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Kostas Myrsiades

West Chester University of Pennsylvania, kmyrsiades@wcupa.edu

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THE POETRY OF TAKIS PAPATSONIS

A Note on *Ursa Minor*

BY KOSTAS MYRSIADES

Most students of Modern Greek literature are not familiar with the poetry of Takis Papatsonis; the significance of his work, especially of his masterpiece *Ursa Minor*, is recognized by many Greek scholars. Kleon Paraschos, Kostas Steryiopoulos, George Savides, Kimon Friar, and others have praised *Ursa Minor* and have compared its beauty and complexity to such qualities in the *Mythistorema* of George Seferis. To Steryiopoulos, the poem is "a national and simultaneously a universal hallucination; a vision of hope that the strength of evil will turn and that love will in the end reign."¹ Papatsonis himself has noted that *Ursa Minor*, written during the cruel years of an enemy occupation of his country, is "a critical point in the whole of my poetical ambition."²

The eight sections of this work were first published in 1944, ten years after Papatsonis' first book of poetry, and were included in a 1962 edition of his work *Ekloge A (Selection I)*. The eight parts of *Ursa Minor*—a dedication and seven poems (like the seven stars of the constellation)—are essentially mystical and are based on the myth of Kallisto and the journey of the soul toward hope and love. This long poem reflects and comments on the female guide and recalls the journey of the soul in Dante's *Commedia*, a work which Papatsonis has admired and studied throughout his career.

Expressing the despair and terror of the war years in Greece, the poem dramatizes the importance of spiritual resistance to the Nazi occupation. Just as the star at the tip of the constellation of Ursa Minor (Kallisto's constellation) gives hope to wandering seamen, so Christianity gives hope to the individual who is bewildered by the agony of life. This hope is offered through the transformation of the multi-form Kallisto whose image unites the pagan with the Christian world and is alternately symbolic of Aphrodite, Artemis, the three Fates, of Beatrice and the Virgin Mary, and even of Christ.

Papatsonis' style is often obscure and impenetrable; for he relies on what he has described as a peculiar combination of "neo-

Christianism" and a mysticism akin to surrealism.³ His images, often highly personal, even idiosyncratic, are, like Ezra Pound's, self-conscious and difficult to decipher. Papatsonis believes that beauty lives in the transformation of myth and symbol into philosophy; this belief helps to explain the prose-like flow of his work and his reliance on "faith and vision" as poetic determinants.⁴ His poetry is always rich in imagery and subtle ambiguities. These qualities in *Ursa Minor*, his most mature and deeply felt work, burst into a flood of strangely familiar wonders.

URSA MINOR

BY TAKIS PAPATSONIS

translated by Kostas Myrsiades

DEDICATION

*A Fearless Woman Dressed in Many Carnations
for Andreas Kambas*

When carnations bloom
when at last the saw
frays the edges of their leaves then truly
we stretched our chests
and drank in their longing

it would have been wiser for us however
if we had not taken
such a drink this year

we did not reach extremes
that is true
for we were ordered
by an inborn prudence
our age we thought
is excited only
by the inciters of our childhood memory
this is obvious
it was not as it turned out however
an error of age
memorable is our spring happiness
memorable the resurrection and the spring tomb-like

for beside their decorative graces
they possessed the gift of fire
their flame-red lips brusque Pentecostalism
purple crimson scarlet
rosy passionate and speckled

ΑΦΙΕΡΩΣΗ

ΘΑΡΡΑΛΕΑ ΓΥΝΑΙΚΑ
ΣΤΟΛΙΣΜΕΝΗ ΜΕ ΠΟΛΛΑ
ΓΑΡΥΦΑΛΑ

Στὸν Ἀντρέα Καμπᾶ

Τότε πού τὰ γαρύφαλα πολυχρωμοῦν
ὅταν πιά τὸ πριόνι
ξεφτάει τὶς ἄκριες τῶν φύλλων τους γιὰ τὰ καλὰ
φουσκώσαμε τὰ στέρνα μας
κι' ἤπιαμε τὸν καημό τους

καλὰ θὰ κάναμε ὅμως
ἂν ἐφέτος δὲν τὸ πίναμε
τέτοιο πιότὸ

δὲ φθάσαμε σὲ ἀκρότητες
αὐτὸ εἶναι ἀλήθεια
γιατὶ μᾶς ἔβαλε σὲ τάξη
μιὰν ἔμφυτή μας περισυλλογή
ἢ ἡλικία μας, σκεφθήκαμε
διεγείρεται μονάχα πιά
εἶναι ὀλοφάνερο,
μὲ τοὺς μοχλοὺς τῆς παιδικῆς μας μνήμης
δὲν ἦταν ὅμως, καθὼς ἀποδείχτη,
τὸ φταιξιμο τῆς ἡλικίας
μνημειακὴ ἢ χαρά μας ἢ ἀνοιξιιάτικη
μνημειακὸ τὸ ἀνασήκωμα κι' ἐντάφιο τὸ ξαρ.

all frayed ends of a single sun
once negroid most secure
at the outset of summer and are now transplanted
to a subject immediately attic
you pluck them cut as a new vision
equally-numbered wounds either alive or faded
mournful calm or agitated
their suffering always enclosed in the cup
in multiple curves and arcs
in bends and painful trajectories

a remnant sheet
when our heart's friend was buried
a shroud in which
the listless body was wrapped
a cloud of myrrh expanding
its dissatisfied breath wandering
the secluded white carnations forgotten
in our bouquet we reaped only the pain
having selected the most mournful active
thoughts of multiple wounds in detachment
we dipped in the cup's water
as if they were to grow unwithering and to remain

"oh how terrible the wounds
when rent from the body"

where are they discarded now
where might they be decomposing
the sad downtrodden bodies
that lost their wounds
but gained the root and earth
of their arduous ancient source

you have the courage to dress
in carnations and I admire you
not because you are so beautiful
so refreshing not that they so become you
but for packing our wounds

you grow the icon of a newly martyred legion
of whatever would dissolve in moist forgetfulness
of whatever would evaporate to the five winds
the unjust pains the hushed screams
the aimless sacrifices with no receiver
honors without laurel and without a head
secret fears the lone with the lonely
the pitiless darkness
cowardice's sorrowful giddiness
with the wretched final moment
the steel that whitens the dawn of day
the tuft of smoke the carnation
which first blooms in the black rifle's barrel
to burst forth whole in their hearts
and to glare up again
in their mouths a deep foam
at some violent moment
thanks to you they have now found their icon
their glory and their worship
their refuge
found at least a gaudy requiem
in their own reddening

I admire you for this
you bleed willingly
under a grave burden and you grieve
to show me how the times disjoined
from that notion we called beauty
and the other we called love
and the third the best
which it seems was mirth
they are being severed now
not any longer just the flowers' petals
but men themselves
that once inhabited the gardens
now the red flowers gush forth
as at one wild time in the past
from round divided necks
instead of from the aromatic shrubs

and each breath behind the rails
in the garden's midnight dampness
with its midnight scents
the mild warm fever blown to me
is exaltation of a single perfect
blood clot thickened in the darkness
a clot which does not come alone

O all of its dreadful escort
the blood's companion
gasps out horrors groans and solitude

for this the courtyard's slates
with petals shed
and frolicking in the wind's impetus
are peppered also by other petals
not at all dance-like or fleeting
withered violet stains rooted
chromatically for ever to become
too bitter slates for memory
for this the spring stars
and the whole bulging moon
for many years now look like
dangling drops of heavenly tears

that's why the sharpness of our vision
has dulled so greatly

that's why you too stay a red icon
wreathed in your many carnations
immobile eminent but ready
my beloved Erinys
the bloodstained.

The waywardness of desire unsettles an innocent mind.

Wisdom of Solomon, 4.7

Thought and affliction, passion, hell itself
(Ophelia) turns to favour and to prettiness.

Shakespeare, *Hamlet*

I am puzzled in a question about hell:
He says, in hell there's one material fire
And yet it shall not burn all men alike.

John Webster, *The Duchess of Malfi*

I. THE QUARRY

How foolish we were in the time
of man's uncertain cowardice
to ascribe to emblems
our extreme desires
as we shaped them
in the isolation of our dreams
as we created them in our processions
and by the sea

we enriched them where possible
indeed we bound them with the living
icons of our experience
and lifeless immaterial as they were
we clothed them with a tangible
essence but they continued so to be
only parables and what they symbolized was arid
sterile desires
we set them far off
pursuing them in barren hunts
we endured life

nor did these holidays occur
without ornaments and dressings
next to the main heroes
our sportive hunting dogs

pure-bred beautiful lines
magical movements and the horses
much more admirable majestic
and the environ
whether forested mountainous or aquatic
each time varying in its manner
the appropriate seasons shifting
recurring in their own delight
that we might reside in the lingering
fantasticism of elevated actuality
with at times the fleeting
vision of the quarry
many-braided horns
tight eyes dimly lit
large and fashioned in
a wooden lustrous matter
astounded but unfearing
regarding us a moment
then extinguishing
dissolving
in confusion within
thick strands
clusters
and shadows

how can I acknowledge
such life as complete
which sufficed us then
the time of our mythical inertia

until you trumpeted
your awakening triumph
as our end and resurrection

until you reversed
our life and its concepts
until that is you infused us
with the spirit of life and prudence

you taught us that what we lived
was life in name only

at last you came
the flaming presence
the tangible star
the chalice's wine
not icon symbol or cloud
but more beautiful than icons
than symbols more instructive
more refreshing mystical
and showery than the clouds

you who know neither decay
nor decoloration
but stand in our midst
in bones and flesh
vaulting multihued and smiling
aborting with no hate
but without hollow sympathy
all that lay suspended
our dreams' accomplices
the varied shaped tools
of our unending hunt

bounding multicolored
happy and cunning
a quarry at last
accessible to our touch
domesticated tiger
a leopard also
lioness
to declare the struggle
body to body
to wake us
yield us courage
to enlighten us
grant us "wide-open gates"
not "closed ones"

far from our thousand fears
summon to us on the opposite
wide open space
not peace but the rallying-cry
of come and fight
let us see who wins

the victor will expect to gain
neither fleece nor squalls
neither sailor's storms
nor the ash-colored demons
of Pan-Caucasia who distribute
their meager fires
on torches that consume
among the mourning of the nereids
let only the writhing and all-living
prey be given him
the invulnerable
enraged by the struggle
she emerges for him as a foamy sea
with a garden and a star-filled
night sky all our heart's longing
all our love's triumph
the incarnation at last
of what we called for many centuries
symbolic dream our cloud
now it came
the long awaited downpour
after the thunder
a companion and a blessing
in the midst of a war
proud and renowned.

II. FAITH AND HOPE

Whatever the fiery sun forged for you with abundant skill
in the length of a carefree day far from us
whatever the sea-day wrought
in its ethereal workshop
whatever itinerant the unsullied harsh sky's reflections
had impressed upon you
whatever the pine's caress had lavished on you
whatever the strong obstinate noon sea-breeze
had conjured as a greeting of our passivity
all those tremulous hours spent unused
providing to assist your invincible hours
evening still came with its own honey tones
with its own crispness and flux
the first indistinguishable star approached
pride of Arcturus nose of the celestial paper-kite
and bore everything to us unsparingly
all that suffering the lingering hours
the crippled times had slowly spun what
absence lack privation had pictured black
how at once everything dissolved in your half-darkened
half-latent and evening entrance
as you arrived with so many gifts

a twig of flowered thyme
was formerly a monumental expectatiton
and now it becomes
largely an object of the sea
which sprinkles us with the shoreline's dew
and its pale hue exhumed it
from sandy shores

evening came O maid
and hurled you straight at us
laden with each day's offerings
and all that such a memorable
day had accomplished for you

Β'. ΠΙΣΤΗ ΚΙ' ΕΛΠΙΔΑ

"Ο,τι μὲ τέχνη περισσὴ σοῦ ἐργάστηκε ὁ λαῦρος ἥλιος
 στὸ μάκρος μιᾶς ξέγνιαστης ἡμέρας μακριὰ μας
 ὅ,τι στὸ ἀνέρό της ἐργαστήρι
 εἶχε ἡ θαλασσινὴ ἡμέρα κατορθώσει
 ὅ,τι οἱ ἀνταύγειες τοῦ ἀκηλίδωτου σκληροῦ οὐρανοῦ
 εἶχαν σφραγίσει ἀπάνω σου πλανητικὸ
 ὅ,τι ἡ θωπεία τοῦ πύκου σοῦ εἶχεν ἐπιδαφιλεύσει
 ὅ,τι ὁ μπάτης δυνατὸς πεισματάρης μεσημεριάτικος
 σοῦχε μηνύσει χαιρετισμὸ τῆς παθητικῆς μας ὑπομονῆς
 ὅλες τὶς τρέμουσες ὥρες ποὺ τὶς περνούσαμε κλειστὲς
 φροντίζοντας τὶς ὥρες σου ἀόρατοι νὰ παραστέκουμε
 ἦρθε ἡ ἐσπέρα μὲ τὶς δικές της μελιχρότητες
 μὲ τὶς δικές της δροσιές καὶ τὰ δικά της ρεύματα
 ἦρθε τὸ πρῶτο δυσδιάκριτο ἄστρο
 ἡ περηφάνεια τοῦ Ἀρκτούρου ἡ μύτη τοῦ ἐπουράνιου
 χαρταετοῦ
 καὶ μᾶς τὰ κόμισε ὅλα χωρὶς φειδῶ
 ὅ,τι σιγόγνεθε ὁ πόνος οἱ μακρόσυρτες ὥρες
 τὰ μισερὰ πράγματα, ὅ,τι εἰκόνιζε μαῦρο
 ἡ ἔλλειψη ἡ στέρηση ἡ ἀπουσία
 πῶς μεμιᾶς ὅλα καταλυθῆκαν στὴ μισοσκοτισμένη
 εἴσοδό σου τὴ μισολανθάνουσα κι' ἐσπερινή
 καθὼς ἔφτασες μὲ τὰ τόσα δῶρα

ἓνα κλωνὶ ἀνθισμένο θυμάρι
 μᾶς ἦταν ἄλλοτε θουνίσιος ἐρχομὸς
 καὶ πῶς τώρα γίνεται
 τόσο θαλασσινὸ ἀντικείμενο
 τόσο ποὺ μᾶς ραντίζει μὲ τὶς δροσιές τοῦ αἰγιαλοῦ
 καὶ αὐτὴ ἡ χλωμή του ἀπόχρωση τὸ ξέθαψε
 ἀπὸ ἀμμουδιᾶς

as always it brought you united
to your unending happiness
to our agony's pliant source
gymnast of our dreams
spirit of the thyme amidst the sea
prey of the fleeting moment's flow

what is left we abhor most
reverie and poverty in your absence compromises
and now at last what spread
as a great black blot of secret fear
an immense crow's wing
terror of the probable

and then how and who will set
in motion the now frenzied firmament
and when we drag the chains and it will not draw
who will start the sun again
the despairing night will last forever
strength and courage will be exhausted
in sterile pained expectation
while all things will remain unmoving
without their tractions or expansions
and our life once found
on the picturesque border of a well
so near her happiness
while hand in hand we danced
with cheerful Grace
abruptly the hand was orphaned
turned into a blind man's abandoned arm extended
seeking direction but losing it
there within the all-encompassing darkness
of the abyss which has nothing
this evening to reflect it

that star which launched
the beautiful evening
evaporated hours ago
and was not followed by the myriad stars

that pursued it
so persistently on other such nights

but that which we longed for
was not at all
such a slithery tar-paved abyss
and this all-powerful desire's
supreme effort
"the one who dared such things"
the one so much the miracle-worker
we did not wish such an abyss
to swallow her
for whatever came with the moment's
flurry to then recede from us
we cry out that soon with faith
we will find it again
re-inhabit it
we will become its sun
its sea and sandy shore
and united at last we will form
the earth's new summer day
the longest of the year
in the year of our love
in the solstices of the year
of the world's greatest love
in those neglected and so unexamined
portions of life
which poor bewildered men were accustomed
to call "mythical"
and of which through suffering
we were able to find the imprints
wounded we tracked them
attained our goal to find the marble
idol of beauty
lifeless as it was and buried
thus it stirred at our coming
took life rekindled
remained beautiful touched us
and won us over.

III. THE PROCLAIMED

The proclaimed
she from the angels
she for whose coming the good omens
grow bounteous and clamor

the great balanced harmony
with the sweetest agitation
is conveyed at nights
in the complicated orbits of the stars
where dawn is later heralded
with an astounding calm
whenever the angelic visitor
is to appear the next day

and when she finally appears and guides us
an astonishment transformed into living flesh
peace and agitation together
in a blend of superb contradiction

tranquillity matched
to the duration of the excitement
security enthroned
in a bed of gushing fever

stability and instability

tranquillity is then bestowed
by the resplendent presence
which moves and resurrects all things

the anxiety is caused
by the impending disappearance
and the grief
which such offerings leave behind

since she was set in the form of sudden
momentary but wholly obvious lightning
we accept her fiery sword strokes
on our hearts and tremble in anticipation
she is both the visible and the uncertain
the intermittent but not lost forever
what we touch to understand the elusive
a strange meshwork her true
reality shouts and laughs
dances and resounds
at exactly the same hour
a mist and darkness comes
and conceals her so you can discern
her presence yet dispute her being

mortal mind cannot embrace
such acute alterations
but it apportions immortality
and keeps us in a state of intimacy
yet even this
withdraws and flees
it withdraws and flees so often
the serene nights fall unfolding
gold wealth on a black fabric
the streets are shaded desolated
an hour thick and deep approaches
greatly advanced then as
solitude begins her exorcisms
then strangely the withdrawn
the evanescent is understood
so personally
and graphically
in her absence
that no presence was ever
so tangible
so effusive and dear
we are enriched
by all adornments that embellish her
she bestows all on us

and if we clarified the oscillations
of the most distant stars
we owe it to her only
if we were able to tell
between the one and the other
we owe it to her exalted nearness

and this is what is
beautiful with certainty
which distinguishes her

and whatever she is not
something urgently hastens us
to flee it as inimical

she is so much the donor of wealth in life
the bestower of the straight way
lulling the turbulent
sweetening the sour
so that the livid
form of death
grew pale was consumed
and at last utterly abolished
the moon always fading
until it vanished
and should the moon revolve
to new habitual waxings
her black conception
is expelled forever

she is neither goddess
nor archangel
who fulfills these miracles

it does not cross your mind
to pray to her

nothing to ask from her
for in her is assembled

what even in the tortuousness
of your most furtive dreams
was never made clear
she provides all
before you even convey it
so great is her generosity
and within you she spreads
as the compound
of the most complex blessedness

one ultimate question still remains
in the chaos of the abyss
IF SHE EVER LEAVES
if ever the sling in its giddiness
whirls disconnecting
from our stellar system
this red-hot counter-weight of the sun

if the cataract of her current's
celestial flaming surge
passes our orbit's course
what then becomes of all things
and how do they regenerate
how does a blade of grass
rejuvenate
how does a flower bloom again
what dead-sea spirit
will rekindle the iridescences and tempests
that gladdened us
or set in motion the dolprins' dance
to re-accompany our prow's
naked joy in the open sea

the question
and the answer

tranquillity
many laws and fates
were vowed

for calm
but one law is the best
one destiny infallible
not ordered
this Attraction
ever to be acknowledged
by renouncement
dwells in eternity
an attraction of the spaces
the best omen of our resistance
the nailing and embrace
the fulfilment of what without
would be the abyss
our luminescence
the symmetry
the justification and grace
of our most willful fatalism

of our most heedless resiliency.

IV. BEFORE A JOURNEY

All the virgin gold's numerous jewels
were burnt and dissolved
this brief night
where the roving one also assisted
this evening she was revealed more inclined
to alchemy more bountiful
and industrious
the ashes have erupted now
and dispersed they tell us
that perhaps day is dawning while within them
they preserve alive
a belated spark
it too will be quenched by our prodding
the spears will thunder

on copper panoplies
the naked nymphs will shake their crazy
sistrums when the chariot
and the great war carriages emerge
they will carry us along
that we may journey once again
with our all-devouring
rich radiant negro
bearing his wealth as merchandise
moments before our new journey
our meditation's birds
stir unperch
timid the first morning birds
shy and ashlike the first ones
and their flying mute but not void
languid unoriented
solitary doves one by one
the timorous first ones take courage
farther off they thicken
congregate become flocks
and in their oscillations
they embolden so that
warbling they commune
here and there
the same tune
and the great topic
of their speech
constellations
much more garrulous and important
than others fancy them
in flight they supplant
constellations bring them
down low to us
birds some white others blackish
all complaisant
teach us
the mysteries of life's motion
meditation's birds
early morning birds

we direct you
with our breath's flow
in the windless hour
when even leaves do not stir
in our creativity's
inmost breath
toward our heart's desire
and you return to us
sent back by the one
we love
from her vegetation
from her night's sleeplessness
when she sits and recounts our suffering
over us you intercross
assorted configurations
a single moment's consummated forms
rhombi polyhedrons
trapezoids and the purest arcs
so much desired and so rare
arcs straightening before perceived
thoughts uniting with thoughts
hers and ours
winged ones with the winged
resounding the cry
of wholeness
voicing a song
of longing
offering all
omitting nothing
blowing the breath
of acceptance
hymnologizing our frenzy
prescribing
our new day
a skylark
takes the lead
assumes their leadership
more actively and impetuously
but a cotton-ball awakening

grows jealous
it gnaws secretly on itself
seeing
its dawn's flares wasted
the geraniums become wild
how can they endure
our love's expansion
so far off
mint lavender
and rosemary
pray for us all however
they love us
and collect about us
their sympathy and concern
sighting our uneasiness
rising in heaps hiding
the indifference
seeing us encircled
in a disorder
unconcealed by all our exaltation's warbling
and even that deserted thyme
now dry the relic of a previous
foreign day in every way
attempts to show
it is with us during this difficult
tribulation and so let us all say
that the travelers of the moment
found themselves closely united
that we celebrate hastily
being as secure as possible
amidst the anxieties of our possessions
the festivity
of this our frightening
summer.

V. THE FATES LEAD

Augusts with their prickly pears
Septembers with their blackberries
that the thorns might rend us
to bathe us in blood
all on the boundary of our
famous barrier
and it is laughable
that today no garden exists
only an area
within which is resurrected at times
on the same tree
one single rose
blood red
its stalk
entangled in thorns
one unique vivid
rose heralding for us
with the wine of its cry
the great universe
the universe's joy
and its revels
and the infinite sunsets
the universe and all
those mirths we love
each of its petals a virtue
every thorn a sting
each thorn a grace
one hundred
the botanists count its virtues
and we count them a thousand
and one thousand they prove indeed
we spoke one evening
of surmounting the barrier
cutting the rose
for companionship
but we did not leap

"we will jump it tomorrow"
we deferred it
and in lieu of the feat
we yearned the sour blackberries
the fat prickly pears
the pointless tearing
the stains of blood which
was not blood and we felt it
stains without shape
yet that which drew us
beyond the fence was well known to us
our sea a few steps further
and the inviting shore at night
on which we would surely
walk hand in hand and always speak
of you the oceans
their ships within them
and the boats and the islands afar
the whole world
the inconstant oceans the frothing
morning topaz
the aragonite of quarantine
the serious deep noon waters
with that rock
called lapis lazuli
drawing the sky near us
the india ink
night's indelible darkness
that we might write the thousand and one nights
of our future history
and decorate the exotic
teachings of Chuang-Tzu
life's talismans
how vain and fruitless
all their breezes came
each evening and other currents
stronger yet
more intense
more compelling

during the hours of day
and lest we sacrifice the fruit
of a voiceless colorless
unbearable dark
and dreamy autumn
and our wretched region
we abided there swaying

until heavenly women
were determined
to arrange more expediently
what our irresolute apathy mesmerized
within time and
this evening as
the broad idle moon
loitered late upon us
arrogant as always though at times
not entirely foreign
and divided among us only
her scorn and indifference
suddenly all the good fates
even so aged
set to opening the pigeon coops at night
arousing at the same time
a brave northerly wind
the wild pigeons burst forth at once
playing and reveling crazily
vaulting so drunkenly
that the night from
mellifluousness turned suddenly
into a windy threshing-floor plucking
in the play their abundant down
and forcing it
into a course upended
with all the flock and clews
which the fates in their wakefulness
bestrewed in carding
their sheep's fleece

how had our sleep begun
what mist consumed it
what imposing army
dressed in white
what deep hidden goodness
annihilated it with violent wonder
the confrontation of the great
procession made
by the bewitching clouds
at the cape of white hope
and the enticements
of the tempestuous turn
overcame for us at last
our ambivalent resistance

nor is it time yet
to regret inertness
or thoughtless torpidity
now that the fates lead
and such fates
as ours
all-powerful fates
with them necessity at once subsides
complaint and bitterness
lose power
and how easily now
how frolickingly
in such intoxication
can the inaccessible fence be leapt
the thorns be mocked
the faded remembrances
be derided forever
by the dust-covered
(we scarcely remember them dust-covered
certainly they were also covered in spiderwebs)
blackberries.

VI. THE PETRIFIED INSECT

All things revolve around
our life's hearth
all throb and vibrate
around her glitter
at times this southwesterly wind
that scavenges us appears
and its fury upon us is reduced
to an etesian wind's caress
at other times all hours
seconds and minutes diminish
aerified by their pulse's spinning-top
but always from life's great source
these hours inhale their being and grow
the miraculous hours
are thus disposed
sprinkled with a moistened
basil spray
until heat refreshes them
and all bloom
flourish
and form
the olympian perfection
of a sunborn love
hours of preparation
all concealed voluptuosity
dauntlessly spread
lavishly courageous
extended to us
an erect stake
into the sickly eye of avarice
hours of offering
that gather
"even as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings"
in their invisible chests
the scattered wealth
and hurl their rays

and their morning linen
to cloak all things
except the enduring
slowly burning spark
which pricks
our heart's abyss
like an artful knot and ties it
with all we pondered
once in the all-round
nights
in the hours when
earth's silence is undone
when the new birds
are summoned
to deliver oracles
the birds which with their
bills irritate
the bleeding
open wounds
of our doubts
when the birds
with their bills entangle
the yarn of our schemes

as bounteously as the fates
bestowed on you
the forked rod which renders you
eternally wavering and irresolute
so much more firmly for us
envious and malicious
dependent
with a tremor in the heart
and moist manly eyes
on the interpretation of our daily
vacillating augury

hours of flowers which accept
the water we offer
hours of flowers

when they are saddened
and they begrudge us
hours of reflected
worship annihilated
by the scythe of partiality
ears of corn that missed
their harvest
hours sulphurized
by eccentricities and the whims
of heaven's musk tree
which dawns and dies
as though we did not exist

sea-beaten hours
hours of the wind
hours of clouds
portraying your many shapes
and your mood's labyrinths
but they lack in the forms' multiplicity
and in daedalean depth
hours that shatter
and impoverish
when you wish to depart
and you leave and we lose you
and without any guile of yours
musk tree of our hell
star of our paradise
do you succeed in breaching
your dreadful imposition
nor with those crooked
nails of barren love
nor with the twin and constant
the perennial eyes
of love
hard unyielding judges
in the terrifying tribunals
of incompatible love
when seated on a stool
before your sovereign feet

we measure
and remeasure
the uncountable
the alternating hours
on your apron's jasmines
and each of the hours
holds erect at its tip
invariably your selfsame image
multiplied and scintillating
from within the iridescences
of the most erudite polyhedron
of the most shining diamond
which your fates excavated
and unburied from our
aspiration's deepest layers

and we count them the uncountable
and number them
the innumerable
now in one mode
then in the other
occasionally triumphant
with a shout of joy
often with lamentation
at times with a dry wringing
of the heart
sometimes with the frenzied bitterness
of your absence's hyoscyamine
on occasion with the lightning speed
of your slightly sky-sketched
caress
often with the purity
of your white flowering
occasionally with the insatiable yearning
of the erect lily
which vainly announces
her fulfillment
at times with the inconstancy and giddiness
of your indefinite acceptance

which we touched one moment
at a time on the premises (you know them)
of a garden and she abandoned us again
and vanished forsaking
in our hands a colored
rag
a bandage of her impoverished
affection
and an amply worn out flag
of her triumph

we have not measured
until now
in the great glowing hours
the voracious noons
when with his gigantic torch
God ignites all things
the gaping noons
consuming without being consumed
kindled and kindling
the unsung ones the few
beneath the poor solitary
all green trees unproclaimed till now
allowing the gold
to drip to the ground in cords
from every branch
there only yesterday
the first cicada chirped
and found us seated
in a corner suffering
our inquisition
and the sting of the fire
at which we did not risk looking
directly lest we go blind
tyrannized us much
this fire was our life's
hearth and with it now
we journey together
we are three complements

you the despotic lady a meteor
fallen from the furnace

(and your sudden scratch
as you fell coincided
with our prayer's spontaneous shriek
which is no more than the monosyllabic
exclamation of your name)

the sun despotic as well
being of the same substance as you

and tied to the chariot
of your double might
we ask ourselves like whom
do we journey on your path
like the conquered following
their conqueror's triumph
like the companions of his heart
and his soul's jasmine
or like the triumphant
triumvirate united
celebrating our multiple
victory
this is what we did not learn
and will not learn
this is what the birds did not say
the morning before we brought ourselves
to the mysterious worshippings
of our tropical divinity
which we exhumed from among sphinxes
the hard petrified insect
does not reveal its secret
as much as it is carved
with scratches of worship
the accountable magic stigma
for all your transitions
the image of the merciless cannon ball
which impregnates love

the icon of creation
as it pulsates
in the passion of its ignition.

VII. THE ATTRACTIONS

Lit ashes fell on our eyes
and we saw the light
silver dust emanating from the twistings
and the nebulae to adorn us
a drop of milk
fell on us from the milky way
and pleased us
water ran silently
from Aquarius' Urns
unable to quench our thirst
but a trickle of expectation
and of submission remained
as is the case when love
is created and strengthened

for love too is generated
in a parallel manner to the spheres
and to all the unimpeded
bountifulness
she takes the Twins as talisman
ignoring the neighboring beasts
holding the destined road
the five-pointed snowy peaks
in full summer will receive her
the Dryads opened for her
all asylums in the Peloponnesus
the rapaciousness of Pan was aroused
Zeus' gold work blazed
the pearls of the Pleiads' diadem
paled

Ζ'. ΟΙ ΕΛΞΕΙΣ

Ἦπεσε ἀναμμένη στάχτη στὰ μάτια
καὶ εἶδαμε τὸ φῶς
ἀσημόσκηνη ἔφτασε ἀπὸ τὶς συστροφές
καὶ τοὺς νεφελοειδεῖς καὶ μᾶς στόλισε
σταλαγματιὰ μᾶς ἔσταξε
γάλα τοῦ γαλαξία
καὶ μᾶς εὐφρανε
ἔτρεξε σιωπηλὸ τὸ νεράκι
ἀπὸ τὰ Ὑδάτια τοῦ Ὑδροχόου
καὶ δὲ μπόρεσε νὰ μᾶς ξεδιψάσει
μᾶς στάθηκε ὅμως σταλαγματὸς
τῆς καρτερίας καὶ τῆς ὑποταγῆς
καθὼς κάθε φορὰ ποὺ πλάθεται
καὶ δυναμώνει ἡ ἀγάπη

γιατὶ πλάθεται καὶ τούτη
παράλληλα μὲ τοὺς κόσμους
καὶ ὅλες τὶς ἀνορμήνευτες
γονιμότητες
παίρνει τοὺς Δίδυμους φυλαχτὸ της
ἀψηφώντας τὰ διπλανὰ θηρία
καὶ προχωρεῖ τὸ γραμμένο δρόμο
οἱ πενταπλὲς κορφές χιονισμένες
καλοκαιριάτικα θὰ τὴ δεχθοῦνε
τῆς ἀνοῖξαν στὴν Πελοπόννησο
οἱ Δρυάδες ὅλα τὰ καταφύγια
κεντρίστη ἡ βουλιμία τοῦ Πάνα
γυάλισε τὸ χρυσαφικὸ στὸ Δία
χλωμιάσαν τὰ μαργαριτάρια
τοῦ περιδέραιου τῶν Ὑάδων
μπῆκαν σὲ ταραχὴ
οἱ ἀστρολόγοι ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου
καὶ ἡ τόσο ἀγέρωχη Ἄρτεμη ἀκόμη
πρωτόνιωσε τὰ μαστίγια
τοῦ φθόνου ἀκούοντας πῶς ἐγκαθιδρύθηκε
στὰ μέρη της ἡ Καλλιστὼ
τόσο ἔκπαγλη καὶ λουλουδένια

the world's astrologers
were cast into disarray
even the most arrogant Artemis
first sensed the whips
of jealousy hearing enthroned
in her region Kallisto
so marvelous and full of flowers
you are the great magnet of the world
your yoked beams
invite us irrevocably
to your seductive net wrought
with golden threads
your Dancers mill about you
while you modestly
nurture all the suns
perpetuate their flames
show a purpose
in unoriented roads
you conduct the cosmic dances
you balance the planets
when goodness overcomes you
you direct toward us
the caresses of the fixed stars
when outraged you nail
on the abyss eternal impediments
the constellations' fearful patterns
you extend the icebergs
and reflect them in your heaven
reaping their royal silence
you clothe in opulent snowy fur
the animals of the arctic reach
you cut us to the heart
and choose it as your home
without ever accepting
its hospitality
with but a single sign you activate
the yawning craters
in the menace of our black mountain
you unfold fully green vineyards

near the sea
on the sulpherized slopes of lava
like thickset armies you congregate
the lemon trees on the plain
and we can not endure this double drunkenness
as you send it tempered
with your soul's pungencies
in a potion which until now
we discerned as death's
our autonomy is shattered in pieces
which glitter as you rattle them
with the sword of your flame

the great magnet of the world
the glinting steel
which draws and kills

at the time when love is created and strengthened

shaped in summer
in august fortified
by St. Demetrius pledged
and on Christmas comes to light

with what wisdom all her fervency
and the garden's tropical cultivation coincide
at the hour when
the days begin to shorten
when all of evening's glories
settle behind the mountain
beside our familiar seas
and violets rain upon the east
for the first time the hidden one appears to us
who until yesterday was still in the arms of day
detailing for us
—the roses belong to her—
this panarchaic queen of love
the enactment of her hegemony
"she who presents humans

with such nice presents
that seductive face of hers
that is smiling always
carrying its seductive flower"
if only you too would
turn your head to see her
you would at last gain knowledge
of the beauty which you pretend
not to know look upon your idol
living goddess and goddess of Salamis
and of Cyprus and our own Attic goddess
how she fearlessly twined
about the wild Lion's mane
and gave to the Virgin's spike
opposite its summer ripeness
and the Lion kneels before her beauty
in worship
for this revelation
of the ethereal crimson we exhausted
one long century
all our hours' agonies
on the watchtower of our yearning
and now having seen the miracles
to whom in haste and frenzy
should we announce them but to you
guide of the stars
helmsman of the sun which binds us
that you might hear it from our fury's riches

"From today love reigns," we tell you
"Love reigns from today"
we shout it like marathon racers
having arrived hurriedly at life's threshold
but you doubt us
as an unfaithful implacable creation
unaccustomed to revelations
we will shake your disbelief
for our announcements are true
etched with fire indisputable

be assured at last as we bring to you the toil
 of a squandered life
 awaiting your acceptance of the knowledge
 which this *reigns* conveys.

FOOTNOTES

¹Kostas Steryiopoulos, "Enas Idiotypos Neoellinas Pistos," *Epoches*, 5 (1963), 67. All prose translations from the Greek are my own.

²A letter from the poet to the author, 5 September 1969.

³Takis Papatsonis, "I 'Parekvoles' tou Efstathious Mesa Sta Byzantina tous Plaisia," *Tetradio Trito* (1945), 71.

⁴Takis Papatsonis, "Z. Oikonomou: O Kosmos Sti Dhisi tou," *Ellinika Phylla*, 1, no. 3 (May, 1935), 93.

Born in Samos, Greece, in 1940, Kostas Myrsiades received a B.A. and a B.S. from Iowa University and a M.A. and Ph.D. in Comparative Literature from Indiana University. He received a certificate from the University of Athens, Greece, where he studied classical and modern Greek language and literature. In 1973 he served as visiting professor and head of the Hellenic Studies program at Deree College in Athens and is presently an associate professor of English at West Chester State College. Mr. Myrsiades has recently published a book on Takis Papatsonis in the Twayne World Author Series; he is now completing a work for the same series on Yannis Ritsos. With Kimon Friar, he is translating and editing the selected works of Ritsos and in a separate volume, Ritsos' *Scripture of the Blind*.