Phasis 11, 2008

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FOR THE SPECIFIC USE OF ANCIENT QUOTATIONS AND PARAPHRASES IN SEFERIS' POEMS

Antiquity holds a special place in Seferis' works. He lavishly uses ancient symbols, images and popular plots. Especially interesting is the way Seferis quotes ancient authors. According to their usage, ancient quotations found in Seferis' works fall into the following three categories: epigraphs, quotations inserted intact into the body of a poem and paraphrases. Below I will try to present various cases of quotation use in Seferis' poetry and comment on their function in each particular poem.

Quotation first occurs in the poem *The Companions in Hades*.[1] It is a grotesque account of what happened to the imprudent companions of Odysseus after they ate Helios' bulls. The poem is introduced with a two-line epigraph quoting the *Odyssey*: 'νήπιοι, οἳ κατὰ βοῦς Ὑπερίονος Ἠελίοιο ἤσθιον αὐτὰρ ὁ τοῖσιν ἀφείλετο νόστιμον ἦμαρ' (a 8-9). The poem is a first-person account, which means that Odysseus' companions themselves narrate about their adventure in Hades and appear fairly self-critical: 'Since we still had some hardtack / how stupid of us / to go ashore and eat / the Sun's slow cattle... / ...On the earth's back we hungered / but when we'd eaten well / we fell to this lower regions / mindless and satisfied.' The epigraph serves as a direct and unambiguous clue to the purpose of the poem, to its content as well as its source.

The next poem to consider is *Mythistorema*, which is mainly fostered exactly by antiquity. Out of the four epigraphs found in the poem, three are borrowed from ancient texts (Μέμνησο λουτρῶν οἷς ἐνοσφίσθης, Quid πλατανὼν opacissimus?, ὄνομα δ' Ὀρέστης). As concerns quotations, the

[1] Seferis G., Complete Poems, translated, edited and introduced by Ed. Keeley and Ph. Sherrard, Great Britain 1995, 236.

poem quotes Plato's *Alcibiades* (133b) and one line from Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* (958), which is presented in free Modern Greek translation.[2] Let us consider each case separately.

The third poem[3] of *Mythistorema* is introduced by a quotation from Aeschylus' *Libation Bearers*: Μέμνησο λουτρῶν οἷς ἐνοσφίσθης (491). The epigraph is intrinsically linked to the text of the poem. It renders the feelings of the poet as he holds the 'marble head' in his hands. 'I look at the eyes: neither open not closed / I speak to the mouth which keeps trying to speak.' The quotation, which is not distinguished for particular significance in either ancient or the subsequent literature, acquires symbolic meaning with Seferis. It may allude to the tragic lot of both – Agamemnon in particular and his homeland in general. Apart from the epigraph, the body text also implies a number of allusions to Aeschylus' tragedy. The phrases evoke associations of what ruthlessly slaughtered Agamemnon could have gone through: his mouth will no more say what he might have wished to say, his eyes will not see his children, who have come together to revenge his death. And the narrator, witnessing this scene, is unable to change anything. 'That's all I'm able to do. Let us recall how Electra addresses her dead father in the *Libation Bearers*: ἀρ᾽ὀρθόν αἴρεις φίλτατον τὸ σὸν κάρα (496). Besides, like 439 of the tragedy contains information about how Agamemnon was hacked to death: 'ἐμασχαλίσθη'. The tragedian uses the verb 'μασχαλίζω', the direct meaning of which is to put under one's arm. However, its semantics is much broader: 'I cut off the extremes of the killed and put them under my arm so as to evade revenge.'[4] These lines are believed to be reflected in the final line: 'My hands disappear and come to me mutilated.'[5]

The poem called *The Argonauts*[6] marks the truly vigorous influx of the ancient spirit. In the very first lines we come across the poet's innovative attempt to insert intact into the structure of his poem Plato's prose text, applying quite an interesting principle of breaking down Plato's sentences into verse lines. It is common knowledge that the lines belong to Plato's *Alcibiades* (133b), devoted to the discussion on how to interpret

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2 This phrase by Aeschylus is translated or paraphrased in several of Seferis' poems.

3 Complete Poems, 5.

4 In this sense, the verb is also used in: Sophocles, *Electra,* 445; Apollonius Rhodius, *Argonautica,* IV, 447.

5 Cf. Benedeti E., Poesia pensiero della grecia classica nell'opera di Giorgio Seferis, Omaggio a Seferis, Studi Bizantini e Neogreci diretti da F. M. Pontani, Padova 1970, 75 ff.

6 Complete Poems, 6.

the well-known aphorism 'Know yourself' from the Temple of Apollo at Delphi. Plato has Socrates say the following words: 'καὶ ψυχὴ εἰ μέλλει γνώσεσθαι αὐτὴν εἰς ψυχὴν αὐτῆ βλεπτέον …' This is the key phrase of the whole poem as the *Odyssey*, as well as the *Argonauitca* (and the poem is evidently based on these two cycles) is a voyage undertaken for the sake of knowing oneself. In the case of Seferis' poem, the words may refer to the specific (the Argonauts, Odysseus, the poet himself), more general (the Greek nation) and the most general (humankind). Starting the poem with this phrase unequivocally points to the main pathos of the *Mythistorema*. The poem ends with the same phrase by Plato.

The epigraph for *Mythistorema's* next poem[7] is 'Quid πλατανὼν opacissimus?', a phrase found in one of the letters of Pliny the Younger (1.3) addressed to his friend. In the letter, Pliny inquires about the places that are dear to him. Seferis borrows one of the questions: 'how is the shady plane tree lane?' However, he makes one very interesting change: the Latin word *platanon*, which is a Greek borrowing, is used in its initial Greek form 'πλατανών'. The poet seems to be pointing to its Greek origin, which was rarely used even in Greek. The more widespread form was 'πλάτανος' or 'πλατάνιστος.'[8] How is epigraph associated with the poem? The latter, which may at first sight remind us of a love poem, in my opinion, conveys much more than a mere passion for an imaginary love interest. As no other suggestions are known to me on the point, I will bring forth some of my own observations. The most conspicuous element that cannot be ignored is the plane-tree, which is recurrent and hence becomes a key concept of the poem (epigraph, 8, 17). If we go back to Pliny's letter, we will see that Pliny calls on his friend to give up all of his daily concerns, hand them down to others and create something that will render his name immortal. Seferis accentuates two points: a) stillness brought by sleep, some kind of uncertainly and b) transience, oblivion and inviability of dreams. The poem renders the feeling of discontent not of a particular individual but of whole generations of mortals. It may even be consonant of the opposition set out in Pliny's letter between daily concerns and the artistic creations of humans, which determines their immortality and which Pliny's addressee was unable to fulfill. The quotation, which had no other significance in the letter apart from serving as a greeting phrase, in Seferis poem acquires a symbolic meaning, more so that Latin 'platanon' is replaced by Greek 'πλατανών'. It can be assumed that Seferis associates 'shady plane-trees'

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7 Complete Poems, 19.

8 Δημητράκος Δ., Μέγα Λεξικόν της Ελληνικής Γλώσσας, Αθήνα 1964, 5857.

with the symbolic implication of plane-tree in ancient Greek world, where it was seen as the tree of sorrow.

In the seventeenth[9] poem of *Mythistorema* there is an attempt of complete transformation of Sophocles' passages. It is common knowledge that Paedagogus tells Electra the invented story of Orestes' death, which he starts with the description of Orestes' brilliant victory in the Delphic games: ''Αργεῖος μὲν ἀνακαλούμενος, ὄνομα δ' Ὀρέστης, τοῦ τὸ κλεινὸν Ἑλλάδος Ἀγαμέμνονος στράτευμα' ἀγείραντός ποτε' (693-696). Seferis uses the formula 'ὄνομα δ' Ὀρέστης' as an epigraph to this poem, which is presented Orestes' monologue: Orestes desribes the challenges of the game. However, unlike Sophocles' passage, the pathos of the poem is not to show the joy of being the winner, the first, but to reveal the helplessness, the torture and pain of the 'first'. Interestingly, what Sophocles presents an invented story – Orestes' participation in the games – Seferis pictures as real, turning Orestes into his contemporary character.

In the poem *Andromeda*[10] the image of Andromeda, related to the myth of Perseus, whom the hero rescued from a horrible torture, is introduced without being named. The poem includes a phrase: 'The sea, the sea, who will be able to drain it dry?', borrowed from Aesechylus' *Agamemnon* (958). The quotation has quite an interesting function. In the *Agamemnon*, the image of the sea with 'a mighty store' as presented by Clytemnestra stands for the riches of the king's palace, 'a store that cannot fail': ''Εστιν Θάλασσα – τίς δέ νιν κατασβέσει;' As concerns Seferis' poem, in my opinion, the quotation is two-dimensional. On the one hand, it could be reflective of the emotions of a person bound to a sea-washed rock, who can watch the unabated waves ahead (according to the tradition, Andromeda's sacrifice is associated with Poseidon's wrath); on the other hand, the quotation may serve to generalize the idea of inexhaustibility of pain, sorrow and mishap. In my opinion, Seferis remarkably modifies the direction of Aeschylus' quotation: if in Aeschylus the sea is the general image of inexhaustibility, Seferis fitted this image to the specific situation featured in the *Andromeda*. The poet retained the meaning of inexhaustibility of sea, but deprived it of its allusion to countless riches. Seferis extended the general meaning of the image and at the same time anchored it in a specific context.

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[9] Complete Poems, 16.

[10] Complete Poems, 24. Seferis gave the name to the poem later.

In 1936, Seferis wrote a poem *In the Manner of G. S.*[11] According to the information available, the poem was written in a port as the poet was waiting for a ship, and consequently, it can be assigned to the group of 'random' poems. In it Seferis sums up his literary works, which by that time were not quite numerous, and presents two dimensions: on the one hand, he cites some passages from his earlier poems (probably, the ones he found the most important), while through the second dimension he presents the actual environment in which the poems were composed. In view of the purpose of the present paper, my attention was attracted by a quotation from Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* 'ὁρῶμεν ἀνθοῦν πέλαγος Αἰγαῖον νεκροῖς' (659). This seemingly simple quote conveys a comprehensive message as it acquires a generalized meaning when placed in a fairly specific context.

In the poem *Monday*[12] from the cycle *Notes for a 'Week'*, the symbol borrowed from antiquity is the kingdom of the dead although the poet has the sensation that they are sleeping: 'Among the bending asphodels the blind are sleeping'. In this case, the key term is 'Asphodels'. There are two interesting cases of quoting: the poet uses a quotation from Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* to make up his own phrase and he paraphrases another passage from the same tragedy. In the first case, in the passage connected with the plant 'παφιοπαίδιλα', Seferis uses the phrase ''Αρκείτω βίος' (1314) from the *Agamemnon* evidently to put emphasis on the process of fading, while in the second case, stating that 'the river doesn't roll, it has forgotten the sea', the poet draws our attention to the sea, and describing it, paraphrases the well-known Aeschylean phrase ' Ἔστιν θάλασσα τίς δέ νιν κατασβέσει' (958) 'and yet there is the sea and who will drain it dry?' The sea serves as the symbol of inexhaustibility. We will come across this phrase of Aeschylus several times in Seferis' works.

The poem *Saturday*[13] of the same cycle is especially interesting. Here the past and the present are linked against the background of modern theatre. An ancient quotation is one of the links in the chain of symbols threaded in the poem: '...What the hero of the drama / recalls in the fifth act, / at the peak of mischance',[14] 'the masks for the three main emotions',[15] 'Medea's slaughtered

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[11] Complete Poems, 52.
[12] Complete Poems, 76.
[13] Complete Poems, 84.
[14] 'The fifth act' denotes in Seferis the climax, the final part. It is noteworthy that in his *Art of Poetry* Horace dwells on the five-act structure of tragedy. Seneca also speaks of

children[16] / the poison and the knife',[17] 'In that box there's life when it starts getting unbearable'[18] which 'make sure you don't open it before the Furies whistle', 'Nessu's shirt', a phrase from *Agamemnon* 'Αρκείτω βίος!' Ιώ!' Ιώ!' (1314), 'Here's the trumpet that destroys the palace revealing the queen in her iniquity', two shores – one, where there is the body and the other, where there is only the kingdom of souls. As we see, the poem describes the world of drama – stage property (the poet confines himself only to their mentioning: 'the masks for three main emotions' and so on), episodes from various plays ('the trumpet that destroys the palace revealing the queen in her iniquity'[19] and even the text of the play (the fifth acte, the third Scene); / you remember the speech that begins: / Enough of life! Io! Io!').

Another poem inspired with the O*dyssey* is *Stratis Thalassinos among the Agapanthi*.[20] The poem presents several hints from the *Odyssey* and quotes a phrase from the Homeric epic 'παρὰ δῆμον ὀνείρων' (XXIV, 12) 'past the region of dreams'.

Among the most noteworthy pattens suggesting an ancient concept within the poetic thought is the poem *An Old Man on the River Bank*.[21] The poem can be broken down into three parts: the first one renders the poets attitude to the fact that everything flows, all is transient; then follows the so-called ancient part, which can be considered the conceptual basis of the poem and which can be reduced to Heraclites' well-known quote 'πάντα ῥέῃ'; the third part contains guesses on whether what flows is good or bad. 'The long river that emerges from the great lakes enclosed / deep in Africa, / that was once a god and than became a road and a / benefactor, a judge and a delta; / this is nevert the same, as the ancient wise men taught, / and yet always remains the same body, the same bad, and / the same Sign, / the same orientation'. It has been noted that this part reflects the following passage from Plato's *Cratilus*: 'Λέγει που Ηράκλειτος ὅτι πάντα χωρεῖ καὶ οὐδὲν μένει, καὶ ποταμοῦ ροῇ ἀπεικάζων τὰ ὄντα, ὡς δὶς ἐς τὸν αὐτὸν ποταμὸν οὐκ ἂν ἐμβαίης' (402a), which renders the essence of

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the dividion of tragedy into acts. Cf. Wörterbuch der Literaturwissenschaft, Hrsg. C. Träger, Leipzig 1986, 18.

15 The masks for the three dramatic genres are implied.

16 Cf. ...τέκνα γὰρ κατακτενῶ t¥m¹ (Euripides, *Medea,* 792-793).

17 Cf. ...φαρμάκοις αὐτοὺς ἐλεῖν (Euripides, *Medea*, 385).

18 In my opinion, the poet alludes to Pandora's box.

19 In my opinion, the phase alludes to the scene from Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, where Clytemnestra and Aegisthus are informed that Agamemnon is back, while the queen mentioned in Seferis' poem must allude to Clytemnestra.

20 Complete Poems, 144.

21 Complete Poems, 146.

Heraclites' dialectics. However, in my opinion, Seferis goes even farther as concerns the poetic interpretation of the ideas in Plato's *Cratylus*. Seferis illustrates the statement 'everything changes' through mentioning the Nile: 'that was once a god and than became a road and a / benefactor, a judge and a delta; / this is never the same, as the ancient wise men taught, / and yet always remains the same body, the same bad, and / the same Sign, / the same orientation'. He enumerates the signs which point that the Nile nevertheless remains the same: 'and yet always remains the same body, the same bad, and / the same Sign, / the same orientation'. To make my opinion clearer, I will quote the lines in Greek: 'καὶ ἤτανε κάποτε θεὸς κι ἔπειτα γένηκε **δρόμος** καὶ **δωρητὴς** καὶ **δικαστὴς** καὶ **δέλτα** ποὺ δὲν εἶναι ποτές του τὸ ἴδιο..., κι ὡστόσο μένει πάντα τὸ ἴδιο **σῶμα**, τὸ ἴδιο **στρῶμα**, καὶ τὸ ἴδιο **Σημεῖο**.' It sufficies to pay attention to the initail letters of word-concepts of the first idea to notice that all the words start with d, and with s in the second case. This, I believe, is reflects of one of the aspects of the so-called linguistic discussion found in Plato's *Cratylus* – in particular, the opposition of arguments: a. the letters included in names cannot correspond to the essence of the designated objects and b. the letters included in names correspond to the essence of the desigated objects.[22] Researchers pay attention to another line: '... the traveller who is used / to gauging his way by the stars', which is believed to allude to Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, line 795.[23]

Last Stop,[24] written in 1944 and imbued with the terror of the World War II, at first sight contains only several allusions to antiquity. However, a closer analysis of the poem reveals its obvious links with the Chorus in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* (160-183). This fairly modern poem is surprisingly consonant with one of the central motifs of Chorus. In view of this, it is no coincidence that the poem is closed with a contracted quotation of two lines from the part. What is the main pathos of Seferis' poem? It is total transience, the highlighting of universal ephemerality, whether a large state and civilization or a human or generations of humans. It is common knowledge that interpretation of the above-mentions passage from Aeschylus' tragedy is the object of disputes

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[22] For more details Cf. Dolidze N., Chief Linguistic Tendencies in Ancient Literature and Plato's *Cratilus,* Tbilisi 1998, 51 ff. (in Georgian).

[23] Cf. καθὼς ὁ στρατοκόπος ποὺ συνήθισε νἀναμετρᾶ τὸ δρόμο του μὲ τ' ἄστρα (Seferis), ἄστροις τὸ λοιπὸν ἐκμετρούμενος (Sophocles, *Oedipus Tyrranus*, 795). Cf. E. Benedeti, 82.

[24] Complete Poems, 154.

among scholars.[25] The playwright shows the essence of tragic perception – learning through suffering: στάζει δι' ἔν θι ὕπνῳ πρὸ καρδιάς μνησιπήμων πόνος' (179). As mentioned above, Seferis quotes them contracted: 'Στάζει τὴ μέρα στάζει στὸν ὕπνο μνησιπήμων πόνος.'

The next piece to discuss in the paper is *Thrush*. It is a quite sizeable poem consisting of three parts. I will avoid analyzing it and will focus only on those passages that include an ancient quotation or a paraphrase. The part of the poem where the first quotation is used carries an allusion to *νέκυια* from the *Odyssey*. Like the *Odyssey*, it also features an old man (here, an old man's voice), who is to prophesy to Odysseus. However, the assumed Tiresias of Seferis utters the words that paraphrase Socreates: '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. / I prefer death. / Who will come out best only god knows.' Apart from the well-known phrase from the *Apology* – ''Οπότεροι δὲ ἡμῶν ἔρχονται ἐπὶ ἄμεινον πρᾶγμα, ἄδηλον παντὶ πλὴν εἰ τῷ θεῷ' (42), it is also the repercussion of Socrates' choice between punishment and its evasion through finding a shelter in a foreign land, as presented in Plato's *Crito*. Transformation of Tiresias into Socrates implies that in this poem Seferis disregards chronological boundaries, making transition from one temporal dimension into another completely free.[26]

The last part of the poem, *Light*, conveys the pathos of returning as, according to Seferis, he uses 'light' as synonymous of Odysseus' home. The poem, whose essence seems very difficult to explore, presents thoughts and visions of a long-suffering and life-hardened man who has attained communion with the Supreme Truth in the Kingdom of Souls. I will dwell only on the passages associated with antiquity. First, let us consider quotations from ancient writings. Remarkably, mere five lines of the poem (57-61) includes translations from three different works: line 57 'laugter of waves' is the paraphrase of 'ποντίων τε κυμάτων ἀνήριθμον γέλασμα' (89) from Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound,* 'tear-stained laughter' in line 58 is the translation of a phrase from the *Iliad:* 'δακρυόεν γελάσασα...', while lines 59-60 allude to a passage from Sophocles *Oedipus at Colonus* (1679-82): 'the old suppliant sees you / as he moves to cross the invisible fields.'[27] The

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[25] Apropos this question, Cf. Gordeziani R., Greek Civilisation, vol. 2, Tbilisi 1997, 187 ff. (in Georgian).

[26] Tyresias' transformation into Socrates is difficult to explain even for Seferis. Among its possible reasons he mentions the great impact the *Apology* had on him. Σεφέρης Γ., Δοκιμές, Β, Αθήνα 1981, 52 ff.

[27] Cf. 'a[skopoi de; plavke" (Sophocles, *Oedipus Coloneus,* 1681).

poem also has the translation of 'Cras amet qui numquam amavit' from *Pervirgilium Veneris*: 'whoever has never loved, will love, / in the light.'

The very first poem, *Agianapa I,*[28] of the collection called *Logbook III*, carries on Seferis' favorite *νέκυια* motif, however, the reference is much more fragmentary and is confined to allusions as compared with other above-considered poems. It does not mention any name directly associated with antiquity. However, the reader is under the impression that the poem is saturated with the information from ancient Greek myths and classical literature. Admittedly, its very first line carries allusion to the *Iliad*. 'And you see the light of the sun, as the ancients used to say. 'το φως του ήλιου' can be related to Homeric 'φάος ἠελίοιο'.[29] In my opinion, the function of the vision of sunlight in Seferis' poem is somewhat different from the one it has in the *Iliad*, where the phrase stands for staying alive ('here I see the light of the sun').

The epigraph of poem *Helen,*[30] which includes three passages from Euripides' *Helen,* is very original. The references function as three emphases of the poem, three highlighted points. The first passage is Teucer's words about how he was going to reach Cyprus, where, in compliance with Apollo's prophesy, he was to found a city that would substitute his homeland (148-150). The second passage is Helen's words that it was not she who went to Troy but her shadow (582). The third one is the question of the messenger – 'What? You mean it was only for a cloud that we struggled so much?' (706-707). The epigraph makes it clear that Euripides' *Helen* is among the main sources for Seferis poem and the information conveyed by the above-mention three passages is very important. They suggest that a. Teucer went to Cyprus upon Apollo's (i.e. divine) will, which means that Greek settlement on Cyprus was the implementation of Apollo's will; b. Helen did not go to Troy, and consequently, the cause of war was her shadow; c. It is surprising that people take up such labour because of a 'cloud', a 'shadow'. The poem is lavishly threaded with translations and paraphrases of Euripides' tragedy: ἀηδόνι ποιητάρη..., ἀηδόνι ντροπαλό..., δακρυσμένο πουλί...,[31] ἔτσι τὸ θέλαν οἱ θεοί..., τὸν παλιὸ δόλο

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[28] Complete Poems, 173.

[29] Cf. ὄφρα δέ μοι ζώει καὶ ὁρᾷ φάος ἠελιοιο (*Ilias,* XVIII, 61); εἴ που ἔτι ζώει καὶ ὁρᾷ φάος ἠελίοιο (*Odyssea*, XIV, 44). Regarding the reference of the text to Homer, see E. Benedeti, 46.

[30] Complete Poems, 177.

[31] Cf. 'σὲ τὸν ἀοιδοτάταν ὄρνιθα μελῳδὸν / ἀηδόνα δακρυόεσσαν (*Helena,* 1109-1110).

τῶν θεῶν...,[32] τὸ ποὺπουλο ἑνὸς Κύκνου...,[33] τ' εἶναι θεός; τί μὴ θεός; καὶ τί τ' ἀνάμεσό τους...[34], ἕνα Σκάμαντρο νὰ ξεχειλάει κουφάρια...[35]

The poem *Memory II*[36] gives an account of the narrator's memories of his encounter with some man and their talk, which is presented as a dialogue, although its greater part is uttered by the narrator's interlocutor. The man's first word ends with the translation of the phrase 'ὡυτὸς δὲ 'Αίδης καὶ Διόνυσος' from Heraclites' fragment 15: 'Hades and Dionysus are the same.'[37] In view of the accents that follow, the function of the phrase can be quite far-reaching. So far, the central theme has been the comprehensive nature of poem and the main focus fell on poetry, which, embodied in Greek drama, resounded in the theatres of Ionia, and drama is associated with Dionysus. Consequently, from Heraclites' fragment, which conveys a completely different message, Seferis borrows only the phrase that alludes to the possible relationship between the essence of Dionysus and Hades. Thus, the poet offers an exquisite metaphor of the death of poetry at this place (and consequently, the death of this very place, i.e. of Ephesus).

The poem *Salamis in Cyprus*[38] presents another interesting convergence of the poet's contemporary dimension with the classical tradition. The title refers to the myth rendered in the above-mentioned poem *Helen* about Teucer's founding a city on Cyprus and calling it Salamis in honor of his homeland. The epigraph of the poem is a phrase from Chorus' words in Aeschylus' *Persians:* '… Σαλαμῖνά τε τᾶς νῦν ματρόπολις τῶνδ' αἰτία στεναγμών' (894-896). In order to understand the function of the phrase more clearly, let us recall its immediate context in the choral part (852-908). A messenger comes to Susa, the capital of Persia, to report about the dismal defeat of the Persians at Salamis. Chorus mentions all the locations under the Persian authority, including Cyprus with its cities Paphos, Solos and Salamis. According to Chorus, this is the very Salamis (i.e. Greek Salamis) whose metropolis became the cause of all their woe. Like in Aeschylus, Salamis is associated with Greek Salamis in Seferis' poem too. The poem is inspired by a real story – occupation of Cyprus by the English-

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[32] Cf. ...Ἥρας μηχαναῖς ἐθνήσκετε (610), ... τέχναις θεῶν / ὥλοντ' (*Helena,* 930-931).

[33] Cf. ... ὅτε σ' ἐτέκετο ματρόθεν / χιονόχρως Κύκνον πτερῷ (*Helena*, 214-215).

[34] Cf. ὅτι θεὸς ἤ μὴ θεὸς ἤ τὸ μέσον (*Helena,* 1109-1110).

[35] Cf. ψυχαὶ δὲ πολλαὶ δι' ἔμ' ἐπὶ Σκαμανδρίοις ῥοαῖσιν ἔθανον (*Helena,* 52-53).

[36] Complete Poems, 188.

[37] Accoridng to Benedeti, the preceeding five lines reflect this fragment by Heraclites. Cf. E. Benedeti, 115.

[38] Complete Poems, 190.

men. Once again, the poet most skillfully introduces into the narration phrases and information from Aeschylus' *Persians*, which is surprisingly coherent function-wise. The key phrase of the poem is a quotation from the same tragedy, 'νῆσός τις ἔστι' (447), which on the first occasion refers to the recklessness and ruthlessness of war, while in the end of the poem it reappears to mark the recollection of past events. To better understand the function of the phrase, let us resort to its source and recall the above-mentioned passage from Aeschylus' *Persians*, where the messenger reports about the loss of the Persians. When describing the dismal event, the messenger says that 'full against Salamis an isle arises', where the Greeks severely beat the Persians, who had found a shelter on the island.[39] Thus, already in Aeschylus, the island, associated with the battle at Salamis, is the symbol of the Persian defeat as well as of the Greek's glorious victory. Seferis uses the symbol both ways. On the one hand, for him it is the historical island attested in the *Persians,* while on the other hand it is any island (including Cyprus) where an analogical event could take place. In the first case, this phrase conveys information about the tragedy on Cyprus and, consequently, it carries a negative function. In the second case, line-ends '... 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'[40] imply certain warning and hope that there is an island where even a great empire encountered defeat. Here, the phrase has a positive function.

The poem *The Cats of Saint Nicholas*[41] is based on a Cyprian legend which tells that monks of the St. Nicolas' monastery kept cats, who, hunting at night snakes that had multiplied in those areas, would die themselves in the end from the poisonous bites. The poem has only one allusion to antiquity, when the poet refers to the myth of Aphrodite to specify the location of that particular beach of Cyprus: '... and there, in the distance to the west, is where Aphrodite rose out of the waves.' Bearing this in mind, one may find it quite unexpected that the epigraph to the poem is a passage from Aeschylus' *Agamemnon:* 'Τὸν δ' ἄνευ λύρας ὅμως ὑμνωδεῖ θρῆνον Ἐρινύος αὐτοδίδακτος ἔσωθεν θυμός οὐ τὸ πᾶν ἔχων ἐλπίδος φίλον θράσος' (990). In order to better understand the function of the epi-

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[39] …νῆσός τις ἔστι πρόσθε Σαλαμῖνος τόπων (*Persai,* 447). The passage alludes to the island of Psyttaleia.

[40] This passage allude to the following line from the *Persians*: Ἑλλήσποντον ἱρὸν δοῦλον ὥς δεσμώμασιν ἤλπισε σχήσειν ῥέοντα (*Persai,* 745-746).

[41] Complete Poems, 220.

graph, it is important to consider its context in Aeschylus. Victorious Agamemnon is back from Troy. Festive mood seems to reign around. Clytemnestra, who has laid a purple carpet in his honor, invites her husband into the palace. Chorus' song conveys a mixed message: all seems to be indicative of joy and festivity; however, Chorus has a premonition of evil, which prevents it from freely expressing its delight. The above-mentioned lines render exactly this mood. Seferis' poem drives us double ways: although people found a way to fight reptiles, eventually, cats, who become people's rescuers, were sacrificed to this. Versifying the story, the poet must have been feeling a certain discrepancy between apparent piece and inner tragism imbued in the local myth. Bearing this in mind, we may assume that Seferis found the lines from his favorite tragedy the best appropriate to render his mood.

The poem *On Stage*[42], which is very difficult to interpret, shows obvious connection with antiquity. In my opinion, the 'plot' to a certain extent refers to Aeschylus' trilogy, especially to *The Libation Bearers*. The poet presents Clytemnestra right before her death. The poet does not specify details but only offers allusions. Clytemnestra rises from her bed, to which she will never return, she gets out of the bath, in which she revenged on Agamemnon 'What where you after? Your look a stammer. / You had just woken up / leaving the sheets to grow ice-cold / and the baths of reverenge.' To refer to the bath, Seferis uses the term 'λουτρά', which is mentioned several times in the *Libation Bearers*. Besides, the appearance of the slave women, who carry Orestes' things, marks the start of the main phase of the revenge. The slave women figure everywhere. The chief guarantee of the revenge is the earth – 'γῆ', presented together with 'δίκη'. 'Earth' is mentioned several times in Serefis' poem, which, however, can be a mere coincidence 'Your feet bare on the soil / on the cut frass'; 'you stood rooted to the soil.' Clytemnestra's breasts also have very important function. In the most dramatic moment, when Orestes is going to kill his mother, Clytemnestra shows him her breast, which fed him as an infant. However, neither this argument will stop Orestes – so, Clytemnestra's breast is of stone 'two small purple stones / covered your nipples.' In the *Libation Bearers,* Clytemnestra deliberately follows Orestes into the palace to meet her death; the same happens in Seferis poem, where Clytemnestra obediently accepts her death. The final phrase of the poem 'am I not the sea?' clearly alludes to the well-known phrase from Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*: Ἔστιν θάλασσα – τίς δέ νιν κατασβέσει' (958), included as a quote or translation in several of Seferis' poems; however, here it is used in a completely different

42 Complete Poems, 202.

meaning. In this case, the author puts emphasis on the fact that Clytemnestra is not the inexhaustible sea but a mortal human.

As shown above, Seferis frequently refers to the information from the classical tradition, which appears as a direct quotation, a Modern Greek translation or a paraphrase. In this respect, Aeschylus is the most important source for the poet; Homer comes in the second place, Euripides in the third, while other poets are quoted rarely. Remarkably, most of the ancient quotations used by Seferis are not among those admitted as maxims in world literature, and consequently, appear quite unexpected. They are so inherent with the Modern Greek verse and the new context that the distance between the past and the present, the boundary between ancient and Modern Greek literatures seem to be abolished, which once again accentuate the integrity of Greek culture, Greek civilization. This exactly can be the reason why the poet so frequently resorts to ancient texts.