfhood, and artistic maturation. These ghosts, symbols of authority, culture, and the tyranny

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<sup>323</sup> Richard M. Kain, *Fabulous Voyager* (New York: Viking, [1947] 1959), p.241.

of the past are memories which the young poet, a slave of words, is struggling to fight with words through his quest for love.

a. "Amor matris"

Stephen's longing for the mother's love dominates the text since its earliest appearance in the opening episode. Beneath this longing lurks his own inability to love. In "Telemachus" he refuses to wear gray because a year after his mother's death he was still in mourning (1.120.)<sup>324</sup> Mulligan contributes to his sense of guilt by constantly accusing Stephen of having "killed" his mother (1:88, 122). The death scene returns to Stephen's memory, tyrannically, with more vivid detail at the end of "Telemachus" in the words of the prayer he refused to sing: *Liliata rutilantium Turma circumdet. Iubilantium te virginum*" (736-38).<sup>325</sup> This prayer for the dying and the song he sung to his mother, become *leitmotifs* repeatedly evoked throughout the novel to keep the mother's memory tormenting. The dead mother, in fact, becomes an avenging Erinyes who haunts Stephen with images of hell, not for the sake of restoring justice in the Aeschylean sense, but to destroy completely all traces of her past love that linger, nostalgically, in the son's

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<sup>324</sup> Stephen's mother must have died on 23 June 1903 so Stephen was free to go into "second mourning" when gray was acceptable. His behavior, notes Gifford, recalls Hamlet's insistence on dressing in black in mourning for his father when the whole court had stopped to do so. See *Ulysses Annotated*, p.15.

<sup>325</sup> "May the glittering throng of confessors, bright as lilies, gather about you. May the glorious choir of virgins receive you." This prayer could be said by the bedside of the dying during the death agony, in the absence of a priest, by any responsible person, man or woman. *Ibid*, p. 19.

memory. Two opposite functions of memory struggle for dominance. Stephen's struggle to restore the injustice done him by the mother's betrayal, is a struggle here for justice and equilibrium. Words, his weapon with which he had vowed to forge the conscience of his race, now becomes the means of reconciling these conflicting memories in his mind.

In "Nestor," Stephen thinks lovingly of his mother (2.140-147) and remembers Cranly's words that maternal love is the only true thing in life: "whatever else unsure in this stinking dunghill of a world a mother's love is not" (*Portrait*, pp. 241-242). But in his deeper heart Stephen questions not only her love for him; he also doubts his own ability to love her: "amor matris: subjective and objective genitive" (2.164), he ponders.<sup>326</sup> Love, in the reflexive form of the Latin, can mean both the mother's love for Stephen and Stephen's affection for his mother. Not reality but the word and its ability to say two different things at the same time is the cause of Stephen's emotions. His claim that he values experience more than theory is but an expression of his desire to escape the nightmare of language and the tyranny of the words.

The relation of past and present is obsessively associated by Joyce with a female family member rising from the grave. Joyce associated the mother with the nightmare of history (punning is always

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<sup>326</sup> - Have you never loved anyone," Cranly had asked him.  
 - Do you mean women?  
 - I am not speaking of that, Cranly said in a colder tone. I ask you if you ever felt love towards anyone or anything...  
 - I tried to love God, Stephen had replied. It seems now I failed. (*A Portrait*, 240)

there to strengthen the association, in this case, "night-mère" or "grand-mère"). History is a ghost, the "grandmother" whom the fox of Stephen's riddle is trying to bury under a hollybush (2.101-15). This ghost is history, the memory of the past that Stephen cannot bury in him.

The mother's specter appears again and again, through the memory of the words Stephen did not say and a series of verbal motifs and intratextual echoes associated with the sea often evoked as "snotgreen" (1.85, 78), the color of the dying woman's vomit. The sea, as in Seferis's poetry, is related here to the mother, death, love and betrayal; she is "our great sweet mother" (1.77-78, 1.85, 3.31-32) who drowned Icarus. The cry "*Thalatta! Thalatta!*" (1.80) of the ten thousand Greeks who escaped out of Persia to the Black Sea because they were betrayed by the Persians, makes the sea also a symbol of salvation.

The nightmare turns alive once again in the restored passage of the Library scene: "Do you know what you are talking about? Love, yes. Word known to all men" (9.429-30). The passage restoration in "Scylla and Charybdis," as Gabler pointed out at the "Miami Conference on the *Critical and Synoptic Edition of Ulysses*," provides a "contrapost to Bloom's definition of love" in "Cyclops."<sup>327</sup> In the "Cyclops" episode love, equated with bigotry and racial intolerance, is defined by Bloom as "the opposite of hatred," on account of which he is accused by the Citizen as advocating "universal love" (12.1483-85).

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<sup>327</sup> See *James Joyce Literary Supplement*, No. 3 (Fall 1989).

But Stephen's most dramatic nightmare comes in "Circe," where the emaciated ghost of the Mother rises through the brothel's floor, "in leper grey and a torn bridal veil." She opens her toothless mouth "uttering a silent word," while the choir is singing the song of the dead: "*Liliata rutilantium te confessorum...*" (15.4163). In this epiphanic episode, given in the form of a play,<sup>328</sup> the following dialogue ensues:

*Stephen*  
They say I killed you, mother. He offended your memory. Cancer did it, not I. Destiny.

*The Mother*  
You sang that song to me. Love's bitter mystery.

*Stephen*  
Tell me the word, mother, if you know now. The word known to all men. (15.4191-92)

What is important here is that Stephen seeks to find the meaning of love in a word. In *A Portrait* "monstrous reveries came thronging into his memory. They too had sprung up before him, suddenly and furiously, out of mere words" (90). Stephen's development as an artist presupposes isolation and gradual detachment from emotions to the point where he loses sense of identity and the memory of his childhood (92-93). By hearing the word, he will be able to reverse the process of isolation and go back to the mother he has lost. It is the artist's struggle between words and emotions. We know that at the opening of *A Portrait*

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<sup>328</sup> The dramatic form is used by many epiphanies. Its cool impersonality heightens the emotional power of the experience presented.

Stephen had sung that song to his dying mother, a song about love. He knows the word as well as his mother does. Stephen asks the question because he needs to hear the word "love", not because he does not know it. The son's plea to the dying mother, Gordon argues, is an invocation to the bard's Muse to say the story everybody knows<sup>329</sup>.

Love is emphasized as a word that only the mother can utter also in *Ulysses*, a play by Stephen Phillips, which was highly thought of in 1902, and Joyce might have read.<sup>330</sup> Here is the crucial Hades scene from the play, where Odysseus asks his mother about Penelope:

*Ulysses: Alas, alas! and mother, she? she lives --  
But stays she true to me?  
Anticleia: Child, I have come  
But lately to this plea, and when I died  
Still was she true to thee, and knew not time.  
Ulysses: At last, at last the word that lighteth hell!  
One word! and thou alone, mother, couldst speak it!  
Thy voice alone: thine out of all the dead!*

In the Homeric version, as in Phillips' play, the mother gives to her son the answer that will make his life complete. Anticleia advises Odysseus to continue his voyage home returning to light and forgetting the dead past, whereas in Joyce's novel she withholds the answer.

Although he knows the word, Stephen may not know how to create meaning out of it, as his mother does not know how to communicate her

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<sup>329</sup> John Gordon, "Love in Bloom, by Stephen Dedalus," *James Joyce Quarterly*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (Winter 1990) 241-255.

<sup>330</sup> Stephen Phillips, *Ulysses: A Drama in a Prologue & Three Acts* (London and New York: John Lane, 1902) p.90.

love to her son. Their relation is one in which love has failed. Stephen's mother perpetuates religious fanaticism, hostility, death -- non-love. Stephen is trapped between the pain of memory and its healing power, between the loving memory of the mother who denied the son and was denied by him. If Stephen could wake from this nightmare, he would perhaps be able to forget and free himself from his *agenbite of inwit*. All he needs is a confirmation of what a word means in terms of real life, a word which will come from his own heart and mature thought if he could only "remember correctly."

Stephen's nightmare is the agony of the poet imprisoned in words and longing to attain freedom from past experiences through life experience. The arrogant young intellectual refrains from action, desperately trying to substitute words for feeling. He can only say no: He will not serve the church, will not be a prisoner of Ireland and of his family, will not kneel to pray. He does not know how to transform the word "love" into life, keeping it instead, literally, a dead word. But the mother can only respond with "a silent word." The word "silence" or "silent" implies the end of a cycle when the thunder begins Vico's divine age and another cycle of history is completed. It forebodes, perhaps, a turning point in Stephen's life, as this episode suggests.

#### **b. "Old father, old artificer"**

The main intertextual sources that constitute Stephen as a son and the father as a creator come from the Homeric and Daedalean myths, and

from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.<sup>331</sup> Telemachus's coming of age and setting out on a journey to Sparta in search of the absent father to establish his identity parallels Stephen's symbolic quest for the father that will set him free. But it is the Daedalean myth that is more important in this respect. For it constitutes the father as the superb artificer who can equip the son with wings to soar out of his captivity. The Daedalean "ecstasy of flight," is "a metaphor of sexual fulfillment and artistic creation."<sup>332</sup> The father is the archetypal model of the skillful creator whom the young man invokes to help him in the last lines of *A Portrait*: "Old father, old artificer, stand me now and ever in good stead" (p. 253). Like Kristava above, Epstein evokes the symbolic role of the father as a creator:

Logically, since there can be only one father-creator in a "race" at a time, the son is debarred from creation, either physical or spiritual, by his own immaturity and by his stifling presence of the paternal creator. When, however, the son breaks through his "virginal" lethargy, when he is ready for creation, the father gives way and the new father begins to create."<sup>333</sup>

Although Stephen's quest for the father permeates the entire text, three episodes focus more emphatically on Stephen's plight for selfhood and artistic self-assertion: "Proteus," "Scylla and Charybdis" and

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<sup>331</sup> To Telemachus, Daedalus, Hamlet, and Christ, who serve as model figures for Stephen, Herring adds Rimbaud, with whom Joyce had an obsession on account of biographical, ideological, and aesthetic concerns they had in common. Phillip F. Herring, *Joyce's Uncertainty Principle* p. 150.

<sup>332</sup> Harry Levin, "The Artist," in James Joyce: *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, (New York: Penguin, 1981) p. 412

<sup>333</sup> Epstein, *The Ordeal of Stephen Dedalus* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1971), p. 161.

"Circe." In "Proteus" Stephen is trying to deal with the problem of identity by pinning down "the signature of things" -- understanding them in spite of the constantly changing visual perception of their nature. He is only a son with confused identity.<sup>334</sup> This is brought up in Stephen's internal monologue as he walks alone on Sandymount Strand contemplating, in synaesthetic terms, change and art's ability to transfix the moment into something permanent:

Ineluctable modality of the visible: at least that if no more, thought through my eyes. Signatures of all things I am here to read... Snotgreen, bluesilver, rust: coloured signs... Shut your eyes and see.

Stephen closed his eyes to hear his boots crush crackling wrack and shells... A very short space of time through very short times of space... that is the ineluctible modality of the audible... My ash sword hangs at my side. Tap with it: they do... Am I walking into eternity along Sandymount strand?...

Rhythm begins, you see. I hear... Acatalectic tetrameter of iambs marching.

Open your eyes now. I will. One moment. Has all vanished since? If I open and am for ever in the black adiaphane. Basta! I will see if I can see.

See now. There all the time without you: and ever shall be, world without end (3:1-27).

Stephen shuts his eyes to sense through time and space the artist inside the rhythm of life. The motif of blindness appears here in the opening and shutting of his eyes and through the light and blackness imagery. The word "Tap" links this imagery with the later occurrences of the blindness motif. The tapping of Stephen's ashplant, symbol of creativity, anticipates the figure of the blind stripling in later

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<sup>334</sup> This is established, among other means, through Rimbaud's famous "*Je est un autre*" evoked in Stephen's "*lui c'est moi*" (3:182-83), and "my soul walks with me, form of forms" (3:279-80).

chapters. In this chapter Stephen is trying to experiment with words, become a seer to fulfil the mission of the poet, as also commanded by Rimbaud.<sup>335</sup>

To become an artist, Stephen has first to become a father. In "Scylla and Charybdis" he tries to establish his identity in relation to paternity. In the Library discussion, Stephen develops a complex theory about fatherhood through his identification with Shakespeare:

Shakespeare was not Prince Hamlet but Hamlet's father -- since as an actor Shakespeare had played the role of the ghost of Hamlet's father. The bard, according to Joyce, had also a son named Hamnet, the twin brother of Hamlet. As the dead king had been betrayed by his queen with his brother, so Shakespeare, as Joyce thought, was betrayed by Anne Hathaway with the poet's brother.<sup>336</sup> Through the Shakespeare theory, the primordial sense of retribution gives its place to acceptance of humiliation in the name of a wider and non-selfish understanding of love.<sup>337</sup> As a creator, the artist is the father of his race and his characters. This makes Stephen -- who is in mourning like Hamlet and

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<sup>335</sup> The word "snotgreen," also comes from Rimbaud. As Steiner writes, Baudelaire, Mallarmé, and Rimbaud are examples of writers who employ a mode of solipsistic integrity that endeavors "to deepen our apprehension by dislocating and goading to new life the supine energies of word and grammar." Geirge Steiner, *On Difficulty and Other Essays* (Oxford University Press, 1978) p.40.

<sup>336</sup> As Ellmann puts it, "Instead of making the artist Shakespeare an avenging hero, Joyce preferred to think of him as a cuckold." *Ulysses*, p. 155.

<sup>337</sup> As Gordon observes, Stephen is driving at the Aquinian *amicita inter multos* (agape) (9.771) which he wishes to trace developing from Shakespeare's "undoing" much as Christian agape unfolds from the Fall," John Gordon, "Love in Bloom, by Stephen Dedalus," p. 246.

identifies with him<sup>338</sup> -- an incarnation of Shakespeare. It constitutes him as an artist, but also as a father, since the artist engenders his characters. Stephen and Hamlet striving to achieve selfhood for the author become the author's fathers. Father and son thus become one and the same person, they are united "consubstantially." They represent the Holy Trinity: father, son, and art. It is this idea that leads to the paradox of Shakespeare's ghost being Hamlet's grandfather (2.152) or, as Mulligan says to taunt Stephen, Hamlet's grandson being Shakespeare's grandfather and Stephen himself the ghost of his own father (1.555-56).

In developing this theory, Stephen wants to prove that Shakespeare's private life as man had fused with his internal life as artist so as to make his art a mirror of lived experience. Shakespeare, inadequate lover and betrayed husband, was able to reproduce the natural image of reality because he had lived the situations he reenacts in his plays. This way Stephen proves to his Platonic interlocutors, A.E. and Eglinton, that the soul does not have a Platonic but an Aristotelian identity woven out of experience and moving toward completeness.

Whereas in "Proteus" Stephen is struggling to establish a sense of self as a son and artist in search of a father figure, in "Scylla" he gains freedom by establishing himself as a father/creator. Dispelling the mother's memory and recreating the father are the first steps toward

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<sup>338</sup> Joyce saw himself and the Stephen of the early chapters in a line Mallarmé had written: "Il se promène, pas plus, lisant au livre de lui-même.", Ellmann, p. 138.

achieving the freedom and detachment needed to create. This turning point comes in "Circe," to which I will return, with the dismissing of the Mother and the appearance of a new father.

## B. Bloom

Bloom's characterization, particularly regarding his universality and incompleteness, is significantly determined by the way he perceives love and uses memory. Whereas Stephen's quest for love is metaphorical, intellectualized, and solipsistic, for Bloom, the practical "Everyman" and down-to-earth extrovert, love has a strong corporeal dimension. It envelops his relationship with Molly, Rudy, his daughter Milly, Stephen, his father, Martha, and Gerty -- it is sexual, paternal, filial, romantic, and humane. Bloom is capable of *caritas*; he has a universal ability for compassion. He feels pity for Mrs. Purefoy, the mother giving birth in "Oxen of the Sun." Although he does not know her, he sends her a few words of encouragement; he also helps settle the affairs of Dignam's widow ("Cyclops") and is concerned over Stephen's drinking when their paths cross in "Oxen;" later he rescues him from the brothel thieves. Love for Bloom represents a universal regulatory system, something like cosmic justice, that keeps life in balance. His musings bear this out:

Love loves to love love. Nurse loves the new chemist. Constable 14A loves Mary Kelly. Gerty MacDowell loves the boy that has the bicycle. M.B. loves a fair gentleman. Li Chi Han lovey up kissy Cha Pu Chow. Jumbo, the elephant, loves Alice, the elephant. ... You love a certain person. And this person loves that other person because everybody loves somebody but God loves everybody (12.1493-1500).

By the end of the day Bloom will have understood that in injustice there is justice too. By having neglected his wife for ten years offering her only incomplete sexual relations, he violates the order of conjugal life. Molly's affair with Boylan is a kind of justice that can bring back the disturbed order of things. Bloom equates the absence of love with injustice.<sup>339</sup> Defending social justice he had dared rebut the citizen:

- And I belong to a race too, says Bloom, that is hated and persecuted. Also now. This very moment. This very instant.
- Gob, he near burnt his fingers with the butt of his old cigar.
- Robbed, says he. Plundered. Insulted. Persecuted. Taking what belongs to us by right. At this very moment, says he, putting up his fist, sold by auction in Morocco like slaves or cattle.
- Are you talking about the new Jerusalem? says the citizen.
- I'm talking about injustice, says Bloom; (12.1467-74),

and turning to another member of the group who urges him to stand up to it like a man, he adds:

- But it's no use.... Force, hatred, history, all that. That's no life for men and women, insult and hatred. And everybody knows that it's the very opposite of that that is really life.
- What, says Alf.
- Love, says Bloom. I mean the opposite of hatred... (12.1481-85)

Similarly, the use of memory contributes to characterization in an analogous way. Whereas Stephen's mind is a storage of literary quotations which he can recall accurately, Bloom constantly misremembers familiar sayings, proverbs, and advertisements, using his imagination to fill the gaps by rewording them. In "Lestrygonians," for instance, Bloom is trying to remember the proverbial phrase: born with a silver spoon in his mouth," which erupts in his thought as he sees a fellow at

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<sup>339</sup> In his hallucinations in "Circe," he calls: "Justice! All Ireland versus one!" (15.3201).

Burton's ramming down his throat a knifeful of cabbage: "Born with a silver knife in his mouth. That's witty, I think. Or no. Silver means born rich. Born with a knife. But then the allusion is lost" (8.684-86). Elsewhere we see Bloom misquote a rule in physics: "Black conducts, reflects (refracts is it?) the heat" (4.79-80). Moreover, he is unable to remember correctly formulas from Catholic rituals: "Dominenomine" (6.595), or " ... Priest with the communion corpus for those women. Chap in the mortuary, coffin or coffey, corpusnomine" (11.1031-36).

Bloom's misremembered quotations from various love songs and stories also constitute him as incomplete. The duet from *Don Giovanni* which he constantly evokes knowing that Molly will sing it in the musical tour with Boylan, is characteristic in this context. Zerlina's words "*vorrei e non vorrei*," I want and don't want,<sup>340</sup> is misremembered eight times. Bloom's quotations underline his special ability to generate metalinguistic discourse by rewording. Such use of quotations subverts the narrator's intent to authenticate the narrative situation, assigning, in the process, a low value to language. With regard to Molly's infidelity, such repeated misquotations produce a mellowing effect on Bloom's anger and frustration.

Bloom's inability to make a decision results in his delayed homecoming and leads to incomplete love relationships outside his home - - with Gerty and Martha. His relationship with Gerty does not go beyond

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<sup>340</sup> From Mozart's *Don Giovanni* and specifically the duet "*La ci darem la mano* [then they will go hand in hand]" in which Don Giovanni is trying to seduce Zerlina on the day of her wedding to Masetto.

the purely visual, while that with Martha exists solely on the verbal plane, in the exchange of love letters. Bloom's experience with Gerty ends with a mixed feeling of pleasure ("But it was lovely. Goodbye, dear. Thanks. Made me feel so young, 13.1272-73), and a reticent chagrin generated by the cuckoo clock reminding him of his cuckolding by Molly (13.1286-1306).<sup>341</sup> Will Bloom pursue a relationship with Gerty? He answers his own question with another question: "Will she come here tomorrow? Wait for her somewhere for ever. Must come back. Murderers do. Will I?" (13.1254). Remembering correctly rather than avoiding painful memories, as Seferis would have it, would bring back the love that was abused and rendered incomplete, can therefore can lead to betrayal. These centripetal and centrifugal forces find their expression in the irresoluteness of Bloom. He says "I want and don't want" to what he, and Molly, would like to say "yes."

Bloom wants and doesn't want. He wants to return the overdue book to the Library but doesn't do it; he wants to pick up Molly's lotion, but he doesn't pick it up; he wants to make a rendez-vous with Martha but never gets to it; he pines over Molly's disloyalty, but will not interrupt her rendez-vous with Boylan. Bloom wants to forget his conjugal debt to Molly because he is afraid to discharge it. The fact that he forgets to take his key with him for fear he might disturb Molly indexes his shyness and kindness that keep him fixed in a position of submissiveness, servitude, and incompleteness. Instead of asserting

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<sup>341</sup> On the significance of the number nine as a figure of completeness and eternity, see Gifford with Seidman, apud 13.1289.

himself, he withdraws between the yes and the no, "*Voglio e non.*" Whereas Stephen is in constant negation, Bloom fluctuates between remembering and misremembering, wanting and not wanting, acting and not acting -- between yes and no. This is the only way for Bloom to feel in control, the only balance he can achieve -- an incomplete balance. Bloom is stuck between yes and no, in his *voglio e non vorrei, vorrei e non vorrei, voglio e non.*

Bloom's longing for a complete home is expressed through the persistent memory of an advertisement he saw in that morning's newspaper: "What is home without Plumtree's Potted Meat? Incomplete. With it an abode of bliss." (5.144-147). Potted meat reappears in many contexts, as a recurrent motif. The corpse in the coffin in "Hades" and the embryo in the womb in "Oxen" are examples of the way the motif acquires additional meaning from each new context.

Bloom's characterization is enabled also by the mythical comparison with Odysseus to whom Joyce adds the "wandering Jew," the ancient mariner, and Haroun Al Rashid. Bloom is the incarnation of all attributes and aspects, concurring or opposed, inherent in man. Whereas according to Joyce the identification with Odysseus is intended to underline Bloom's completeness, he subverts this relationship by presenting him as an uncircumcised Jew, (17.373), an incomplete Jew, who was also a Protestant and a Roman Catholic three times baptized, and that he is also a free-mason. His physical description revealed for the first time in "Ithaca" portrays him as a rather medium-sized man who

wears weird sizes of clothing -- or is it that the size of his clothes is simply misremembered either by Bloom or by the unreliable narrator of "Ithaca?"<sup>342</sup> Like another Tiresias, Leopold is represented as belonging to both genders (he has a female-sounding name, Paula, and is the "womanly man" about to give birth.) His incompleteness is a characteristic of an all-inclusive personality; as Hayman has put it, he "is perhaps the most particularized character in all literature but who is also, and consequently, among the most generalized."<sup>343</sup> In vesting his hero with all these conflicting qualities, the author constitutes him as a symbol.

Bloom's all-inclusive personality is important in his understanding of love as harmony resulting from the strife of opposite forces: betrayal, wasted love, hatred. His sense of love is not limited to his narrow interests but defies chauvinism, racial discrimination, bigotry, and alienation, products of modern life. It becomes a metaphor for balance, justice, and unity that holds his world together. The dichotomy between the two protagonists lies in the division of the self between its opposite aspects. We can see balance in Bloom and Stephen, father and son, body and mind, the young artist and the practical man, words and experience when the two are seen as one. Split up, they can only represent incompleteness.

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<sup>342</sup> We read that "he is a gent about 40... height 5 ft 9 1/2 inches, full build, olive complexion" (17.2002-3), that his chest measures an impossible 28 inches (17.1818), and that a size 17 collar is too small for his neck (17.1431).

<sup>343</sup> Hayman, *The Mechanics of Meaning*, p. 19.

## 5. "CIRCE": The light!, The light!

The "Circe" episode, already discussed in a different context, gravitates toward the creation of a moment, in which both protagonists undergo transformation, even if this is in parodic terms. Stephen sets himself free to create after symbolically destroying the old father and the mother; Bloom does it by resurrecting in Stephen his beloved, dead son and becoming symbolically a father. The transformation is achieved through the dramatic interplay of light and darkness, metaphors of blindness and illumination, death and rebirth, and ultimately the artist's identification with God. Focusing on the scene of the smashing of the chandelier in Bella's brothel, I'll attempt to point to the interaction of these symbols which effect the apocalypsis taking place in this scene.

Drinking and the whorehouse atmosphere bring about a confusion of the mind that is expressed in a series of hallucinations which in turn bring into light the protagonist's repressed desires. Stephen, drunken and hallucinating, performs his frenzied *tripudium*, a "dance of death," which, as Epstein observes, is symbolic of the son's breaking through "his virginal" lethargy when he is ready for creation.<sup>344</sup> At this point, when Stephen has symbolically liberated himself from the old father, the specter of the mother appears more frightening than ever: "Her face worn and noseless, green with gravemould... fixes her bluecircled hollow eyesockets on Stephen and opens her toothless mouth

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<sup>344</sup> See Epstein, *The Ordeal of Stephen Dedalus* p. 161.

uttering a silent word" (15.4157-61). When Stephen reiterates his plea for the "word known to all men," she reminds him that years and years she loved him, but does not pronounce the word "love" in the present tense since she is dead. Love, momentarily recreated through memory, is subsequently destroyed by fanatical faith. Strangled with rage, Stephen smashes the chandelier with his ashtree stick, a tree of life and creative power and a reincarnation of Siegfried's magical sword. This is the moment when the artist frees himself and becomes a magician. This moment of revelation is described through alternating images of darkness and light, time and space, in the same words Stephen used in "Proteus," at 2.9.10, to describe the end of historical time: "Time's livid final flame leaps and, in the following darkness, ruin of all space, shattered glass and toppling masonry" (15.4243-45). In breaking the light, Stephen performs an act of dispelling the mother's ghost -- the visible and the audible that defines the actual space and time of history. Stephen is now ready to achieve the freedom he had contemplated in "Proteus," as he was walking on the beach alone. This is the time when the artist can disengage himself from the painful memories and emotions that drown his creative vigor. Stephen reiterates his rebellious decision by identifying himself with Lucifer uttering "non serviam," and by calling the mother "hyena," and subsequently obliterating her image in darkness. The words create and destroy the things they name. Only when the light is destroyed will the mother's image be expelled and the son's feelings purged. Stephen is shattering the memory of the past, history and time, the way his boots crash the sea shells on Sandymound Strand.

The "blindness" scene in "Proteus" is now re-enacted to result in the metamorphosis, a revelation of God, symbolically of the creative artist who can stop the passage of time. By oversimplifying the deep meanings and philosophies of life, sometimes reducing them in simplistic, even comic sounds of letters, Joyce responds with humor and amusement to the unanswerable questions that torment the poet and the philosopher. In "Proteus" we saw the agony of the "blind" poet who struggles to gain control over darkness through his art longing, and at the same time fearing, to re-open his eyes; "My ash sword hangs at my side. Tap with it... Am I walking into eternity? ... Open your eyes now... Has all vanished since? If I open and am for ever in the black adaphane. Basta! I will see if I can see. See now." There all the time without you: and ever shall be, world without end" (3:1-27).

We saw the blindness motif recur also in "Cyclops" and re-emerge in the image of the "blind stripling" twice -- in "Wandering Rocks" and in "Sirens." The "Cyclops" episode provides an image of various kinds of single vision and darkness of mind. The citizen has only a half-vision of reality because of his blind nationalism. He is monocular and blind in his rage when, for lack of a rock, he hurls an empty biscuit tin at Bloom: "Mercy of God the sun was in his eyes or he'd have left him for dead" (2:739), says the hostile narrator. In the image of the blind stripling," the young piano tuner, whom Bloom assists to cross the street, we can see Stephen, the young and immature artist helped by the father. Trying to light his cigarette, in "Circe," Stephen remarks: "Must get glasses. Broke them yesterday. Sixteen years ago" (15.3628-

29). The reader only now discovers that Stephen has been without glasses all day, symbolically unable to see clearly, when he regressively turns the memory clock sixteen years ago when he had broken his glasses at Glongowes College, as we know from *A Portrait*. Now he becomes aware of his "blindness." Joyce was half-blind at the time he was writing *Ulysses*, which made him identify all the more with blind poets like Homer and Milton, and their keen sense of inner vision and the luminous world of art: "Ce qu'apportent les yeux n'est rien," Joyce had said, "J'ai cent mondes à créer, je n'en perds qu'un."<sup>345</sup> Insight replaces in the maturing artist the external vision of things.

The emergence and evolution of the artist that "Proteus" and "Scylla and Charybdis" promote, is brought to completion in "Circe." It comes through language and the arranging of words and letters. Stephen's identification with dog is an example of this: As he looks in the mirror, he sees himself as a "dogsbody": "Who chose this face for me? This dogsbody to rid of vermin?" (1.136-37). Every particular form is a manifestation of what Bruno has called the "world-soul" representing, like in Pre-Socratic philosophy, the union of all opposites. His cry "Dooooooooooooog! ... Goooooooooooood!" (15.4711-16) at the peak of the confusion reenacts in linguistic terms the abolition of the self, and the rising, in its place, of God -- or the artist who can recreate the world with words and thus control it. "Dog" an anagram of God, has been repeatedly evoked in relation to God's cyclical self-realization through history. In "Nestor, the circling dog" moves to one great goal, the

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<sup>345</sup> Ellmann, *James Joyce*, 664.

manifestation of God," says Mr Deasy (2.380-81).<sup>346</sup> As Zukofsky writes, "Dog can sometimes be read backwards, and reading the letters forwards and backwards is the world."<sup>347</sup>

The birth of the artist is not complete without a new father to replace the old. In "Circe" it is related to the emergence of love and compassion. It comes at the moment Stephen is lying on the floor in a foetal sleep position -- presaging his rebirth -- and mumbling "Who Goes with Fergus" while Bloom, grasping the ashplant stands guard over him. During his hallucinations, comic rather than dramatic, Bloom's subconscious thoughts had a moment ago brought to light his own experience of love and his need to be loved. Various persons, sources, objects, or victims of love in his life had appeared through a series of visions: His father Rudolf who committed suicide, his "poor mother," his daughter Milly, Martha, Gerty, and Molly in Turkish attire being seduced by Boylan. He had also pictured himself as a victim of the Inquisition sacrificing himself by burning for the salvation of mankind. The diversity of Bloom's hallucinations as opposed to Stephen's, which are limited to his mother and sister, points not only to the distinct way the minds of the two men work, but also to the way they respond to love and use memory or imagination. The parade of masks culminates in Bloom's

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<sup>346</sup> This is following the Aristotelian distinction that there is no world-soul" unifying particular souls but life in nature undergoes physical permutations to perfect itself, which leads to the idea of God. Joyce, of course, undercuts the word by replacing it with the function of the creative artist. The evolutionary process that replaces God is a nineteenth century idea, as Bergson's *élan vital* theory exemplifies.

<sup>347</sup> Zukofsky, Louis. *Bottom: On Shakespeare* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

emergence as "a finished example of the new womanly man... " who "is about to have a baby" (15.1798 and 1810) -- obviously a prophecy about his developing relation with Stephen -- which Bloom acknowledges by saying: "O, I so want to be a mother" (1818). The moment he stands protectively over Stephen and resumes his ashplant, Bloom's paternal feelings toward Stephen are born. The emergence of the creative father is followed by another epiphany, Rudy's vision, which is created out of darkness and light:

Against the dark wall a figure appears slowly, a fairy boy of eleven, a changeling" kidnapped, dressed in an Eton suit with glass shoes and a little bronze helmet, holding a book in his hand. He reads from right to left inaudibly, smiling, kissing the page.

Bloom

(Wonderstruck, calls inaudibly.) Rudy!

Rudy

(Gazes unseeing into Bloom's eyes and goes on reading, kissing, smiling. He has a delicate mauve face. On his suit he has diamond and ruby buttons. In his free left hand he holds a slim ivory cane with a violet bowknot. A white lambkin peeps out of his waistcoat pocket) (15.4956-66).

Through his love and constant memory of his son, Bloom is able to reconstruct the concrete image of the boy as he would have been had he not died ten years ago. The boy, who acknowledges the father but continues his own way, as Stephen will do in "Ithaca," materializes as an amalgamation of other characters, with a part of him turning up in the image of the "blind stripling" of the "Sirens" episode. The epiphany erupts as darkness is transformed into the exquisite colors of sparkling jewels.

The relation of light to rebirth is also depicted by Stephen Phillips' *Ulysses* in his own version of the climactic scene of the chandelier. Phillips' Ulysses, "urged by his mother, "rushes to the foot of the descent, and stumbles upward," fighting off the throng of ghosts surging around him and pulling him back as he struggles to escape: I gasp and fight toward thee!... Think me not dead! The light, the light! the air, the blessed air!<sup>348</sup> Stephen and Bloom seek their freedom out of the asphyxiating crowd of ghosts and the house of "degraded love," into the open air. Let's remember that the vision of pure love that Rudy represents, appears not in Bloom's encounter with the other shades inside Bella's whorehouse, but in the open air.

The light is a metaphor also for the father and his symbolic role. "The father in *Ulysses*," argues Epstein, "is related to symbols of whiteness or paleness and light, as in *A Portrait*." Blond or bleached hair, the pale sea (Old Father Ocean), white clothes, the sun and sunlight are related to "old wisdom." In the long list of symbols of paternity associated with light, we find Mr Deasy, identified by Stephen as a cold seafather, whose blond hair is "bleached" by the sunshine. He is anti-Semitic because the Jews sinned against the light.<sup>349</sup> The smashing of the light ends not only the tyranny of the mother but also the reign of the old fathers who have been obstructing the son's growth to personal and artistic maturity. It follows, as we remember, the

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<sup>348</sup> Phillips, *Ulysses*, p. 91-92

<sup>349</sup> Epstein, *The Ordeal of Stephen Dedalus*, p. 165.

symbolic dance of death, the *tripudium* that Stephen dances. The son, who is represented by darkness, destroys the light of the old father.

The symbolism of light, which reappears in "Ithaca," infuses with a sense of balance and renewal the ending of the novel. When Bloom and Stephen go out into the garden, their attention is attracted by different light sources: The stars among which they imagine themselves orbiting, the "first golden limb of the resurgent sun perceptible low on the horizon" (17.1267-8) (a pun with the son is at work here) and the moon "denoted by a visible splendid sign, a lamp" (17.1178), Molly's lamp, which catches the gaze of Bloom and Stephen as they look together at the stars. Molly's lunar powers to transform have been established through her ability to renew and also to be consistent, "to enamour" and "to render insane" (17.1157-70); Lunita, her mother's name, is evocative in this context (18.848). Discussing Odysseus's return to Ithaca at *Iykabas*, that is the day of the festival of Apollo of the New Moon (Apollo Noumenios) when "the old moon wanes and the new is born,"<sup>350</sup> Norman Austin has shown that the epic poem's *dénouement* comes at the "moment of equilibrium between one moon and the next;" it is a moment that also marks the beginning of spring, and a new birth of the returning hero.<sup>351</sup>

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<sup>350</sup> *The Odyssey*, 14.160-2, 19.305-7.

<sup>351</sup> Norman Austin, *Archery at the Dark of the Moon: Poetic Problems in Homer's "Odyssey."* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975) p. 244-247.

The darkness/light imagery of *Ulysses* resulting in epiphanic moments is based on the interaction of the themes of love, memory, and art. The essence of epiphany "turns out to be a luminous point in darkness like the epiphanies of all the other modernists or like Dante's God, arbitrary, often grotesque or seemingly inappropriate, but serving to unlock the door of memory and trigger an appropriate and copious flow of words."<sup>352</sup>

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<sup>352</sup> See Day, "Dante, Ibsen, Joyce, Epiphanies, and the Art of Memory," p. 361.

## 6. THE LAST CHAPTERS

The two last episodes of *Ulysses*, introducing spectacular experiments with style and narrative techniques, also mark a noticeable turn in three important aspects of the work: The union of father and son, the possibility of homecoming, and the epiphany of art in Molly's soliloquy. These possibilities are often undermined by an unreliable or too esoteric narrator, nevertheless they are present in the "Ithaca" and the "Penelope" chapters.

### a. "Ithaca"

Whereas "Circe" is the high point in Stephen's process of becoming as an individual and an artist, the seventeenth episode establishes what is commonly seen as a union of the father with the son, and provides a series of clues related to Bloom's achievement of *nostos* through memory and love. The penultimate chapter of Joyce's novel, considered in reality its last episode, is the last episode in which we see the characters involved in some action. It is written in a cold and impersonal style seen by some as a kind of Platonic dialogue using a catechistic question/answer technique.

Following Stephen's rescue from the brothel, and after stopping for an "undrinkable coffee" at the cabman's shelter in the "Eumaius" episode, the two men arrive at 7 Eccles Street -- Bloom's house. There, over a hot cup of cocoa that Bloom prepares for Stephen, they have a

discussion on a variety of topics after which Stephen departs without making any promises of return. This brief meeting constitutes the long anticipated union of father and son.

Abundant ink has been spilled on whether Bloom and Stephen actually unite as father and son and whether this was the purpose of the book. Some critics are skeptical about whether the "fusion" achieved "consubstantially" should be construed as a successful resolution of the paternal quest.<sup>353</sup> The union of the symbolic father and son occurs "consubstantially," says the narrator. The father and the son, body and mind, old and young, scientific and artistic, experience and words, all fall together for a brief time before they go their separate ways again. But the two men also represent similarities: They are both fathers and sons, creators and even artists, since "there's a touch of the artist about old Bloom!" (10.582-3).

Given the unreliability of the "Ithaca" narrator and Joyce's own tongue-in-cheek attitude toward his characters and plot, we would rather accept another answer Joyce seems to offer: He unites the two men verbally, in "Blephen" and "Stoom," by rearranging the letters of their names. Joyce, who had an obsession with words and names, had been looking for such a symbolic union for years and was determined to achieve it. I am referring to another example, that of James Stephens,

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<sup>353</sup> Phillip Herring argues that, ironically, "the son fails to recognize the father" (174); Patrick McGee calls their union a "missed encounter, a double revelation in which nothing, *the* nothing, is revealed." *Joyce's Uncertainty Principle*, p. 164-65.

the real person Joyce had discovered (mentioned also at 15.1532) whose name unites those of Stephen Dedalus and the author himself. James Stephens, who was born on the same day, year, time, and hour with the author and like him had two children, fascinated Joyce who considered him as his double.<sup>354</sup>

"Ithaca" is about a meeting which is uneventful, undramatic, just a symbolic moment of repose in the journey of the two men. If homecoming is accomplished here, it is only as far as Bloom is concerned and even so, it is inconclusive and ambiguous. Stephen had actually returned his key to Mulligan and leaves Bloom's house without saying where he was going to spend the night. We don't even know whether he is enjoying, for the moment, his newly gained freedom from the ghosts of his past. What we know is that Stephen is as keyless as before and still incomplete, without a house, a woman, or a job. Stephen leaves the "father" and the house Bloom offers him, to seek his own place in the world of the mind, still trying to reconcile experience and words. There is no homecoming for him, only existential loneliness inherent in freedom.

The "Ithaca" episode ends with Stephen's departure in an unspecified direction toward an unspecified future, leaving us totally in the dark regarding his thoughts and feelings after the encounter with "the father." As Epstein has argued, "Ulysses is, in part, the story of a father's search for a son, but the easy parallel must not be drawn -- the son is not in search of a father. The son is striving to become a

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<sup>354</sup> Ellmann, *James Joyce*, pp. 23, 592.

father, to fulfill his Aristotelian drive toward completeness. In *Finnegans Wake*, he reminds us, the only reason the sons seek the father is to destroy him.<sup>355</sup> Stephen has to leave Bloom's house. Accepting a role as Bloom's son, or a relation with Molly or Milly would compromise his freedom exposing it to the danger of new emotional complications. To be able to create, the artist has to separate himself from life, to intellectualize experience and transform it into words. Stephen is interested only in his own escape into the timelessness of art. As he vouched in *A Portrait*: his weapons are exile, silence, and cunning. One could add: and solitude.

Whereas the reader is left in the dark regarding Stephen's thoughts, the text gives out a detailed account of Bloom's movements and reflections after Stephen's departure. When left alone, he turns to memory and love to regain his sense of self and establish his own un-Homeric but deeply human *nostos*. In spite of the late hour, Leopold delays going to bed. Before returning to Molly's bed he needs to reconstruct his sense of identity and to order the thoughts of his past life and relationships which he revives through memory. He seeks an affirmation of love and of his sense of identity shaken by the events of the day. In this respect, the house becomes important. Bloom comes home from a state of exile and homelessness, from a brothel, which, even more emphatically than Seferis's hotel in "Thrush," is a symbol of homelessness. Bloom, exile and stranger in Ireland, is referred to as "a foreign gentleman" both by Gerty McDowell (13.1302) and by Molly

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<sup>355</sup> Epstein, *The Ordeal of Stephen Dedalus*, pp. 156-173, esp. 173.

recalling in her monologue her first impression of him. The Homeric return is rearticulated and reformulated according to the particular character's ability to readjust to the environment from which he was estranged. This is an essential difference between Odysseus and Bloom. Bloom has been thinking all day of that advertisement about home being incomplete without potted meat and comes home only to find, ironically, crumbs of potted meat in his bed from her picnic with her lover! What does he do about it? He simply brushes them off his bedsheets, wiping adultery from the conjugal bed! After all, "every married man is in danger of being a cuckold [and] cuckoldry is one of the natural attributes of marriage." This is the superb knowledge Panurge seeks in order to fight the terror of cuckoldry which keeps him from marrying.<sup>356</sup> Homecoming, if there is such a thing in Joyce, is only a moment of repose between life's crises. Joyce appears, in this context, closer to the post-Dantean view of Odysseus as a restless wanderer continually setting on a new journey in search of freedom and experience.<sup>357</sup>

Bloom achieves his unorthodox *nostos* by assembling through memory the proofs of his ability to love and be loved. From the unlocking of the garden gate we are taken inside the house to the unlocking of his private drawers -- the intimate domain of the individual's thought and emotions. The unlocking of Bloom's two private drawers is an act of

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<sup>356</sup> Rabelais, *Gargantua & Pantagruel* (New York: Penguin, 1983), p.377.

<sup>357</sup> Important illustrations thereof are Tennyson's "Ulysses," and Nikos Kazantzakis's *Οδύσσεια* [The Odyssey: A Modern Sequel], Kimon Friar trans., (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1958).

reconstructive memory. According to Bachelard, drawers function as intelligence and replace memory as well as intelligence. Once you put something in them, Bachelard says, you could find it again, magically, as many times as you wished, untouched by the passage of time. Drawers hold an entire well-classified world of positive knowledge.<sup>358</sup> Like memory, drawers and cabinets preserve the past and transport it, magically revealed, into the present, unchanged. This is a description of epiphany.

In going through the contents of his drawers, Bloom reconstructs his thoughts and feelings through the memory of the past and the proofs of his ability to love and be loved. Talking with the dead, as he does, is an act which contradicts Stephen's wanting to put an end to the communication with the dead mother because it had become too painful and despoiled his freedom. Listening to the dead is what Homer's hero and Seferis's personae do. Whereas Stephen turns away from history rejecting the past,<sup>359</sup> Bloom counts on the memory of the past from which the transition into the future seems to be easier.

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<sup>358</sup> Citing the example of Henry Bosco's novel *M. Carre-Benoît à la campagne*, Bachelard writes: "C'est le meuble à tiroirs qui est une intelligence. ... Là, du moins, tout restait solide, fidèle. On voyait ce que l'on voyait, on touchait ce que l'on touchait... Il tenait lieu de tout: c'était une mémoire et une intelligence... Ce qu'on y mettait une fois, cent fois, dix mille fois, on pouvait l'y retrouver d'un clin d'oeil, si j'ose dire. Quarante-huit tiroirs! De quoi contenir tout un monde bien classé de connaissances positives. M. Carre-Benoît attachait aux tiroirs une sorte de puissance magique. "Le tiroir, disait-il parfois, est le fondement de l'esprit humain (loc. cit. p. 126). See Gaston Bachelard, *La poétique de l'espace*, p.81-82.

<sup>359</sup> As Joyce was never able to do, having remained a prisoner of Ireland and his culture.

Bloom is trying to regain his shaken sense of self and his house that had been taken over by a usurper. Milly's and Martha's letters, which he finds in the drawers of his memory, reestablish him as a father and a lover. The documents and birth certificate, the anagrams and acrostics that he makes with his name are emblematic of his inner desire to recognize himself and regain his identity which was challenged by the events that took place during his absence. Lastly, a letter from his dead father addressed "To My Dear Son Leopold," resurrects the ghost of the father who tells him, among other things, to "be kind to Athos," his dog (17.1881-5). Isn't this what he has just done with "dogsboddy" Stephen? Contrary to Stephen, who asks the mother to assert her love for him, Bloom is asked by the father to give love to others.

Searching in the drawers for tokens of the dead is tantamount to resurrecting their voices through memory. Drawers are like gramophones and photographs: "Besides how could you remember everybody?" muses Bloom in the "Hades" episode, "Eyes, walk, voice. Well, the voice, yes: gramophone. Have a gramophone in every grave or keep it in the house... Remind you of the voice like the photograph reminds you of the face (6.962-967). "Is it the voice / of our dead friends or / the gramophone?," asks Seferis ("Sixteen Haiku, 4").<sup>360</sup> The gramophones are contemporary man's communication with the dead. Functioning like memory, they create out of real time a moment that had existed in the

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<sup>360</sup> or: "At every corner a gramophone shop  
 in every shop a hundred gramophones  
 for each gramophone a hundred records  
 on every record  
 someone living plays with someone dead." ("Tuesday")

past. Seferis must have read Joyce. Their common bonds through Eliot, Pound, and the Symbolists' preoccupation with the suggestiveness of language may have inspired the Greek poet's coinage of such common symbols with Joyce as the sea, the blind, the gramophones, and the light.

Among the objects Bloom contemplates are objects related to time: A timepiece on the mantelpiece, a dwarf tree, and an embalmed owl. All three objects are symbols of time, wisdom, and permanence. As already seen, Bloom is concerned with the here and the now, with lived experience, which Stephen lost in theories and abstractions in vain tries to establish.

Joyce purposely avoids metaphysical questions, such as time and decay, cosmic order, and change. What he does is in fact transforming symbolic meaning into literal, caricaturing the issue, or mutes, the question which is jocosiously taken up by a language of epistemology and *double entendre*: Bloom, for example, dreams of stopping time, on the way to buy a kidney for his breakfast, by resorting to imagination -- a lesser kind of art appropriate for Bloom, yet a higher kind of memory, according to Joyce. Savoring the warmth of the morning sun he meditates on an imaginary setting off at dawn: "Travel round in front of the sun, steal a day's march on him. Keep it up for ever never grow a day older technically" (U4.83-86). Traveling with the sun means counteracting the process of ageing; it implies the stopping of time and of decay. But Bloom's preoccupation with time is mainly related to the memory of

Molly's encounter with Boylan, a memory which is intensified as the time of the rendez-vous approaches. We see such a preoccupation with time in "Wandering Rocks" (120.389-96) unfolding about 3:00 o'clock, in the bar activities depicted in "Sirens," around 4:00 p.m., and in Bloom's musings about the relevance of words in the crucial question of time: "I woo, last my race. Milly young student. Well, my fault perhaps. No son. Rudy. Too late now. Or if not? If not? If still? He bore no hate. Hate. Love. Those are names. Rudy. Soon I am old" (11.285). This brings to mind the antithesis with Stephen who is trying to understand life through "the signature of things," and to experience love through words. Finally, in "Nausicaa" Leopold's watch stops at half-past-four, the hour of the adulterous meeting (13.847). Time has literally stopped.

In the same comic vein, Bloom's self-recognition also involves the discovery on his body of a "cicatrice" from a bee sting, which recalls the scar by which Odysseus was recognized. Lastly, a look in the mirror of the front room returns to Bloom only an image of disorder: "inverted volumes improperly arranged" (17.1358). Contrary to Stephen, Bloom does not believe the idea that the rearrangement of words, even of volumes of words, will order the chaos of human relations. He is not trying to arrange the improperly arranged books because he is interested in the experience of love rather than the words that represent it. Part of the disorder he sees in the mirror is a "solitary man whom he cannot recognize" his own reflection; like Seferis who sees in his own reflection "the stranger and the enemy."

If Seferis' quest culminates in "serenity," we can say that Joyce's advice to man's struggle for self-assertion in the face of change and adjustment is "equanimity" -- the unheroic and unmelodramatic resignation with which Bloom accepts life. It is based on love. Among other ways of dealing with Molly's infidelity, Bloom contemplates retribution, humorously evoking through the "mechanical bed" Hephaestus's device to catch Aphrodite and Ares in invisible nets (17.2202). But he opts for equanimity, with which Bloom confronts all of his problems. It is a state of composure, evenness of mind, and calm resignation that comes as a result of an experience and maturity. What Joyce celebrates in Bloom's equanimity is the generosity of spirit; what he mocks is the man of violence. Love for Bloom is more than the ability for feeling and compassion. His decision to do nothing about Molly's cheating results from such a love that transcends egocentric thinking and presupposes humility and sacrifice. Let's not forget that Joyce had referred to Homer's Odysseus as "kindly."<sup>361</sup> To be able to love indiscriminately means to conquer through self-effacement the selfish desire for retribution, as is the case with Bloom. It is with this decision that Bloom enters Molly's bed, bravely scoffing at established attitudes that relate honor to violence. There is a sense of heroism in this. Whereas Stephen attempts to achieve freedom by destroying the father and the mother, Bloom seeks freedom from his "scruples" in submission.<sup>362</sup> It ends in a humanizing view of man.

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<sup>361</sup> Ellmann, *James Joyce*, p. 436

<sup>362</sup> "I'm doing whatever I want; I'm obeying," [Κάνω ό,τι θέλω' υπακούω" (p. 425), says a Cretan hero, when he recognizes the futility of unbridled pride and useless heroism. Nikos Kazantzakis, *Καπετάν Μιχάλης*,

Bloom's homecoming is complete through an escape of the discourse into symbolism and his integration into the realm of the female, Mother Earth and the possibility of symbolic rebirth. Having recounted to Molly what he did during the day -- hiding the episode with Gerty in "Nausicaa," as Odysseus had hidden everything about Nausicaa -- Bloom kisses Molly's rump and lies down to sleep, assuming a foetal position at Molly's feet, ready to be reborn in the womb of "Gaia Tellus." Lempriere describes Gaia Tellus as "a divinity the same as the earth ... generally represented in the character of Tellus... She also appeared as holding a scepter in one hand, and a key in the other, ... while at her feet was lying a tame lion without chains."<sup>363</sup> Like Penelope, Molly holds the key to her husband's homecoming. But whereas Odysseus seals his return with a bloody slaying of the suitors, Bloom enters Molly's bed, a meek, tame lion! In "Circe" Bloom had recalled Mrs. Breen's words: "You were the lion of the night" (15.448) -- and his name, of course, is *Leopold*.

The "Ithaca" chapter ends with Bloom and Molly lying in opposite directions in bed "each and both carried westward, forward and rereward respectively, by the proper perpetual motion of the earth through everchanging tracts of neverchanging space" (17.2307-10), symbols of the eternal wanderer united with Mother Earth in timelessness, beyond change. Bloom's *Odyssey* ends here. "He has travelled." He is ready to be

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translated by Jonathan Griffin as *Freedom or Death* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1956) p. 367.

<sup>363</sup> John Lempriere, *Lempriere's Classical Dictionary* (London: Bracken Books, 1984)

reborn "a manchild in the womb." Leopold has vanquished his opponent Blazes Boylan by confronting his doubts, and because he is the first and the last in Molly's thoughts as she falls off to sleep. Molly's affair in fact restores Bloom to his rightful place as a more tender and sensitive partner than vulgar Boylan. The heroic code is reinscribed to project a new sense of heroism that coincides with unselfish love. As in Plato and Seferis, it is this kind of love that makes human inadequacy bearable.

Although the "Ithaca" chapter appears as the chapter in which things come to an end, it institutes this "closure" as indeterminacy. Its pretentious style, unreliable narrator, and its ending with a question -- "Where?" -- followed by a mysterious dot at the beginning of the next line, suggest that everything is questionable. After all action stops, the reader is left, indeed, with a number of questions: Have the protagonists of Ulysses achieved completeness and equilibrium? Will Bloom and Molly find again their past relationship? Nothing shows that Stephen's ghosts will not return to haunt him, or that he will come back to Bloom's house. Chances are, in fact, that like Bloom's notched coin thrown in the water he will "never return." The atonement with the father was only a coincidental encounter.

Joyce's conclusions, if any, are non-committal, muted, dropped casually into the flood of facts and thoughts. Remaining in his hiding corner, the author avoids to allow any projections into the future. It is only on the symbolic level that he lets the impression of

regeneration erupt. In the "Oxen of the Sun" episode, for example, we read that the star of Venus will rise on the 17 of June 1904 (14.1099-1103), signaling a new day and perhaps a new life supported perhaps by the fact that Bloom asks Molly to "get his breakfast in bed," which would get him out of his ambivalent, in-between position on life. But in most cases the narrative undermines, through wry or ironic commentary, any eventual tendency to take these themes seriously.

The "Ithaca" chapter is closer to Plato than one can realize at first sight. Yet, nothing is deeper than what meets the eye. Its form resembles a Platonic dialogue not only because of its question/answer technique, but also because of its catechism and dogmatism, exactly the opposite of what Plato was trying to avoid by resorting to Socratic irony. Joyce seeks the same effect by means of overstatement -- thus showing us the effects of such a use of language. Other notes the two texts strike are their playfulness and the self-effaced author who resorts to linguistic solutions when situations are unanswerable. Although the purposes such strategies serve are different, the underlying problem is the same: The problem of writing about man and trying to draw conclusions on the unpredictable and ambiguous human element.

**b. "Penelope"**

The last chapter of *Ulysses* constitutes a demonstration of the artistic process and particularly the transformation of memory and love into art -- and of Molly Bloom into an artist! The artistic process is represented through the taking over of involuntary language and of a sense of timelessness which this new dimension of the story introduces. This is made possible mainly because of the chapter's technique: The stream of consciousness, or "female internal monologue" which enables the surrealistic dramatization of the way the human mind -- memory, imagination, and the unconscious -- work.

Joyce seems to have been ambivalent as to which of the two dimensions in his heroine, the realistic or the symbolic, he wanted to emphasize most. In "Penelope" he had described Molly as "human, all too human," he says, but later he changed his mind: "I have rejected the usual interpretation of her as a human apparition... In conception and technique I tried to depict the earth which is prehuman and presumably posthuman."<sup>364</sup> This symbolic dimension to which Joyce refers here is the description of a technique.

This chapter, in fact, not only intensifies the symbolic dimension established in "Ithaca," but also, paradoxically, descends the story to earth. Molly's earthly meditations and outpourings of subconscious exemplify the artist's creative way of bringing together the different

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<sup>364</sup> James Joyce, *Letters I*, Gilbert Stuart ed. pp. 160 and 180.

levels of discourse, realistic, symbolic, linguistic, into an expression of art. What is moving the discourse toward an end is not plot any more but the rhetoric of memory and love. Let's look into the nature and content of this soliloquy and the rhetoric of memory and love that organizes it, and speculate whether this last chapter constitutes a kind of closure to Joyce's novel.

Late as it comes, this is the first time that we have a direct and more sustained view of Molly's character. Until now, Joyce's literary heroine had existed in an embryonic state since whatever the reader knows about her came almost exclusively through Bloom's subjective memories and thoughts. These images have constituted Molly as a character to the same extent they have characterized Bloom who generated them. Molly's literary life actually begins as early as chapter four, with an incomplete and inarticulate sound she issues, "Mn" (4.59), her first "word" as she is coming out of the previous night's sleep. "Calypso" is the only episode before "Penelope" that gives us a glimpse of Molly's direct thoughts, which reach their highest point in her asking Bloom to explain the word "metempsychosis" (4.331-343). If the "Calypso" episode marks the birth of Joyce's heroine through the way she understands language and speaks it, the "Penelope" chapter concludes with Molly's maturity as a character born and developed through language. From her original rudimentary speech, we are taken to a gush of words surging, again from half-asleep reminiscences, flashing thoughts between sleep and awakesness, that come to the surface unrestrained by the logic of syntax and grammar. The completeness the

characters of *Ulysses* seek is best exemplified by Molly's transformation, in a strictly linguistic sense, from an incomplete stage into maturity in "Penelope." The stuff that transforms it and she transforms into art is memory and love.

Molly's monologue is a product of memory and love. Its themes are built on memories of love relations and emotions which span her entire life as a woman. They start with the sensual life of her days in Gibraltar before her marriage and end with her latest love experience of that same afternoon, going even beyond present time into a kind of speculative anticipation regarding her future love relationship with Bloom. Molly's monologue is a transformation of forgotten experience into language -- "fabled by the daughters of memory. And yet ... in some way if not as memory fabled it" (2.7). This is what comes to Stephen's mind as he listens to a student striving to recall a historical detail. Molly is a composer of epiphanies and poetic images, an artist whose eloquence lies not in sophisticated, intellectualized patterns of speech but in the spontaneous ability to transform life into words. She can do intuitively what Stephen is striving to achieve intellectually with much toil and agony. Moreover, she is free, in control of her emotional attachments. The Homeric Penelope's ability to tell stories is depicted in Molly's weaving past, present, and future in terms of love and memory -- feeling and thought -- into the fabric of language. Penelope was famous on account of her weaving and unweaving, a metaphor of the tales she was composing. Text" comes, after all, from *texere*, or to weave.

Identified with love and also with adultery, Molly is an incarnation of Aphrodite. Bloom's act of offering her, in an Amphitryonic mood, to Stephen makes her a kind of "Pandemos Aphrodite." As the personification of love, she has unifying and creative powers manifested in her ability to unite time past, present, and future and to bring together in her semi-conscious speech Bloom, Stephen, and herself: "I wonder," she mumbles "why [Stephen] wouldnt stay the night... itd be great fun supposing he stayed with us ... Id love to have a long talk with an intelligent well-educated person ... (18.778-80). "Daedala Tellus,"<sup>365</sup> the ingenuous earth, is a great name for Earth that Joyce would have envied. It unifies verbally Stephen and Molly, rivaling and perhaps surpassing the pedestrian "Blephen" and Stoom!" As far as Molly's reunion with Bloom is concerned, he emerges repeatedly in her remembered or imagined love relations with other men, but clearly dominating her thoughts. It is Bloom, ambivalent between yes and no, for whom Molly reserves the last words of her soliloquy, her famous "yeses."

Molly is also the symbol of nature, like art. As such, she is eternal. As the last chapter shows, she can jump in and out of the past, in and out of time and mix memories with dream and reality transporting all of them, through her spontaneous language, into a time that has no temporal duration, the eternal time of art. That her two appearances in the novel depict her either waking up or falling asleep tells us that the author wants us to identify her with the timeless quality of dream in which involuntary memory and subliminal thought rule. As Gaia-

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<sup>365</sup> Vico, *New Science*, p. 237.

Tellus," an embodiment of nature and its cycles, Molly is indifferent to time past, passing, and to come, and can barely recall her own youth: "Lord how long ago it seems centuries" (18.666).

The Joycean characters cannot escape from time, or history, as long as they remember -- "Think you're escaping and run into yourself," says Bloom ; the only way out is to become a symbol, myth, or art. In "Penelope" language is a way of escaping into art and immortality. The transcendence of time and space achieved in "Circe" through the hallucinations and fantasies of its characters, is attained in "Penelope" through the forms of speech and thought that in this chapter move outside time subject to decay. These two chapters present an effort to break out of calendar time into eternal time, imitating art. Dealing with the unconscious "Circe" and "Penelope" seek to create a hallucinating effect where epic time -- not attached to a specific place and chronology -- is spelled out in a dramatic imitation of time. Gifford recognizes that both the dramatic dialogue of "Circe" and Molly's soliloquy in "Penelope" are "radical experiments with the disparities between clock time, psychological time, and the imitation of time."<sup>366</sup> "There is ultimately no escape," concludes Spoo, "-- for

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<sup>366</sup> Bloom's hallucinations in "Circe" "last only a moment in dramatic time but are spelled out in a dramatic imitation of epic time," that is the two years or so in which actually his hallucinations of that night would have unfolded. Similarly, "Molly's soliloquy belongs at once in the dramatic and the epic dimensions of time... Read aloud, the duration of the episode is three hours," whereas Molly's spell of insomnia would have not lasted more than an hour by the clock." See Gifford's Introduction, *Ulysses Annotated*, p. 3.

Stephen or for Joyce, antihistorical Icarus or pragmatic Daedalus -- from the nightmare, only the ceaseless effort to awake from 'history's oppressive texts through the weaving and reweaving of alternative ones."<sup>367</sup>

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<sup>367</sup> Spoo, *James Joyce and the Language of History*, pp. 12-13.

#### IV. MORE COMPARISONS

Plato, Seferis, and Joyce construct their artistic syntheses with the purpose of creating an alternative that would counteract the anxiety over man's impotence in the face of change and death. This alternative appears as an act of revelation, in which time symbolically stops, or experience is transformed into art and immortalized. It is the counter transformation the artist performs to mock change. Memory and love, embodiment of the human potential and experience exemplify the process of transmutation of experience into art. The author's answer expressed in philosophical, metaphysical, or aesthetic terms through poetic logos is, in fact, a statement of man's power to create. This is the hour when the artist becomes omnipotent, like God.

More analytically, love becomes for Plato and Seferis a property of the soul. This awareness instills faith in the human potential for progress and moral perfection (for Plato) and of a slight rise (for Seferis). Plato invents *anamnesis* to keep the mind alive and to create a means through which the individual can eternally renew self-knowledge. Similarly, writing, an external method, has to be eternalized in order to preserve memory. Identified with man's natural language and emotion memory in Seferis links the suffering and pain of existence with the wisdom of the past. While Seferis holds on to memory as a constructive, integrating force, Joyce shuns it as an obstacle to personal and artistic freedom. In Joyce's work, all answers involving man, even art,

are acknowledged and questioned, the only thing that remains, in the end, is a cheerful celebration of life as it is.

For Plato and Seferis the answer to man's plight is seen as part of an overall balance which enables the soul to achieve dignity and nobility for a better life in the ephemeral world of in an imagined future beyond this world. For Joyce, who believes in humanity but natural limitations in reaching the superhuman heights that the western culture has seen possible, the answer lies in doubt and skepticism. Language, which he wants to prove as inadequate, is a mirror of life, with all its changes, ambiguities, and unpredictabilities. Used like a theme, language becomes life whose ambiguity and indeterminacy the author approaches conscious, at all times, of the impossibility of grasping and explaining.

Like Joyce, Plato is preoccupied with language as a means of philosophical expression. Aware of the limitations of language, he concocts a new idiom by changing traditional modes of expression. Both use texts and thoughts of previous thinkers which they modify or subvert through irony, the Socratic authority, unreliable narrators, modulations of style, misquotations, all purported to exploit both the subversive power of the words and their capacity to propagate meaning. Contrary to Plato and Joyce who depend on verbal fireworks, Seferis relies on the steady emotional meaning of the words, favoring a language that "can be whispered." The development of the artist who is seeking his own voice involves, by necessity, questioning language's presumptions that it can

represent life and human thought. If life and language, products of repetition and change, can only be temporary truths and unstable impressions, it follows that all the novelist can do is convey this impression of fluidity that defines life. Plato is an example, though in different terms, an earlier illustration of modernism's attitude toward language. He has Socrates voice his beliefs -- often questioning Plato's own -- but when a written imitation of what Socrates teaches is needed for the purposes of philosophy, he is ambivalent between a language he professes he can control but in fact fears its independence. He invents the "dialogue" to attack both Socrates and writing, resorting to playful irony, while keeping himself self-effaced and unobtrusive, like Joyce paring his fingernails!

Plato deals with the historical realities of his times and the impact of time by escaping into the eternal and the immortal, leaving the past behind; Joyce attempts to do it by escaping into art, which can transform "dog" into God! Seferis by seeking that white horse in the coal pit of the past, and in the darkness of the human soul. Man, manipulator of words, can make death miraculously disappear and immortality come forth. Plato presents a philosophical solution, whereas Seferis offers a metaphysical one, and Joyce conjures up an aesthetic alternative. Through different definitions, orientations, and sensibilities, visions and epiphanies, what these three authors create through the interplay of memory, love, and language is the "miracle" of immortality -- a vision of God.

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**V. ANNEX****Seferis's poems in bilingual version**

(Translations from the original Greek are by Edmund Keeley  
and Philip Sherrard)

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## ΠΑΝΩ Σ' ΕΝΑΝ ΞΕΝΟ ΣΤΙΧΟ

Στήν Έλλη, Χριστούγεννα 1931

Εύτυχισμένος πού έκανε τὸ ταξίδι τοῦ Ὀδυσσεά.  
Εύτυχισμένος ἂν στὸ ξεκίνημα, ἔνωθε γερή τὴν ἄρματωσιὰ  
μιᾶς ἀγάπης, ἀπλωμένη μέσα στὸ κορμί του, σὰν τὶς  
φλέβες ὅπου βουίζει τὸ αἷμα.

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

Παρακαλῶ τὸ θεὸ νὰ μὲ συντρέξει νὰ πῶ, σὲ μιὰ στιγμή  
μεγάλης εὐδαιμονίας, ποιά εἶναι αὐτὴ ἡ ἀγάπη·  
κάθομαι κάποτε τριγυρισμένος ἀπὸ τὴν ξενιτειά, κι' ἀκοίω  
τὸ μακρινὸ βούισμά της, σὰν τὸν ἀχὸ τῆς θάλασσας  
πού ἔσμιξε μὲ τὸ ἀνέξηγητο δρολάπι.

Καὶ παρουσιάζεται μπροστά μου, πάλι καὶ πάλι, τὸ φάν-  
τασμα τοῦ Ὀδυσσεά, μὲ μάτια κοκκινισμένα ἀπὸ τοῦ  
κυμάτου τὴν ἀρμύρα  
κι' ἀπὸ τὸ μεστωμένο πόθο νὰ ξαναδεῖ τὸν καπνὸ πού βγαί-  
νει ἀπὸ τὴ ζεστασιὰ τοῦ σπιτιοῦ του καὶ τὸ σκυλί του  
πού γέρασε προσμένοντας στὴ θύρα.

## REFLECTIONS ON A FOREIGN LINE OF VERSE

For Elli, Christmas 1931

Fortunate he who's made the voyage of Odysseus.\*  
Fortunate if on setting out he's felt the rigging of a love  
strong in his body, spreading there like veins where  
the blood throbs.

A love of 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.

I ask God to help me say, at some moment of great happi-  
ness, what that love is;  
sometimes when I sit surrounded by exile I hear its distant  
murmur like the sound of sea struck by an inexplicable  
hurricane.

And again and again the shade of Odysseus appears before  
me, his eyes red from the waves' salt,  
from his ripe longing to see once more the smoke ascend-  
ing from his warm hearth and the dog grown old  
waiting by the door.

Στέκεται μεγάλος, ψιθυρίζοντας ανάμεσα στ' άσπρισμένα  
του γένηια, λόγια τῆς γλώσσας μας, ὅπως τῆ μιλούσαν  
πρὶν τρεῖς χιλιάδες χρόνια.

Ἄπλώνει μιὰ παλάμη ροζιασμένη ἀπὸ τὰ σκοινιά καὶ τὸ  
δοιάκι, μὲ δέρμα δουλεμένο ἀπὸ τὸ ξεροβόρι ἀπὸ τὴν  
κάψα κι' ἀπὸ τὰ χιόνια.

Θά 'λεγες πὼς θέλει νὰ διώξει τὸν ὑπεράνθρωπο Κύκλωπα  
πού βλέπει μ' ἓνα μάτι, τὶς Σειρῆνες πού σὰν τὶς ἀ-  
κούσεις ξεχνᾷς, τὴ Σκύλλα καὶ τὴ Χάρυβδη ἀπ' ἀνά-  
μεσό μας·

τόσα περίπλοκα τέρατα, πού δὲ μᾶς ἀφήνουν νὰ στοχαστοῦ-  
με, πὼς εἶταν κι' αὐτὸς ἓνας ἄνθρωπος πού πάλεψε μέ-  
σα στὸν κόσμο, μὲ τὴν ψυχὴ καὶ μὲ τὸ σῶμα.

Εἶναι ὁ μεγάλος Ὀδυσσεύς· ἐκεῖνος πού εἶπε νὰ γίνῃ τὸ  
ξύλινο ἄλογο καὶ οἱ Ἀχαιοὶ κερδίσανε τὴν Τροία.

Φαντάζομαι πὼς ἔρχεται νὰ μ' ἀρμηνέψῃ πὼς νὰ φτιάξω  
κι' ἐγὼ ἓνα ξύλινο ἄλογο γιὰ νὰ κερδίσω τὴ δική μου  
Τροία.

Γιατὶ μιᾷ ταπεινᾷ καὶ μὲ γαλήνη, χωρὶς προσπάθεια, λὲς  
μὲ γνωρίζει σὰν πατέρας

εἶτε σὰν κάτι γέρους θαλασσινοῦς, πού ἀκουμπισμένοι στὰ  
δίχτυα τους, τὴν ὥρα πού χειμώνιαζε καὶ θύμωνε ὁ  
ἄγέρας,

μοῦ λέγανε, στὰ παιδικὰ μου χρόνια, τὸ τραγούδι τοῦ Ἐ-  
ρωτόκριτου μὲ τὰ δάκρυα στὰ μάτια·

A large man, whispering through his whitened beard words  
in our language spoken as it was three thousand years  
ago.

He extends a palm calloused by the ropes and the tiller, his  
skin weathered by the dry north wind, by heat and  
snow.

It's as if he wants to expel from among us the superhuman  
one-eyed Cyclops, the Sirens who make you forget  
with their song, Scylla and Charybdis:

so many complex monsters that prevent us from remember-  
ing that he too was a man struggling in the world with  
soul and body.

He is the mighty Odysseus: he who proposed the wooden  
horse with which the Achaeans captured Troy.

I imagine he's coming to tell me how I too may build a  
wooden horse to capture my own Troy.

Because he speaks humbly and calmly, without effort, as  
though he were my father

or certain old sailors of my childhood who, leaning on their  
nets with winter coming on and the wind raging,

used to recite, with tears in their eyes, the song of Erotocri-  
tos;\*

τότες πού τρόμαζα μέσα στὸν ὕπνο μου ἀκούγοντας τὴν ἀν-  
τίδικη μοῖρα τῆς Ἀρετῆς νὰ κατεβαίνει τὰ μαρμαρέ-  
νια σκαλοπάτια.

Μοῦ λέει τὸ δύσκολο πόνο νὰ νιώθεις τὰ πανιά τοῦ καρα-  
βιοῦ σου φουσκωμένα ἀπὸ τὴ θύμηση καὶ τὴν ψυχὴ  
σου νὰ γίνεται τιμόνι.

Καὶ νὰ 'σαι μόνος, σκοτεινὸς μέσα στὴ νύχτα καὶ ἀκυβέρ-  
νητος σὰν τ' ἄχερο στ' ἁλώνι.

Τὴν πίκρα νὰ βλέπεις τοὺς συντρόφους σου καταποντισμέ-  
νους μέσα στὰ στοιχεῖα, σκορπισμένους: ἕναν-ἕναν.  
Καὶ πόσο παράξενα ἀντρειεύεσαι μιλώνοντας μὲ τοὺς πεθαμέ-  
νους, ὅταν δὲ φτάνουν πιά οἱ ζωντανοὶ πού σοῦ ἀπο-  
μέναν.

Μιλᾶ... βλέπω ἀκόμη τὰ χέρια του πού ξέραν νὰ δοκιμά-  
σουν ἂν εἶταν καλὰ σκαλισμένη στὴν πλώρη ἢ γοργόνα  
νὰ μοῦ χαρίζουν τὴν ἀκύμαντη γαλάζια θάλασσα μέσα στὴν  
καρδιά τοῦ χειμῶνα.

it was then I would shudder in my sleep at the unjust fate  
of Aretousa descending the marble steps.

He tells me of the harsh pain you feel when the ship's sails  
swell with memory and your soul becomes a rudder;  
of being alone, dark in the night, and helpless as chaff on  
the threshing floor;

of the bitterness of seeing your companions one by one  
pulled down into the elements and scattered;  
and of how strangely you gain strength conversing with the  
dead when the living who remain are no longer  
enough.

He speaks . . . I still see his hands that knew how to judge  
the carving of the mermaid at the prow  
presenting me the waveless blue sea in the heart of winter.

## Η ΑΠΟΦΑΣΗ ΤΗΣ ΑΗΣΜΟΝΙΑΣ

*Ποιός θά μᾶς λογαριάσει τήν ἀπόφαση τῆς ἀημονιάς ;...*

Γ. Σ.

Στάσου διαβάτη μπροστά στήν ἡσυχὴ λίμνη  
ἢ σγουρὴ θάλασσα καὶ τὰ βασανισμένα καρφία  
οἱ δρόμοι ποῦ τυλίγαν βουνά καὶ γεννούσαν ἄστρα  
δλα τελειώνουν ἐδῶ στήν πλατεῖά ἐπιφάνεια.

Τώρα μπορείς νά κοιτάξεις μέ γαλήνη τοὺς κύκλους  
δέξ τους, εἶναι κατάσπροι σάν τὸν ὕπνο τῆς νύχτας  
χωρὶς νά γγίξουν πουθενά γλιστροῦν σ' ἓνα λιγνὸ λεπιδί  
ποῦ τοὺς ὑψώνει ἐλάχιστα πάνω ἀπὸ τὰ νερά.

Σοῦ μοιάζουν ξένη, τὰ ἡσυχά φτερά καὶ τὰ καταλαβαίνεις  
ἐνῶ σέ κοιτάζουν μαρμαρωμένα τὰ μάτια τῶν λιονταριῶν  
καὶ τὸ φύλλο τοῦ δέντρο ἔμεινε ἔγραφο στὰ ἐπουράνια  
καὶ τὸ κοντύλι τρύπησε τὸν τοῖχο τῆς φυλακῆς.

Κί' ὅμως δὲν εἶταν ἄλλα τὰ πουλιὰ ποῦ σφάζαν τὶς χωριά-  
τοπούλες  
τὸ αἷμα κοκκίνιζε τὸ γάλα πάνω στὶς πλάκες τοῦ δρόμου  
καὶ τ' ἄλογά τους ἀθρόρυβα σάν τὸ λειωμένο μολύβι  
ρίχναν ἀδιάβαστα σχήματα μέσα στὶς γούρνες.

Κί' ἐσφιγγε ἡ νύχτα ὀλόγνα τὸν κυρτὸ λαϊμὸ τους  
ποῦ δὲν τραγουδοῦσε γιὰτὶ δὲν εἶταν τρόπος νά πεθάνει

## THE DECISION TO FORGET

*Who will calculate for us the cost of our decision to forget?*

G. S.

Stop beside the still lake, passer-by;  
the curly sea and the tormented ships  
the roads that wrapped mountains and gave birth to stars  
all end here on this broad surface.

Now you can watch the swans calmly  
look at them: all white like the night's sleep  
without touching anywhere they glide on a thin blade  
that lifts them barely above the water.

They're like you, stranger, the still wings, and you under-  
stand them  
as the stony eyes of the lions stare at you  
and the tree's leaf remains uninscribed in the heavens  
and the pen pierced the prison wall.

And yet the birds that slaughtered the village girls were  
none other than these  
the blood reddened the milk on the road's flagstones  
and their horses cast noiselessly, like molten lead,  
illegible shapes into the troughs.

And night suddenly tightened around their arched necks  
which didn't sing because there was no way to die

ἀλλὰ χτυποῦσε θερίζοντας τὰ κόκκαλα τῶν ἀνθρώπων  
τυφλά. Καὶ δρόσιζαν τὰ φτερά τους τῆ φρίκη.

Κι' αὐτὰ πού γίνονταν εἶχαν τὴν ἴδια γαλήνη μὲ τοῦτα πού  
βλέπεις  
εἶχαν τὴν ἴδια γαλήνη γιατί δὲν περίσσευε ψυχὴ νὰ συλλο-  
γιστοῦμε  
ἐκτός ἀπ' τὴ δύναμη νὰ χαράξουμε λίγα σημάδια στὶς  
πέτρες  
πού ἄγγιξαν τώρα πιά τὸ βυθὸ κάτω ἀπ' τὴ μνήμη.

Μαζί τους κι' ἐμεῖς μακριὰ πολὺ μακριά, στάσου διαβάτη  
μπροστὰ στὴν ἡσυχὴ λίμνη μὲ τοὺς ἄσπιλους κύκνους  
πού ταξιδεύουν σὰν ἄσπρα κουρέλια μέσα στὸ νοῦ σου  
καὶ σὲ ξυπνᾶνε σὲ πράγματα πού ἔζησες καὶ πού δὲ θυ-  
μᾶσαι.

Μήτε θυμᾶσαι διαβάζοντας τὰ ψηφιά μας πάνω στὶς πέτρες·  
ὥστόσο μένεις ἐκστατικὸς μαζί μὲ τ' ἄρνιά σου  
πού μεγαλώνουν τὸ σῶμα σου μὲ τὸ μαλλί τους  
τώρα πού νιώθεις στὶς φλέβες σου μιὰ βοή θυσίας.

but beat, threshing men's bones blindly.  
And their wings cooled the horror.

And what then happened had the same tranquillity as what  
you see before you  
the same tranquillity because there wasn't a soul left for us  
to consider  
except the power for carving a few signs on the stones  
which now have touched the depths under memory.

We too with them, far away, very far away—stop, passer-by,  
beside the still lake with the spotless swans  
that travel like white tatters through your mind  
and waken you to things you lived yet don't remember.

Nor do you remember as you read our characters on the  
stones;  
even so you're astonished together with your sheep  
that enlarge your body with their wool  
now that you feel in your veins a sound of sacrifice.

## Ο ΒΑΣΙΛΙΑΣ ΤΗΣ ΑΣΙΝΗΣ

Ἄσινην τε...

ΙΛΙΑΔΑ

Κοιτάξαμε ὅλο τὸ πρῶν γύρω γύρω τὸ κάστρο  
ἀρχίζοντας ἀπὸ τὸ μέρος τοῦ ἰσίου ἐκεῖ πού ἡ θά-  
λασσα  
πράσινη καὶ χωρὶς ἀναλαμπή, τὸ στῆθος σκοτωμένου πα-  
γονιοῦ  
μᾶς δέχτηκε ὅπως ὁ καιὸς χωρὶς κανένα χάσμα.  
Οἱ φλέβες τοῦ βράχου κατέβαιναν ἀπὸ ψηλὰ  
στριμμένα κλήματα γυμνὰ πολὺκλωνα ζωντανεύοντας  
στ' ἄγγιγμα τοῦ νεροῦ, καθὼς τὸ μάτι ἀκολουθώντας τις  
πάλευε νὰ ξεφύγει τὸ κουραστικὸ λίκνισμα  
χάνοντας δύναμη ὀλοένα.

Ἄπὸ τὸ μέρος τοῦ ἡλίου ἓνας μακρὸς γιάλος ὀλάνοιχτος  
καὶ τὸ φῶς τρίβοντας διαμαντικὰ στὰ μεγάλα τείχη.  
Κανένα πλάσμα ζωντανὸ τ' ἀγριοπερίστερα φευγάτα  
κι' ὁ βασιλιάς τῆς Ἄσινης πού τὸν γυρεύουμε δυὸ χρόνια  
τώρα  
ἀγνωστος λησμονημένος ἀπ' ὅλους κι' ἀπὸ τὸν Ὅμηρο  
μόνο μιὰ λέξη στὴν Ἰλιάδα κι' ἐκείνη ἀβέβαιη  
ριγμένη ἐδῶ σὰν τὴν ἐντάφια χρυσὴ προσωπίδα.  
Τὴν ἄγγιξες, θυμᾶσαι τὸν ἦχο τῆς; κούφιο μέσα σ'  
φῶς  
σὰν τὸ στεγνὸ πιθάρι στὸ σκαμμένο χῶμα·

## THE KING OF ASINE

Ἄσινην τε . . .

ILIAD\*

All morning long we looked around the citadel\*  
starting from the shaded side, there where the sea,  
green and without luster—breast of a slain peacock—  
received us like time without an opening in it.  
Veins of rock dropped down from high above,  
twisted vines, naked, many-branched, coming alive  
at the water's touch, while the eye following them  
struggled to escape the tiresome rocking,  
losing strength continually.

On the sunny side a long empty beach  
and the light striking diamonds on the huge walls.  
No living thing, the wild doves gone  
and the king of Asine, whom we've been trying to find for  
two years now,  
unknown, forgotten by all, even by Homer,  
only one word in the *Iliad* and that uncertain,  
thrown here like the gold burial mask.  
You touched it, remember its sound? Hollow in the light  
like a dry jar in dug earth:

κι' ὁ ἴδιος ἤχος μὲς στὴ θάλασσα μὲ τὰ κουπιὰ μας.  
 Ὁ βασιλιάς τῆς Ἀσίνης ἕνα κενὸ κάτω ἀπ' τὴν προσω-  
 πίδα  
 παντοῦ μαζί μας παντοῦ μαζί μας, κάτω ἀπὸ ἕνα ὄνομα :  
 «Ἀσίνην τε... Ἀσίνην τε...»

καὶ τὰ παιδιὰ του ἀγάλματα  
 κι' οἱ πόθοι του φτερουγίσματα πουλιῶν κι' ὁ ἀγέρας  
 στὰ διαστήματα τῶν στοχασμῶν του καὶ τὰ καράβια του  
 ἀραγμένα σ' ἄφαντο λιμάνι·  
 κάτω ἀπ' τὴν προσωπίδα ἕνα κενό.

Πίσω ἀπὸ τὰ μεγάλα μάτια τὰ καμπύλα χεῖλια τοῦς  
 βοστρύχους  
 ἀνάγλυφα στὸ μαλαματένιο σκέπασμα τῆς ὑπαρξῆς μας  
 ἕνα σημεῖο σκοτεινὸ πού ταξιδεύει σὰν τὸ ψάρι  
 μέσα στὴν αὐγινὴ γαλήνη τοῦ πελάγου καὶ τὸ βλέπεις :  
 ἕνα κενὸ παντοῦ μαζί μας.  
 Καὶ τὸ πουλὶ πού πέταξε τὸν ἄλλο χειμῶνα  
 μὲ σπασμένη φτερούγα  
 σκῆνωμα ζωῆς,  
 κι' ἡ νέα γυναίκα πού ἔφυγε νὰ παίξει  
 μὲ τὰ σκυλόδοντα τοῦ καλοκαιριοῦ  
 κι' ἡ ψυχὴ πού γύρεψε τσιρίζοντας τὸν κάτω κόσμο  
 κι' ὁ τόπος σὰν τὸ μεγάλο πλατανόφυλλο πού παρασέρνει  
 ὁ χεῖμαρρος τοῦ ἡλίου  
 μὲ τ' ἀρχαῖα μνημεῖα καὶ τὴ σύγχρονη θλίψη.

Κι' ὁ ποιητὴς ἀργοπορεῖ κοιτάζοντας τίς πέτρες κι' ἀνα-  
 ρωτιέται

the same sound that our oars make in the sea.  
 The king of Asine a void under the mask  
 everywhere with us everywhere with us, under a name:  
 "Ἀσίνην τε . . . Ἀσίνην τε . . ."

and his children statues  
 and his desires the fluttering of birds, and the wind  
 in the gaps between his thoughts, and his ships  
 anchored in a vanished port:  
 under the mask a void.

Behind the large eyes the curved lips the curls  
 carved in relief on the gold cover of our existence  
 a dark spot that you see traveling like a fish  
 in the dawn calm of the sea:  
 a void everywhere with us.  
 And the bird that flew away last winter  
 with a broken wing:  
 abode of life,  
 and the young woman who left to play  
 with the dogteeth of summer  
 and the soul that sought the lower world squeaking  
 and the country like a large plane-leaf swept along by, the  
 torrent of the sun  
 with the ancient monuments and the contemporary sorrow.  
 And the poet lingers, looking at the stones, and asks himself

ὑπάρχουν ἄραγε  
 ἀνάμεσα στις χαλασμένες τοῦτες γραμμές τις ἀκμές τις  
 αἰχμές τὰ κοῖλα καὶ τις καμπύλες  
 ὑπάρχουν ἄραγε  
 ἐδῶ πού συναντιέται τὸ πέρασμα τῆς βροχῆς τοῦ ἀγέρα  
 καὶ τῆς φθορᾶς  
 ὑπάρχουν, ἢ κίνηση τοῦ προσώπου τὸ σχῆμα τῆς στορ-  
 γῆς  
 ἐκείνων πού λιγότεψαν τόσο παράξενα μὲς στὴ  
 ζωὴ μας  
 αὐτῶν πού ἀπόμειναν σκιές κυμάτων καὶ στοχασμοὶ μὲ τὴν  
 ἀπεραντοσύνη τοῦ πελάγου  
 ἢ μήπως ὄχι δὲν ἀπομένει τίποτε παρὰ μόνο τὸ βάρος  
 ἢ νοσταλγία τοῦ βάρους μιᾶς ὑπαρξῆς ζωντανῆς  
 ἐκεῖ πού μένουμε τώρα ἀνυπόστατοι λυγίζοντας  
 σὰν τὰ κλωνάρια τῆς φριχτῆς ἰτιᾶς σωριασμένα μέσα στὴ  
 διάρκεια τῆς ἀπελπισίας  
 ἐνῶ τὸ ρέμα κίτρινο κατεβάζει ἀργὰ βοῦρλα ξεριζωμένα  
 μὲς στὸ βοῦρκο  
 εἰκόνα μορφῆς πού μαρμάρωσε μὲ τὴν ἀπόφαση μιᾶς  
 πίκρας παντοτινῆς.  
 Ὁ ποιητῆς ἓνα κενό.  
 Ἄσπιδοφόρος ὁ ἥλιος ἀνέβαινε πολεμώντας  
 κι' ἀπὸ τὸ βάθος τῆς σπηλιᾶς μιὰ νυχτερίδα τρομαγμένη,  
 χτύπησε πάνω στὸ φῶς σὰν τὴ σαίτα πάνω στὸ σκου-  
 τάρι:  
 «Ἄσίνην τε Ἄσίνην τε...». Νά 'ταν αὐτὴ ὁ βασιλιάς τῆς  
 Ἄσίνης

does there really exist  
 among these ruined lines, edges, points, hollows, and curves  
 does there really exist  
 here where one meets the path of rain, wind, and ruin  
 does there exist the movement of the face, shape of the  
 tenderness  
 of those who've shrunk so strangely in our lives,  
 those who remained the shadow of waves and thoughts with  
 the sea's boundlessness  
 or perhaps no, nothing is left but the weight  
 the nostalgia for the weight of a living existence  
 there where we now remain unsubstantial, bending  
 like the branches of a terrible willow-tree heaped in  
 permanent despair  
 while the yellow current slowly carries down rushes up-  
 rooted in the mud  
 image of a form that the sentence to everlasting bitterness  
 has turned to stone:  
 the poet a void.

Shieldbearer, the sun climbed warring,  
 and from the depths of the cave a startled bat  
 hit the light as an arrow hits a shield:  
 "Ἄσίνην τε . . . Ἄσίνην τε . . ." Would that it were the king  
 of Asine

•ΚΙΧΛΗ•

*Δαίμονος επιπόνου και τύχης χαλεπῆς εφήμερον σπέρμα, τί με  
βιάζεσθε λέγειν, ἃ ὑμῖν ἄρειον μὴ γινῶναι.*

Ο ΣΕΙΑΗΝΟΣ ΣΤΟΝ ΜΙΔΑ

“THRUSH”•

*Ephemeral issue of a vicious daemon and a harsh fate, why  
do you force me to speak of things that it would be better  
for you not to know.*

SILENUS TO MIDAS•

*Τὸ σπίτι κοντὰ στὴ θάλασσα*

Τὰ σπίτια ποὺ εἶχα μοῦ τὰ πήραν. Ἔτυχε  
 νά 'ναι τὰ χρόνια δίσεχτα· πολέμοι χαλασμοὶ ξενιτεμοί·  
 κάποτε ὁ κυνηγὸς βρίσκει τὰ διαβατάρικα πουλιὰ  
 κάποτε δὲν τὰ βρίσκει· τὸ κυνήγι  
 εἶταν καλὸ στὰ χρόνια μου, πήραν πολλοὺς τὰ σκάγια·  
 οἱ ἄλλοι γυρίζουν ἢ τρελαίνονται στὰ καταφύγια.

Μὴ μοῦ μιλάς γιὰ τ' ἀηδὸνι μῆτε γιὰ τὸν κορυδαλὸ  
 μῆτε γιὰ τὴ μικρούλα σουσουράδα  
 ποὺ γράφει νούμερα στὸ φῶς μὲ τὴν οὐρά της·  
 δὲν ξέρω πολλὰ πράγματα ἀπὸ σπίτια  
 ξέρω πῶς ἔχουν τὴ φυλὴ τους, τίποτε ἄλλο.  
 Καινούργια στὴν ἀρχή, σὰν τὰ μωρὰ  
 ποὺ παίζουν στὰ περβόλια μὲ τὰ κρόσια τοῦ ἡλίου,  
 κεντοῦν παραθυρόφυλλα χρωματιστὰ καὶ πόρτες  
 γυαλιστερές πάνω στὴ μέρα·  
 ὅταν τελειώσει ὁ ἀρχιτέκτονας ἀλλάζουν,  
 ζαρώνουν ἢ χαμογελοῦν ἢ ἀκόμη πεισματῶνουν  
 μ' ἐκείνους ποὺ ἔμειναν μ' ἐκείνους ποὺ ἔφυγαν  
 μ' ἄλλους ποὺ θὰ γυρίζανε ἂν μπορούσαν  
 ἢ ποὺ χαθῆκαν, τώρα ποὺ ἔγινε  
 ὁ κόσμος ἓνα ἀπέραντο ξενοδοχεῖο.

Δὲν ξέρω πολλὰ πράγματα ἀπὸ σπίτια,  
 θυμᾶμαι τὴ χαρὰ τους καὶ τὴ λύπη τους

*The house near the sea\**

The houses I had they took away from me. The times  
 happened to be unpropitious: war, destruction, exile;  
 sometimes the hunter hits the migratory birds,  
 sometimes he doesn't hit them. Hunting  
 was good in my time, many felt the pellet;  
 the rest circle aimlessly or go mad in the shelters.

Don't talk to me about the nightingale or the lark  
 or the little wagtail  
 inscribing figures with his tail in the light;  
 I don't know much about houses  
 I know they have their own nature, nothing else.  
 New at first, like babies  
 who play in gardens with the tassels of the sun,  
 they embroider colored shutters and shining doors  
 over the day.  
 When the architect's finished, they change,  
 they frown or smile or even grow stubborn  
 with those who stayed behind, with those who went away  
 with others who'd come back if they could  
 or others who disappeared, now that the world's become  
 an endless hotel.

I don't know much about houses,  
 I remember their joy and their sorrow

καμιά φορά, σὰ σταματήσω·

ἀκόμη

καμιά φορά, κοντὰ στὴ θάλασσα, σὲ κάμαρες γυμνές  
μ' ἓνα κρεβάτι σιδερένιο χωρὶς τίποτε δικό μου  
κοιτάζοντας τὴ βραδινὴν ἀράχνη συλλογιέμαι  
πὼς κάποιος ἐτοιμάζεται νὰ ῥθει, πὼς τὸν στολίζουν  
μ' ἄσπρα καὶ μαῦρα ροῦχα μὲ πολύχρωμα κοσμήματα  
καὶ γύρω του μιλοῦν σιγὰ σεβάσμιες δέσποινες  
γκρίζα μαλλιά καὶ σκοτεινές δαντέλες,  
πὼς ἐτοιμάζεται νὰ ῥθει νὰ μ' ἀποχαιρετήσει·  
ἦ, μιὰ γυναίκα ἐλικοβλέφαρη βαθύζωνη  
γυρίζοντας ἀπὸ λιμάνια μεσημβρινά,  
Σμύρνη Ρόδο Συρακοῦσες Ἀλεξάντρεια,  
ἀπὸ κλειστὲς πολιτεῖες σὰν τὰ ζεστὰ παραθυρόφυλλα,  
μὲ ἀρώματα χρυσῶν καρπῶν καὶ βότανα,  
πὼς ἀνεβαίνει τὰ σκαλιὰ χωρὶς νὰ βλέπει  
ἐκείνους ποὺ κοιμήθηκαν κάτω ἀπ' τὴ σκάλα.

Ξέρεις τὰ σπίτια πεισματῶνουν εὐκολα, σὰν τὰ γυμνώσεις.

sometimes, when I stop to think;

again

sometimes, near the sea, in naked rooms  
with a single iron bed and nothing of my own,  
watching the evening spider, I imagine  
that someone is getting ready to come, that they dress  
him up\*  
in white and black robes, with many-colored jewels,  
and around him venerable ladies,  
gray hair and dark lace shawls, talk softly,  
that he is getting ready to come and say goodbye to me;  
or that a woman—eyelashes quivering, slim-waisted,  
returning from southern ports,  
Smyrna Rhodes Syracuse Alexandria,  
from cities closed like hot shutters,  
with perfume of golden fruit and herbs—  
climbs the stairs without seeing  
those who've fallen asleep under the stairs.

Houses, you know, grow stubborn easily when you strip  
them bare.

Τὸν εἶδα χτῆς νὰ σταματᾶ στήν πόρτα  
 κάτω ἀπὸ τὸ παράθυρό μου· θά 'ταν  
 ἑπτὰ περίπου· μιὰ γυναίκα εἶταν μαζί του.  
 Εἶχε τὸ φέρσιμο τοῦ Ἐλπήνωρα, λίγο πρὶν πέσει  
 νὰ τσακιστεῖ, κι' ὅμως δὲν εἶταν μεθυσμένος.  
 Μιλοῦσε πολὺ γρήγορα, κι' ἐκείνη  
 κοίταζε ἀφηρημένη πρὸς τοὺς φωνογράφους·  
 τὸν ἔκοβε καμιὰ φορὰ νὰ πεῖ μιὰ φράση  
 κι' ἔπειτα κοίταζε μ' ἀνυπομονησία  
 ἐκεῖ πού τηγανίζουν ψάρια· σὰν τῆ γάτα.  
 Αὐτὸς ψιθύριζε μ' ἓνα ἀποσιγάρο σβηστό στὰ χεῖλια:

— «Ἄκουσε ἀκόμη τοῦτο. Στὸ φεγγάρι  
 τ' ἀγάλματα λυγίζουν κάποτε σὰν τὸ καλάμι  
 ἀνάμεσα σὲ ζωντανούς καρπούς—τ' ἀγάλματα·  
 κι' ἡ φλόγα γίνεται δροσερὴ πικροδάφνη,  
 ἡ φλόγα πού καίει τὸν ἄνθρωπο, θέλω νὰ πῶ».

— «Εἶναι τὸ φῶς... ἴσκιοι τῆς νύχτας...».

— «Ἴσως ἡ νύχτα πού ἀνοιξε, γαλάζιο ρόδι,  
 σκοτεινὸς κόρφος, καὶ σὲ γέμισε ἄστρα  
 κόβοντας τὸν καιρό.

Κι' ὅμως τ' ἀγάλματα

I saw him yesterday standing by the door  
 below my window; it was about  
 seven o'clock; there was a woman with him.  
 He had the look of Elpenor just before he fell  
 and smashed himself, yet he wasn't drunk.  
 He was speaking fast, and she  
 was gazing absently toward the gramophones;  
 now and then she cut him short to say a word  
 and then would glance impatiently  
 toward where they were frying fish: like a cat.  
 He muttered with a cigarette butt between his lips:

— "Listen. There's this too. In the moonlight  
 the statues sometimes bend like reeds  
 in the midst of ripe fruit—the statues;  
 and the flame becomes a cool oleander,  
 the flame that burns you, I mean."

— "It's just the light . . . shadows of the night."

— "Maybe the night that split open, a blue pomegranate,  
 a dark breast, and filled you with stars,  
 cleaving time.

And yet the statues

λυγίζουν κάποτε, μοιράζοντας τὸν πόθο  
στὰ δυό, σὰν τὸ ροδάκινο· κι' ἡ φλόγα  
γίνεται φίλημα στὰ μέλη κι' ἀναφυλλητὸ  
κι' ἔπειτα φύλλο δροσερὸ πού παίρνει ὁ ἄνεμος·  
λυγίζουν· γίνονται ἀλαφριά μ' ἓνα ἀνθρώπινο βάρος.  
Δὲν τὸ ξεχνᾷς».

— «Τ' ἀγάλματά εἶναι στὸ μουσεῖο».

— «Ὅχι, σὲ κυνηγοῦν, πῶς δὲν τὸ βλέπεις;  
θέλω νὰ πῶ μὲ τὰ σπασμένα μέλη τους,  
μὲ τὴν ἄλλοτινὴ μορφή τους πού δὲ γνώρισες  
κι' ὁμως τὴν ξέρεις.

“Ὅπως ὅταν

στὰ τελευταῖα τῆς νιότης σου ἀγαπήσεις  
γυναίκα πού ἔμεινε ὁμορφῆ, κι' ὄλο φοβᾷσαι,  
καθὼς τὴν κράτησες γυμνὴ τὸ μεσημέρι,  
τὴ μνήμη πού ξυπνᾷ στὴν ἀγκαλιά σου·  
φοβᾷσαι τὸ φιλὶ μὴ σὲ προδώσει  
σ' ἄλλα κρεββάτια περασμένα τώρα  
πού ὥστόσο θὰ μπορούσαν νὰ στοιχειώσουν  
τόσο εὐκόλα τόσο εὐκόλα καὶ ν' ἀναστήσουν  
εἰδῶλα στὸν καθρέφτη, σώματα πού εἶταν μιὰ φορά·  
τὴν ἡδονή τους.

“Ὅπως ὅταν

γυρίζεις ἀπ' τὰ ξένα καὶ τύχει ν' ἀνοίξεις  
παλιὰ κασέλα κλειδωμένη ἀπὸ καιρὸ  
καὶ βρεῖς κουρέλια ἀπὸ τὰ ροῦχα πού φοροῦσες  
σὲ ὁμορφες ὥρες, σὲ γιορτὲς μὲ φῶτα

bend sometimes, dividing desire in two,  
like a peach; and the flame  
becomes a kiss on the limbs, a sobbing,  
and then a cool leaf carried off by the wind;  
they bend; they become light with a human weight.  
You don't forget it.”

—“The statues are in the museum.”

— “No, they pursue you, why can't you see it?  
I mean with their broken limbs,  
with their shape from another time, a shape you don't  
recognize  
yet know.

It's as though

in the last days of your youth you loved  
a woman who was still beautiful, and you were always afraid,  
as you held her naked at noon,  
of the memory aroused by your embrace;  
were afraid the kiss might betray you  
to other beds now of the past  
which nevertheless could haunt you  
so easily, so easily, and bring to life  
images in the mirror, bodies once alive:  
their sensuality.

It's as though

returning home from some foreign country you happen  
to open  
an old trunk that's been locked up a long time  
and find the tatters of clothes you used to wear  
on happy occasions, at festivals with many-colored lights,

πολύχρωμα, καθρεφτισμένα, πού ὄλο χαμηλώνουν  
 και μένει μόνο τὸ ἄρωμα τῆς ἀπουσίας  
 μιᾶς νέας μορφῆς.

Ἄλῆθεια, τὰ συντρίμμια  
 δὲν εἶναι ἐκεῖνα· ἐσύ ἴσαι τὸ ρημάδι·  
 σὲ κυνηγοῦν μὲ μιὰ παράξενη παρθενιά  
 στὸ σπίτι στὸ γραφεῖο στὶς δεξιώσεις  
 τῶν μεγιστάνων, στὸν ἀνομολόγητο φόβο τοῦ ὕπνου·  
 μιλοῦν γιὰ περιστατικά πού θά ἤθελες νὰ μὴν ὑπάρ-  
 χουν  
 ἢ νὰ γινόντουσαν χρόνια μετὰ τὸ θάνατό σου,  
 κι' αὐτὸ εἶναι δύσκολο γιὰτί...»

— «Τ' ἀγάλματα εἶναι στὸ μουσεῖο.

Καληνύχτα».

— «...γιατί τ' ἀγάλματα δὲν εἶναι πιὰ συντρίμμια,  
 εἴμαστε ἐμεῖς. Τ' ἀγάλματα λυγίζουν ἀλαφριά... καλη-  
 νύχτα».

Ἐδῶ χωρίστηκαν. Αὐτὸς ἐπῆρε  
 τὴν ἀνηφόρα πού τραβάει κατὰ τὴν Ἄρκτο  
 κι' αὐτὴ προχώρησε πρὸς τὸ πολύφωτο ἀκρογιαλί  
 ὅπου τὸ κῦμα πνίγεται στὴ βοή τοῦ ραδιοφώνου:

*Τὸ ραδιόφωνο*

— «Πανιὰ στὸ φύσημα τοῦ ἀγέρα  
 ὁ νοῦς δὲν κράτησε ἄλλο ἀπὸ τὴ μέρα.  
 Ἄρωμα πεύκου και σιγή

mirrored, now becoming dim,  
 and all that remains is the perfume of the absence  
 of a young form.

Really, those statues are not  
 the fragments. You yourself are the relic;  
 they haunt you with a strange virginity  
 at home, at the office, at receptions for the celebrated,  
 in the unconfessed terror of sleep;  
 they speak of things you wish didn't exist  
 or would happen years after your death,  
 and that's difficult because . . .”

— “The statues are in the museum.

Good night.”

— “. . . because the statues are no longer  
 fragments. We are. The statues bend lightly . . . Good  
 night.”

At this point they separated. He took  
 the road leading uphill toward the North  
 and she moved on toward the light-flooded beach  
 where the waves are drowned in the noise from the radio:

*The radio*

—“Sails puffed out by the wind  
 are all that stay in the mind.  
 Perfume of silence and pine

εύκολα θ' ἀπαλύνουν τὴν πληγὴ  
ποῦ ἔκαμαν φεύγοντας ὁ ναύτης  
ἢ σουσουράδα ὁ κοκοβιδὸς κι' ὁ μυγοχάφτης.  
Γυναίκα ποῦ ἔμεινες χωρὶς ἀφή,  
ἄκουσε τῶν ἀνέμων τὴν ταφή.

Ἄδειασε τὸ χρυσὸ βρέλι  
ὁ γήλιος ἔγινε κουρέλι  
σὲ μιᾶς μεσόκοπης λαιμὸ  
ποῦ βήχει καὶ δὲν ἔχει τελειωμό·  
τὸ καλοκαίρι ποῦ ταξίδεψε τὴ θλίβει  
μὲ τὰ μαλάματα στοὺς ὤμους καὶ στὴν ἦβη.  
Γυναίκα ποῦ ἔχασες τὸ φῶς,  
ἄκουσε, τραγουδᾷ ὁ τυφλός.

Σκοτείνιασε· κλεῖσε τὰ τζάμια·  
κάνε σουραύλια μὲ τὰ χτεσινὰ καλάμια,  
καὶ μὴν ἀνοίγεις ὅσο κι' ἂ χτυποῦν·  
φωνάζουν μὰ δὲν ἔχουν τί νὰ ποῦν.  
Πάρε κυκλάμινα, πευκοβελόνες,  
κρίνα ἀπ' τὴν ἄμμο, κι' ἀπ' τὴ θάλασσα ἀνεμῶνες·  
γυναίκα ποῦ ἔχασες τὸ νοῦ,  
ἄκου, περνᾷ τὸ ξόδι τοῦ νεροῦ...

—'Αθῆναι. Ἄνελίσσονται ραγδαίως  
τὰ γεγονότα ποῦ ἤκουσε μὲ δέος  
ἢ κοινὴ γνώμη. Ὁ κύριος ὑπουργὸς  
ἐδήλωσεν, Δὲν μένει πλέον καιρὸς...  
—...πάρε κυκλάμινα... πευκοβελόνες...

will soon be an anodyne  
now that the sailor's set sail,  
flycatcher, catfish, and wagtail.  
O woman whose touch is dumb,  
hear the wind's requiem.

“Drained is the golden keg  
the sun's become a rag  
round a middle-aged woman's neck—  
who coughs and coughs without break;  
for the summer that's gone she sighs,  
for the gold on her shoulders, her thighs.  
O woman, O sightless thing,  
hear the blindman sing.

“Close the shutters: the day recedes;  
make flutes from yesteryear's reeds  
and don't open, knock how they may:  
they shout but have nothing to say.  
Take cyclamen, pine-needles, the lily,  
anemones out of the sea;  
O woman whose wits are lost,  
listen, the water's ghost . . .

—“Athens. The public has heard  
the news with alarm; it is feared  
a crisis is near. The prime  
minister declared: ‘There is no more time . . .’  
Take cyclamen . . . needles of pine . . .

κρίνα ἀπ' τὴν ἄμμο... πευκοβελόνες...  
γυναίκα...

—... ὑπερτερεῖ συντριπτικῶς.

— Ὁ πόλεμος...»

ΨΥΧΑΜΟΙΒΟΣ.

the lily . . . needles of pine . . .

O woman . . .

— . . . is overwhelmingly stronger

The war . . .”

SOULMONGER •

Γ'

*Τὸ ναυάγιο τῆς «Κίχλης»*

«Τὸ ξύλο αὐτὸ ποὺ δρόσιζε τὸ μέτωπό μου  
τὶς ὥρες ποὺ τὸ μεσημέρι πύρωνε τὶς φλέβες  
σὲ ξένα χέρια θέλει ἀνθίσει, Πάρ' το, σοῦ τὸ χαρίζω·  
δές, εἶναι ξύλο λεμονιάς...»

“Ἀκουσα τὴ φωνὴ  
καθὼς ἐκοίταζα στὴ θάλασσα νὰ ξεχωρίσω  
ἓνα καράβι ποὺ τὸ βούλιαξαν ἐδῶ καὶ χρόνια·  
τὸ 'λεγαν «Κίχλη»· ἓνα μικρὸ ναυάγιο· τὰ κατάρτια,  
σπασμένα, κυματίζανε λοξὰ στὸ βάθος, σὰν πλοκάμια  
ἢ μνήμη ὀνείρων, δείχνοντας τὸ σκαρί του  
στόμια θαμπὸ κάποιου μεγάλου κήτους νεκροῦ  
σβησμένο στὸ νερό. Μεγάλη ἀπλώνουνταν γαλήνη.

Κι' ἄλλες φωνές σιγὰ σιγὰ μὲ τὴ σειρά τους  
ἀκολουθήσαν· ψίθυροι φτενοὶ καὶ διψασμένοι  
ποὺ βγαίναν ἀπὸ τοῦ ἡλίου τ' ἄλλο μέρος, τὸ σκοτεινὸ·  
θά 'λεγε γύρευαν νὰ πιοῦν αἷμα μιὰ στάλα·  
εἶτανε γνώριμες μὰ δὲν μπορούσα νὰ τὶς ξεχωρίσω.  
Κι' ἦρθε ἡ φωνὴ τοῦ γέρου, αὐτὴ τὴν ἔνωσα  
πέφτοντας στὴν καρδιὰ τῆς μέρας  
ἡσυχῆ, σὰν ἀκίνητη·  
«Κι' ἂ μὲ δικάσετε νὰ πιῶ φαρμάκι, εὐχαριστῶ·  
τὸ δίκιο·σας θὰ 'ναι τὸ δίκιο μου· ποῦ νὰ πηγαίνω  
γυρίζοντας σὲ ξένους τόπους, ἓνα στρογγυλὸ λιθάρι.

III

*The wreck "Thrush"*

“This wood that cooled my forehead  
at times when noon burned my veins  
will flower in other hands. Take it, I'm giving it to you;  
look, it's wood from a lemon-tree . . .”

I heard the voice  
as I was gazing at the sea trying to make out  
a ship they'd sunk there years ago;  
it was called “Thrush,” a small wreck; the masts,  
broken, swayed at odd angles deep underwater, like  
tentacles,  
or the memory of dreams, marking the hull: —  
vague mouth of some huge dead sea-monster  
extinguished in the water. Calm spread all around.

And gradually, in turn, other voices followed,\*  
whispers thin and thirsty  
emerging from the other side of the sun, the dark side;  
you might say they longed for a drop of blood to drink;\*  
familiar voices, but I couldn't distinguish one from the  
other.

And then the voice of the old man reached me; I felt it  
quietly falling into the heart of day,  
as though motionless:  
“And if you condemn me to drink poison, I thank you.  
Your law will be my law; how can I go  
wandering from one foreign country to another, a rolling  
stone.

Τὸ θάνατο τὸν προτιμῶ·  
ποῖός πάει γιὰ τὸ καλύ-τερο ὁ θεὸς τὸ ξέρει».

Χῶρες τοῦ ἡλίου καὶ δὲν μπορεῖτε ν' ἀντικρίσετε τὸν ἥλιο.  
Χῶρες τοῦ ἀνθρώπου καὶ δὲν μπορεῖτε ν' ἀντικρίσετε τὸν  
ἄνθρωπο.

*Τὸ φῶς*

Καθὼς περνοῦν τὰ χρόνια  
πληθαίνουν οἱ κριτὲς ποὺ σὲ καταδικάζουν·  
καθὼς περνοῦν τὰ χρόνια καὶ κουβεντιάζεις μὲ λιγότερες  
φωνές,  
βλέπεις τὸν ἥλιο μ' ἄλλα μάτια·  
ξέρεις πῶς ἐκεῖνοι ποὺ ἔμειναν, σὲ γελοῦσαν,  
τὸ παραμίλημα τῆς σάρκας, ὁ ὁμορφος χορὸς  
ποὺ τελειώνει στὴ γύμνια.  
"Ὅπως, τὴ νύχτα στρίβοντας στὴν ἔρημη δημοσιά.  
ἄξαφνα βλέπεις νὰ γυαλίζουν τὰ μάτια ἐνὸς ζώου  
ποὺ ἔφυγαν κιόλας, ἔτσι νιώθεις τὰ μάτια σου·  
τὸν ἥλιο τὸν κοιτᾶς, ἔπειτα χάνεσαι μὲς στὸ σκοτάδι·  
ὁ δωρικὸς χιτώνας  
ποὺ ἀγγίξανε τὰ δάχτυλά σου καὶ λύγισε σὰν τὰ βουνά,  
εἶναι ἓνα μάρμαρο στὸ φῶς, μὰ τὸ κεφάλι του εἶναι στὸ  
σκοτάδι.  
Κι' αὐτοὺς ποὺ ἀφήσαν τὴν παλαιστρα γιὰ νὰ πάρουν τὰ  
δοξάρια  
καὶ χτύπησαν τὸ θεληματικὸ μαραθωνοδρόμο  
κι' ἐκεῖνος εἶδε τὴ σφενδόνη ν' ἀρμενίζει στὸ αἷμα  
ν' ἀδειάζει ὁ κόσμος ὅπως τὸ φεγγάρι

I prefer death.  
Who'll come out best only God knows."

Countries of the sun yet you can't face the sun.  
Countries of men yet you can't face man.

*The light*

As the years go by  
the judges who condemn you grow in number;  
as the years go by and you converse with fewer voices,  
you see the sun with different eyes:  
you know that those who stayed behind were deceiving you  
the delirium of flesh, the lovely dance  
that ends in nakedness.  
It's as though, turning at night into an empty highway,  
you suddenly see the eyes of an animal shine,  
eyes already gone; so you feel your own eyes:  
you gaze at the sun, then you're lost in darkness.  
The doric chiton  
that swayed like the mountains when your fingers touched it  
is a marble figure in the light, but its head is in darkness.  
And those who abandoned the stadium to take up arms  
struck the obstinate marathon runner  
and he saw the track sail in blood,  
the world empty like the moon,

καὶ νὰ μαραίνονται νὰ νικηφόρα περιβόλια·  
τούς βλέπεις μέσ στον ἥλιο, πίσω ἀπὸ τὸν ἥλιο.  
Καὶ τὰ παιδιὰ ποὺ κάναν μακροβούτια ἀπ' τὰ μαστούνια  
πηγαίνουν σὰν ἀδράχτια γνέθοντας ἀκόμη,  
σώματα γυμνὰ βουλιάζοντας μέσα στὸ μαῦρο φῶς  
μ' ἓνα νόμισμα στά δόντια, κολυμπώντας ἀκόμη,  
καθὼς ὁ γῆλιος ράβει μὲ βελονιές μαλαματένιες  
πανιὰ καὶ ξύλα ὑγρὰ καὶ χρώματα πελαγίσια·  
ἀκόμη τώρα κατεβαίνουνε λοξὰ  
πρὸς τὰ χαλίκια τοῦ βυθοῦ  
οἱ ἄσπρες λήκυθοι.

Ἄγγελικὸ καὶ μαῦρο, φῶς,  
γέλιο τῶν κυμάτων στίς δημοσιές τοῦ πόντου,  
δακρυσμένο γέλιο,  
σὲ βλέπει ὁ γέροντας ἰκέτης  
πηγαίνοντας νὰ δρασκελίσει τίς ἀόρατες πλάκες  
καθρεφτισμένο στὸ αἷμα του  
ποὺ γέννησε τὸν Ἐτεοκλή καὶ τὸν Πολυνείκη.  
Ἄγγελικὴ καὶ μαύρη, μέρα·  
ἡ γλυφὴ γέψη τῆς γυναίκας ποὺ φαρμακώνει τὸ φυλακι-  
σμένο  
βγαίνει ἀπ' τὸ κύμα δροσερὸ κλωνάρι στολισμένο στάλες.  
Τραγοῦδῆσε μικρὴ Ἀντιγόνη, τραγοῦδῆσε, τραγοῦδῆσε...  
δὲ σοῦ μιλῶ γιὰ περασμένα, μιλῶ γιὰ τὴν ἀγάπη·  
στόλισε τὰ μαλλιά σου μὲ τ' ἀγκάθια τοῦ ἡλίου,  
σκοτεινὴ κοπέλλα·  
ἡ καρδιὰ τοῦ Σκορπιοῦ βασίλειψε,  
ὁ τύραννος μέσα ἀπ' τὸν ἄνθρωπο ἔχει φύγει,

the gardens of victory wither:  
you see them in the sun, behind the sun.  
And the boys who dived from the bow-sprits  
go like spindles twisting still,  
naked bodies plunging into black light  
with a coin between the teeth, swimming still,  
while the sun with golden needles sews  
sails and wet wood and colors of the sea;  
even now they're going down obliquely,  
the white lekythoi,  
toward the pebbles on the sea floor.

Light, angelic and black,  
laughter of waves on the sea's highways,  
tear-stained laughter,  
the old suppliant sees you  
as he moves to cross the invisible fields—  
light mirrored in his blood,  
the blood that gave birth to Eteocles and Polynices.  
Day, angelic and black;  
the brackish taste of woman that poisons the prisoner  
emerges from the wave a cool branch adorned with drops.  
Sing little Antigone, sing, O sing . . .  
I'm not speaking to you about things past, I'm speaking  
about love;  
decorate your hair with the sun's thorns,  
dark girl;  
the heart of the Scorpion has set,  
the tyrant in man has fled,

κι' ὅλες οἱ κόρες τοῦ πόντου, Νηρηίδες, Γραῖες  
τρέχουν στὰ λαμπυρίσματα τῆς ἀναδυομένης·  
ὅποιος ποτέ του δὲν ἀγάπησε θ' ἀγαπήσει,  
στὸ φῶς·

καὶ εἶσαι

σ' ἓνα μεγάλο σπίτι μὲ πολλὰ παράθυρα ἀνοιχτὰ  
τρέχοντας ἀπὸ κάμαρα σὲ κάμαρα, δὲν ξέροντας ἀπὸ ποῦ  
νὰ κοιτάξεις πρῶτα,  
γιατὶ θὰ φύγουν τὰ πεῦκα καὶ τὰ καθρεφτισμένα βουνὰ καὶ  
τὸ τιτίβισμα τῶν πουλιῶν  
θ' ἀδειάσει ἢ θάλασσα, θρυμματισμένο γυαλί, ἀπὸ βοριὰ  
καὶ νότο  
θ' ἀδειάσουν τὰ μάτια σου ἀπ' τὸ φῶς τῆς μέρας  
πὼς σταματοῦν ξαφνικὰ κι' ὅλα μαζὶ τὰ τζιτζίκια.

Πέρος, «Γαλήνη», 31 τοῦ Ὀκτωβρίου 1946

and all the daughters of the sea, Nereids, Graeae,\*  
hurry toward the shimmering of the rising goddess:  
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,\*  
because the pine-trees will vanish, and the mirrored moun-  
tains, and the chirping of birds  
the sea will drain dry, shattered glass, from north and south  
your eyes will empty of daylight  
the way the cicadas suddenly, all together, fall silent.

Poros, "Galini," 31 October 1946

## ΕΛΕΝΗ

ΤΕΥΚΡΟΣ: ... ἐς γῆν ἰναλίαν Κύπρον, οἱ μ' ἐθέσπισεν  
οἰκεῖν Ἀπόλλων, ὄνομα νησιωτικὸν  
Σαλαμίνα θέμενον τῆς ἐκεῖ χάριν πάτρας.

ΕΛΕΝΗ: Οὐκ ἦλθον ἐς γῆν Τρωάδ', ἀλλ' εἶδωλον ἦν.

ΑΓΓΕΛΟΣ: Τί φῆς;  
Νεφέλης ἄρ' ἄλλως εἶχομεν πόνους πέρι;  
ΕΥΡΙΠΙΔΗΣ, ΕΛΕΝΗ

«Τ' ἀηδόνια δὲ σ' ἀφήνουνε νὰ κοιμηθεῖς στὶς Πλάτρες».

Ἀηδόνη ντροπαλό, μὲς στὸν ἀνασασμὸ τῶν φύλλων,  
σὺ ποὺ δωρίζεις τῇ μουσικῇ δροσιὰ τοῦ δάσους  
στὰ χωρισμένα σώματα καὶ στὶς ψυχὲς  
αὐτῶν ποὺ ξέρουν πὼς δὲ θὰ γυρίσουν.  
Τυφλὴ φωνή, ποὺ ψηλαφεῖς μέσα στὴ νυχτωμένη μνήμη  
βήματα καὶ χειρονομίες· δὲ θὰ τολμούσα νὰ πῶ φιλήματα·  
καὶ τὸ πικρὸ τρικύμισμα τῆς ξαγριεμένης σκλάβας.

«Τ' ἀηδόνια δὲ σ' ἀφήνουνε νὰ κοιμηθεῖς στὶς Πλάτρες».

Ποιὲς εἶναι οἱ Πλάτρες; Ποιὸς τὸ γνωρίζει τοῦτο τὸ νησί;  
Ἐζῆσα τὴ ζωὴ μου ἀκούγοντας ὀνόματα πρωτάκουστα:

## HELEN

TEUCER: . . . in sea-girt Cyprus, where it was decreed  
by Apollo that I should live, giving the city  
the name of Salamis in memory of my island home.

HELEN: I never went to Troy; it was a phantom.

SERVANT: What? You mean it was only for a cloud that we  
struggled so much?

EURIPIDES, HELEN\*

“The nightingales won't let you sleep in Platres.”\*

Shy nightingale, in the breathing of the leaves,  
you who bestow the forest's musical coolness  
on the sundered bodies, on the souls  
of those who know they will not return.  
Blind voice, you who grope in the darkness of memory  
for footsteps and gestures—I wouldn't dare say kisses—  
and the bitter raging of the slavewoman grown wild.

“The nightingales won't let you sleep in Platres.”

Platres: where is Platres? And this island: who knows it?  
I've lived my life hearing names I've never heard before:

κινούργιους τόπους, κινούργιες τρέλες τῶν ἀνθρώπων  
ἢ τῶν θεῶν

ἢ μοίρα μου πού κυματίζει  
ἐνάμεσα στὸ στερνὸ σπαθὶ ἐνὸς Αἴαντα  
καὶ μιὰν ἄλλη Σαλαμίνα  
μ' ἔφερε ἐδῶ σ' αὐτὸ τὸ γυρογιάλι.

Τὸ φεγγάρι

βγήκε ἀπ' τὸ πέλαγο σὰν Ἀφροδίτη  
σκέπασε τ' ἄστρα τοῦ Τοξότη, τώρα πάει νὰ βρει  
τὴν καρδιά τοῦ Σκορπιοῦ, κι' ὅλα τ' ἀλλάζει.  
Ποῦ εἶν' ἡ ἀλήθεια;  
Εἶμουν κι' ἐγὼ στὸν πόλεμο τοξότης  
τὸ ριζικό μου, ἐνὸς ἀνθρώπου πού ξαστόχησε.

Ἀηδὸν ποιητάρη,  
σὰν καὶ μιὰ τέτοια νύχτα στ' ἀκροθαλάσσι τοῦ Πρωτέα  
σ' ἄκουσαν οἱ σκλάβες Σπαρτιάτισσες κι' ἔσυραν τὸ θρῆνο,  
κι' ἀνάμεσό τους—ποιὸς θὰ τὸ 'λεγε;— ἡ Ἑλένη!  
Αὐτὴ πού κυνηγούσαμε χρόνια στὸ Σκάμαντρο.  
Εἶταν ἐκεῖ, στὰ χεῖλια τῆς ἐρήμου· τὴν ἄγγιξα, μοῦ μίλησε:  
«Δὲν εἶν' ἀλήθεια, δὲν εἶν' ἀλήθεια» φώναζε.  
«Δὲν μπήκα στὸ γαλαζόπλωρο καράβι.  
Ποτὲ δὲν πάτησα τὴν ἀντρειωμένη Τροία».

Μὲ τὸ βαθὺ στηθόδεσμο, τὸν ἥλιο στὰ μαλλιά, κι' αὐτὸ τὸ  
ἀνάστημα

ἰσκιοὶ καὶ χαμόγελα παντοῦ  
στοὺς ὤμους στοὺς μηροὺς στὰ γόνατα  
ζωντανὸ δέρμα, καὶ τὰ μάτια

new countries, new idiocies of men  
or of the gods;

my fate, which wavers  
between the last sword of some Ajax  
and another Salamis,  
brought me here, to this shore.

The moon

rose from the sea like Aphrodite,  
covered the Archer's stars, now moves to find  
the Heart of Scorpio, and changes everything.  
Truth, where's the truth?  
I too was an archer in the war;  
my fate: that of a man who missed his target.

Lyric nightingale,  
on a night like this, by the shore of Proteus,  
the Spartan slave girls heard you and began their lament,  
and among them—who would have believed it?—Helen!  
She whom we hunted so many years by the banks of the  
Scamander.

She was there, at the desert's lip; I touched her; she spoke  
to me:

"It isn't true, it isn't true," she cried.

"I didn't board the blue-bowed ship.

I never went to valiant Troy."

Breasts girded high, the sun in her hair, and that stature  
shadows and smiles everywhere,  
on shoulders, thighs, and knees;  
the skin alive, and her eyes

μέ τὰ μεγάλα βλέφαρα,  
εἶταν ἐκεῖ, στήν ὄχθη ἑνὸς Δέλτα.

Καὶ στήν Τροία;

Τίποτε στήν Τροία — ἓνα εἶδωλο.

Ἔτσι τὸ θέλαν οἱ θεοί.

Κι' ὁ Πάρης, μ' ἓναν ἴσχιο πλάγιαζε σὰ νὰ εἶταν πλάσμα  
ἀτόφιο·

κι' ἐμεῖς σφαζόμεσταν γιὰ τὴν Ἑλένη δέκα χρόνια.

Μεγάλος πόνος εἶχε πέσει στήν Ἑλλάδα.

Τόσα κορμιὰ ριγμένα

στὰ σαγόνια τῆς θάλασσας στὰ σαγόνια τῆς γῆς·  
τόσες ψυχές

δοσμένες στίς μυλόπετρες, σὰν τὸ σιτάρι.

Κι' οἱ ποταμοὶ φουσκῶναν μὲς στὴ λάσπη τὸ αἷμα  
γιὰ ἓνα λιγὸ κυμάτισμα γιὰ μιὰ νεφέλη

μιᾶς πεταλούδας τίναγμα τὸ πούπουλο ἑνὸς κύκνου  
γιὰ ἓνα πουκάμισο ἀδειανό, γιὰ μιὰν Ἑλένη.

Κι' ὁ ἀδερφός μου;

Ἄηδὼν ἀηδὼν ἀηδὼν,

τ' εἶναι θεός; τί μὴ θεός; καὶ τί τ' ἀνάμεσό τους;

«Τ' ἀηδόνια δὲ σ' ἀφήνουνε νὰ κοιμηθεῖς στίς Πλάτρες».

Δακρυσμένο πουλί,

σὴν Κύπρο τὴ θαλασσοφίλητη

ποῦ ἔταξαν γιὰ νὰ μοῦ θυμίζει τὴν πατρίδα,

ἄραξα μοναχὸς μ' αὐτὸ τὸ παραμῦθι,

ἂν εἶναι ἀλήθεια πὼς αὐτὸ εἶναι παραμῦθι,

with the large eyelids,  
she was there, on the banks of a Delta.

And at Troy?

At Troy, nothing: just a phantom image.

The gods wanted it so.

And Paris, Paris lay with a shadow as though it were a  
solid being;

and for ten whole years we slaughtered ourselves for Helen.

Great suffering had fallen on Greece.

So many bodies thrown

into the jaws of the sea, the jaws of the earth\*

so many souls

fed to the millstones like grain.

And the rivers swelling, blood in their silt,

all for a linen undulation, a filmy cloud,

a butterfly's flicker, a whisp of swan's down,

an empty tunic—all for a Helen.

And my brother?

Nightingale nightingale nightingale,

what is a god? What is not a god? And what is there in-  
between them?

“The nightingales won't let you sleep in Platres.”

Tearful bird,

on sea-kissed Cyprus

consecrated to remind me of my country,

I moored alone with this fable,

if it's true that it is a fable,

ἂν εἶναι ἀλήθεια πῶς οἱ ἀνθρώποι δὲ θὰ ξαναπιάσουν  
τὸν παλιὸ δόλο τῶν θεῶν·

ἂν εἶναι ἀλήθεια

πῶς κάποιος ἄλλος Τεῦκρος, ὕστερα ἀπὸ χρόνια,  
ἢ κάποιος Αἴαντας ἢ Πρίαμος ἢ Ἑκάβη  
ἢ κάποιος ἄγνωστος, ἀνώνυμος, πού ὥστόσο  
εἶδε ἓνα Σκάμαντρο νὰ ξεχειλάει κουφάρια,  
δὲν τό 'χει μὲς στὴ μοίρα του ν' ἀκούσει  
μαντατοφόρους πού ἔρχονται νὰ ποῦνε  
πῶς τόσοσ πόνος τόση ζωὴ  
πήγαν στὴν ἄβυσσο  
γιὰ ἓνα πουκάμισο ἀδειανὸ γιὰ μιὰν Ἑλένη.

if it's true that mortals will not again take up  
the old deceit of the gods;

if it's true

that in future years some other Teucer,  
or some Ajax or Priam or Hecuba,  
or someone unknown and nameless who nevertheless saw  
a Scamander overflow with corpses,  
isn't fated to hear  
messengers coming to tell him  
that so much suffering, so much life,  
went into the abyss  
all for an empty tunic, all for a Helen.

Ἔϊταν πλῆτὺς ὁ κάμπος καὶ στρωτός· ἀπὸ μακριὰ φαι-  
νόταν

τὸ γύρισμα χειρῶν ποὺ σκάβαν.

Στὸν οὐρανὸ τὰ σύννεφα πολλές καμπύλες, κάπου κάπου  
μιὰ σάλπιγγα χρυσὴ καὶ ρόδινη· τὸ δεῖλι.

Στὸ λιγοστὸ χορτάρι καὶ στ' ἀγκάθια τριγυρίζαν  
φιλὲς ἀποβροχάρισσες ἀνάσες· θά'χε βρέξει  
πέρα στὶς ἄκρες τὰ βουνὰ ποὺ ἐπαιρναν χρῶμα.

Κι' ἐγὼ προχώρεσα πρὸς τοὺς ἀνθρώπους ποὺ δουλεύαν,  
γυναῖκες κι' ἄντρες μὲ τ' ἀξίνια σὲ χαντάκια.

Ἔϊταν μιὰ πολιτεία παλιά· τειχιὰ δρόμοι καὶ σπίτια  
ξεχώριζαν σὰν πετρωμένοι μυῶνες κυκλώπων,  
ἡ ἀνατομία μιᾶς ξοδεμένης δύναμης κάτω ἀπ' τὸ μάτι  
τοῦ ἀρχαιολόγου τοῦ ναρκοδότη ἢ τοῦ χειρουργοῦ.  
Φιντάσματα καὶ ὑφάσματα, χλιδὴ καὶ χεῖλια, χωνεμένα  
καὶ τὰ ππραπετάσματα τοῦ πόνου διάπλατα ἀνοιχτὰ  
ἀφῆνοντας νὰ φαίνεται γυμνὸς κι' ἀδιάφορὸς ὁ τάφος.

Κι' ἀνάβλεψα πρὸς τοὺς ἀνθρώπους ποὺ δουλεύαν  
τοὺς τεντωμένους ὤμους καὶ τὰ μπράτσα ποὺ χτυπούσαν  
μ' ἓνα ρυθμὸ βαρὺ καὶ γρήγορο τούτη τῆ νέκρα  
σὰ νὰ περνοῦσε στὰ χαλάσματα ὁ τροχὸς τῆς μοίρας.

\*Ἀξαφνα περπατοῦσα καὶ δὲν περπατοῦσα

The plain was broad and level; from a distance you could see  
arms in motion as they dug.

In the sky, the clouds all curves, here and there  
a trumpet golden and rose: the sunset.

In the thin grass and the thorns  
a light after-shower breeze stirred: it had rained  
there on the peaks of the mountains that now took on color.

And I moved on toward those at work,  
women and men digging with picks in trenches.  
It was an ancient city; walls, streets, and houses  
stood out like the petrified muscles of cyclopes,  
the anatomy of spent strength under the eye  
of the archaeologist, anaesthetist, or surgeon.  
Phantoms and fabrics, luxury and lips, buried  
and the curtains of pain spread wide open  
to reveal, naked and indifferent, the tomb.

And I looked up toward those at work,  
the taut shoulders, the arms that struck  
this dead silence with a rhythm heavy and swift  
as though the wheel of fate were passing through the ruins.

Suddenly I was walking and did not walk

κοίταζα τὰ πετούμενα πουλιά, κι' εἶταν μαρμαρωμένα  
κοίταζα τὸν αἰθέρα τ' οὐρανοῦ, κι' εἶτανε θαμπωμένος  
κοίταζα τὰ κορμιά πού πολεμοῦσαν, κι' εἶχαν μείνει  
κι' ἀνάμεσό τους ἓνα πρόσωπο τὸ φῶς ν' ἀνηφορίζει.  
Τὰ μαλλιά μαῦρα χύνουνταν στὴν τραχηλιά, τὰ φρύδια  
εἶχανε τὸ φτερούγισμα τῆς χελιδόνας, τὰ ρουθούνια  
καμαρωτὰ πάνω ἀπ' τὰ χεῖλια, καὶ τὸ σῶμα  
ἔβγαине ἀπὸ τὸ χεροπάλεμα ξεγυμνωμένο  
μὲ τ' ἄγουρα βυζιά τῆς ὀδηγήτρας,  
χορὸς ἀκίνητος.

Κι' ἐγὼ χαμήλωσα τὰ μάτια μου τριγύρω:  
κορίτσια ζύμωναν, καὶ ζύμη δὲν ἀγγίζαν  
γυναῖκες γνέθανε, τ' ἀδράχτια δὲ γυρίζαν  
ἀρνιά ποτίζονταν, κι' ἡ γλώσσα τους στεκόταν  
πάνω ἀπὸ πράσινα νερά πού ἔμοιαζαν κοιμισμένα  
κι' ὁ ζευγάς ἔμενε μ' ἀνέερη τῆ βουκέντρα.  
Καὶ ξανακοίταξα τὸ σῶμα ἐκεῖνο ν' ἀνεβαίνει  
εἶχανε μαζευτεῖ πολλοί, μερμήγκια,  
καὶ τῆ χτυποῦσαν μὲ κοντάρια καὶ δὲν τῆ λαβώναν.  
Τώρα ἡ κοιλιά της ἔλαμπε σὰν τὸ φεγγάρι  
καὶ πίστευα πῶς ὁ οὐρανὸς εἶταν ἡ μήτρα  
πού τὴν ἐγέννησε καὶ τὴν ξανάπαιρνε, μάνα καὶ βρέφος.  
Τὰ πόδια της μείναν ἀκόμη μαρμαρένια  
καὶ χάθηκαν· μιὰ ἀνάληψη.

Ὁ κόσμος  
Ξαναγινόταν ὅπως εἶταν, ὁ δικός μας  
μὲ τὸν καιρὸ καὶ μὲ τὸ χῶμα.

Ἀρώματα ἀπὸ σκίνο

I looked at the flying birds, and they had stopped stone dead  
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, the eyebrows  
had the motion of a swallow's wings, the nostrils  
arched above the lips, and the body  
emerged from the struggling arms stripped  
with the unripe breasts of the Virgin,  
a motionless dance.

And I lowered my eyes to look all around:  
girls kneaded, but they didn't touch the dough  
women spun, but the spindles didn't turn  
lambs were drinking, but their tongues hung still  
above green waters that seemed asleep  
and the ploughman transfixed with his staff poised.\*  
And I looked again at that body ascending:  
people had gathered like ants,  
and they struck her with lances but didn't wound her.  
Her belly now shone like the moon  
and I thought the sky was the womb  
that bore her and now took her back, mother and child.  
Her feet were still visible, adamantine  
then they vanished: an Assumption.

The world  
became again as it had been, ours:  
the world of time and earth.

Aromas of terebinth

πήραν νὰ ξεκινήσουν στὶς παλιές πλαγιές τῆς μνήμης  
κόρφοι μέσα στὰ φύλλα, χείλια ὑγρά·  
κι' ὅλα στεγνώσαν μονομιᾶς στὴν πλατωσιὰ τοῦ κάμπου  
στῆς πέτρας τὴν ἀπόγνωση στὴ δύναμη τῆ φαγωμένη  
στὸν ἄδειο τόπο μὲ τὸ λιγοστὸ χορτάρι καὶ τ' ἀγκάθια  
ὅπου γλιστροῦσε ξέγνοιαστο ἓνα φίδι,  
ὅπου ξεοδεύουνε πολὺ καιρὸ γιὰ νὰ πεθάνουν.

began to stir on the old slopes of memory  
breasts among leaves, lips moist;  
and all went dry at once on the length of the plain,  
in the stone's despair, in eroded power,  
in that empty place with the thin grass and the thorns  
where a snake slithered heedless,  
where they take a long time to die.

«ΕΠΙ ΑΣΠΑΛΑΘΩΝ...»

Ἦταν ὠραῖο τὸ Σούνιο τῆ μέρα ἐκείνη τοῦ Εὐαγγελισμοῦ  
πάλι μὲ τὴν ἀνοιξη.  
Λιγοστὰ πράσινα φύλλα γύρω στὶς σκουριασμένες πέτρες  
τὸ κόκκινο χῶμα κι' ἀσπάλαθοι  
δείχνοντας ἔτοιμα τὰ μεγάλα τους βελόνια  
καὶ τοὺς κίτρινους ἀνθούς.  
Ἄπόμακρα οἱ ἀρχαῖες κολόνες, χόρδές μιᾶς ἀρπας ἀντη-  
χοῦν ἀκόμη...

Γαλήνη.

—Τί μπορεῖ νὰ μοῦ θύμισε τὸν Ἄρδιαῖο ἐκεῖνον;  
Μιὰ λέξη στὸν Πλάτωνα θαρρῶ, χαμένη στοῦ μυαλοῦ τ'  
αὐλάκια·  
τ' ὄνομα τοῦ κίτρινου θάμνου  
δὲν ἄλλαξε ἀπὸ ἐκείνους τοὺς καιρούς.  
Τὸ βράδυ βρῆκα τὴν περικοπή:  
«Τὸν ἔδεσαν χειροπόδαρα» μᾶς λέει  
«τὸν ἔριξαν χάμω καὶ τὸν ἔγδαραν  
τὸν ἔσυραν παράμερα τὸν καταξέσχισαν  
ἀπάνω στοὺς ἀγκαθεροὺς ἀσπάλαθους  
καὶ πῆγαν καὶ τὸν πέταξαν στὸν Τάρταρο, κουρέλι».

Ἔτσι στὸν κάτω κόσμο πλέρωνε τὰ κρίματά του  
ὁ Παμφύλιος Ἄρδιαῖος ὁ πανάθλιος Τύραννος.

31 τοῦ Μάρτη 1971

“ON ASPALATHOI . . .”\*

Sounion was lovely that spring day—  
the Feast of the Annunciation.  
Sparse green leaves around rust-colored stone,  
red earth, and aspalathoi  
with their huge thorns and their yellow flowers  
already out.  
In the distance the ancient columns, strings of a harp still  
vibrating . . .

Peace.

What could have made me think of Ardiaios?  
Possibly a word in Plato, buried in the mind's furrows:  
the name of the yellow bush  
hasn't changed since his time.  
That evening I found the passage:  
“They bound him hand and foot,” it says,  
“they flung him down and flayed him,  
they dragged him along  
gashing his flesh on thorny aspalathoi,  
and they went and threw him into Tartarus, torn to shreds.”

In this way Ardiaios, the terrible Pamphylian tyrant,  
paid for his crimes in the nether world.

31 March 1971

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