

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY LIBRARY CHRONICLE

VOLUME LVIII • NUMBER 3 • SPRING 1997

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Princeton University Library Chronicle

Published under the sponsorship of the Friends of the Princeton University Library.

Issued three times a year: Autumn, Winter, Spring

Institutional subscription: Thirty dollars Single numbers: Ten dollars

Orders and remittances may be sent to Princeton University Library, One Washington Road, Princeton, NJ 08544-2098.

Printed at Princeton Academic Press, Inc.
Lawrenceville, NJ 08648

Composed by Martin-Waterman Associates, Ltd.

US ISSN 0032-8456

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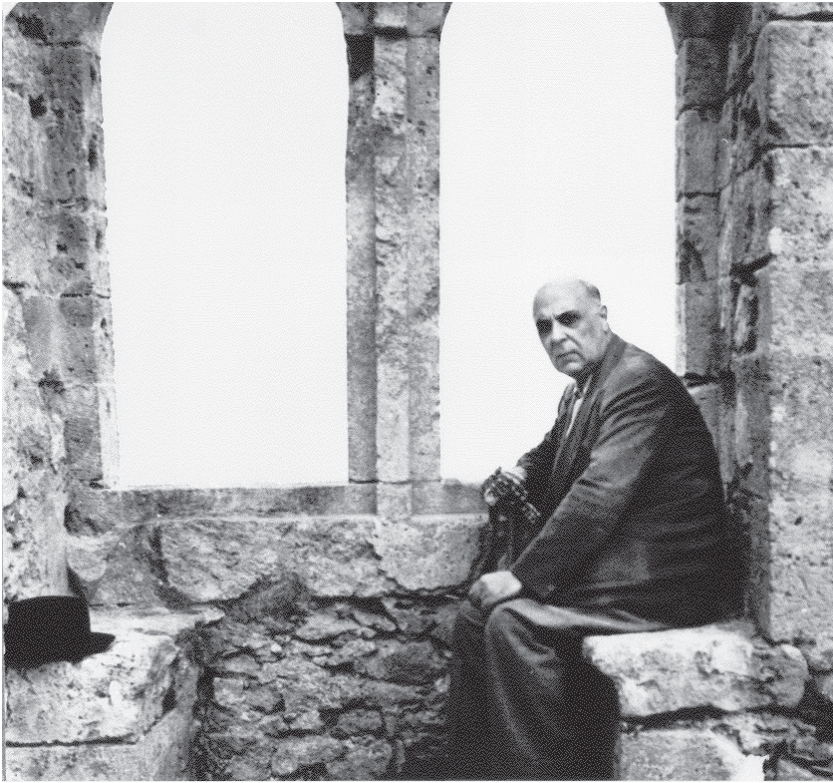
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George Seferis at Aghios Ilarion, Cyprus, in 1953. George Seferis's Photographs of Cyprus, Manuscripts Division, Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.
Used by permission of the Cultural Foundation of the National Bank of Greece.

Mythistorema¹

BY GEORGE SEFERIS

TRANSLATED BY EDMUND KEELEY AND PHILIP SHERRARD

I

The angel —
three years we waited for him, attention riveted,
closely scanning
the pines the shore the stars.
One with the blade of the plough or the ship's keel
we were searching to find once more the first seed
so that the age-old drama could begin again.

We returned to our homes broken,
limbs incapable, mouths cracked
by the taste of rust and brine.
When we woke we travelled towards the north, strangers
plunged into mist by the immaculate wings of swans that
wounded us.
On winter nights the strong wind from the east maddened us,
in the summers we were lost in the agony of days that couldn't
die.

We brought back
these carved reliefs of a humble art.

¹ A cycle of 24 poems; the entire cycle is in *George Seferis: Collected Poems*, revised edition. Translated, edited and introduced by Edmund Keeley and Philip Sherrard (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995). Reprinted here with the kind permission of Princeton University Press, Edmund Keeley, and Denise Sherrard.

I woke with this marble head in my hands;
it exhausts my elbows and I don't know where to put it down.
It was falling into the dream as I was coming out of the dream
so our life became one and it will be very difficult for it to
separate again.

I look at the eyes: neither open nor closed
I speak to the mouth which keeps trying to speak
I hold the cheeks which have broken through the skin.
That's all I'm able to do.

My hands disappear and come towards me
mutilated.

The garden with its fountains in the rain
you will see only from behind the clouded glass
of the low window. Your room
will be lit only by the flames from the fireplace
and sometimes the distant lightning will reveal
the wrinkles on your forehead, my old Friend.

The garden with the fountains that in your hands
was a rhythm of the other life, beyond the broken
statues and the tragic columns
and a dance among the oleanders
near the new quarries —
misty glass will have cut it off from your life.
You won't breathe; earth and the sap of the trees
will spring from your memory to strike
this window struck by rain
from the outside world.

Sleep wrapped you in green leaves like a tree
 you breathed like a tree in the quiet light
 in the limpid spring I looked at your face:
 eyelids closed, eyelashes brushing the water.
 In the soft grass my fingers found your fingers
 I held your pulse a moment
 and felt elsewhere your heart's pain.

Under the plane tree, near the water, among laurel
 sleep moved you and scattered you
 around me, near me, without my being able to touch the whole of
 you —
 one as you were with your silence;
 seeing your shadow grow and diminish,
 lose itself in the other shadows, in the other
 world that let you go yet held you back.

The life that they gave us to live, we lived.
 Pity those who wait with such patience
 lost in the black laurel under the heavy plane trees
 and those, alone, who speak to cisterns and wells
 and drown in the voice's circles.
 Pity the companion who shared our privation and our sweat
 and plunged into the sun like a crow beyond the ruins,
 without hope of enjoying our reward.

Give us, outside sleep, serenity.

On the track, once more on the track, on the track,
 how many times around, how many blood-stained laps, how
 many black
 rows; the people who watch me,
 who watched me when, in the chariot,
 I raised my hand glorious, and they roared triumphantly.

The froth of the horses strikes me, when will the horses tire?
 The axle creaks, the axle burns, when will the axle burst into
 flame?
 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?
 and I feel my knees give way over the axle
 over the wheels, over the wild track
 knees buckle easily when the gods so will it,
 no one can escape, what use is strength, you can't
 escape the sea that cradled you and that you search for
 at this time of trial, with the horses panting,
 with the reeds that used to sing in autumn to the Lydian mode
 the sea you cannot find no matter how you run
 no matter how you circle past the black, bored Eumenides,
 unforgiven.

December 1933 — December 1934



George Seferis and Edmund Keeley in Athens, 1969. Photograph by Dimitris Papadimos,
© E.L.I.A. (Hellenic Literary and Historical Archives Society). Used by permission.

Modern Greek Literature at Princeton

Building a Program and a Collection

BY DIMITRI GONDICAS

“Working in Modern Greek literature is a lonely enterprise: few know its riches, very few teach the subject, even fewer come to the literature as scholars or critics, especially in the United States,” wrote Edmund Keeley, Class of 1948, in his *Cavafy’s Alexandria*.¹ Twenty years later, in the preface to the second edition,² he would remark: “working in Modern Greek literature is no longer the lonely enterprise I saw it to be in [1976]. The discipline of Modern Greek Studies, then in its infancy, has grown measurably during the intervening years and has now found a hospitable — if sometimes less than ample — home in a number of American Universities.”

Overshadowed by and unfairly compared to their venerable Classical ancestors, the writers of modern Greece remained virtually unknown outside their country for the greater part of this century. When not totally ignored, Modern Greek literature was until recently relegated to “minor” status, for the simple reason that it was unavailable in translation and therefore inaccessible to critics and the broader public. This is no longer the case: in the last two decades, C. P. Cavafy has become recognized as a major twentieth-century poet in any language; two Greek poets, George Seferis and Odysseus Elytis, have earned Nobel prizes; the novels of Nikos Kazantzakis have achieved broad circulation; and the poet Yannis Ritsos has received international acclaim. How did this dramatic change occur? How does a virtually unknown national literature become an international literature?

It takes translator-scholars, academic institutions, and publishers working together to discover new foreign poets and establish new

¹ Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1976, p. vii.

² Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996, p. ix.

literary fields. In the case of modern Greek literature and the English-speaking world, this was accomplished in large measure by the efforts of such writers as E. M. Forster, Arnold Toynbee, T. S. Eliot, Bernard Spencer, Lawrence Durrell, Henry Miller, Rex Warner, and W. H. Auden, all of whom were deeply influenced by the new poetic voices of modern Greece. Translators and critics such as Edmund Keeley, Philip Sherrard, George Savidis, Nanos Valaoritis, Kimon Friar, John Movrogordato, Rae Dalven, Peter Bien, Peter Green, and Andonis Decavalles wrote the first critical studies and English translations of the works of modern Greek writers. Editors and publishers John Lehmann (*New Writing* and *London Magazine*, London), Theodore and Renée Weiss (*Quarterly Review of Literature*, Princeton), Daniel Halpern (*Antaeus*, New York), and Ben Sonnenberg (*Grand Street*, New York) also played a crucial role in the early dissemination of modern Greek literature in England and America.

As Professor of English and Creative Writing at Princeton for forty years, Keeley taught Modern Greek poetry and the art of translation to scores of students. His pioneering translations and studies of modern Greek poetry were published by Princeton University Press to critical acclaim and broad public appreciation (more than 50,000 copies of his collaborative translations of Cavafy have been sold — a very impressive figure by any standard — and the Keeley-Sherrard renderings of Seferis's poetry have sold very well, too). Keeley's masterful translations (many of them in collaboration with Philip Sherrard or George Savidis) of all the major modern Greek poets — Cavafy, Sikelianos, Seferis, Ritsos, and Elytis — are now considered exemplary in that they represent sensitive and nuanced readings of the original texts to which they remain close, while at the same time providing resonant poems in English. It is widely accepted that the Nobel Committee recognized the work of George Seferis and Odysseus Elytis in large part on the basis of their reading of the Keeley-Sherrard translations and the prior critical and public reception of these translations.

First-generation American neohellenists were very few, and they were often unable to find work in university settings. Some were forced to become independent writer-critics. Others, like Keeley, who held academic appointments, worked in an intellectual and institutional vacuum with regard to their work in modern Greek

literature. After all, professors of English, even creative writers (Keeley is also the author of seven novels), were not supposed to waste their time translating obscure foreign poets whose names one could barely pronounce! Yet, although most of these pioneer writers and critics were not given the opportunity by their institutions to train graduate students in Modern Greek, they did manage to institutionalize the field of Modern Greek Studies.

This first generation has left behind an important and enduring legacy: the internationalization and broad recognition of modern Greek literature and the creation of Modern Greek Studies programs that will produce the next generation of neohellenists. Edmund Keeley and Princeton University played a fundamental role in this process.³ Over the last two centuries, Princeton has enjoyed a unique and close relationship to the Greek world⁴ and the people of Greece.⁵ The University was and continues to be a leading force in the development of Classics,⁶ Classical Archaeology,⁷ Classical Philoso-

³ For a personal account of the early years of Modern Greek Studies at Princeton, see “An Interview with Edmund Keeley,” in *Paralos: A Journey into Hellenism*, No. 1 (1995), published by the Hellenic Association of Princeton with the support of the Program in Hellenic Studies.

⁴ Nicholas Biddle (1786–1844), Class of 1801, was the second American citizen of the independent United States to travel to Greece. Two of his letters from his 1806 trip to Greece are preserved in Firestone Library. See also R. A. McNeal, *Nicholas Biddle in Greece: The Journals and Letters of 1806* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993). Biddle was a precursor of the American philhellenic movement that aided Greece in her struggle for independence (1821–1828) from the Ottoman Empire. In the last decades of the nineteenth century, Princeton Classics Professor William Sloane was the leader of the American Olympic movement that successfully revived the Olympic Games in Athens in 1896. Led by Sloane, the small American team included four Princetonians. Among them was Robert Garrett, Class of 1897, who earned several medals in track events. The discus he threw in winning the gold medal is in the University’s collections. In 1942 Garrett donated to Princeton his famous collection of more than 10,000 manuscripts, among them sixteen Byzantine Greek manuscripts of the highest quality.

⁵ Princeton has a long tradition of supporting Greek students: the first two foreign students to receive scholarships from the College of New Jersey were Greek nationals Constantine J. Menaeos and Luke K. Oeconomos, both of the Class of 1840. The Bylaws and Minutes of the Nassau-Hall Education Society held in the Princeton University Archives, Mudd Library, include a “Report of the Board of Managers” (30 July 1836), where the Society petitions the College to support these two natives of “Greece — the land of eloquence and of poetry,” referring to them as “countrymen of Homer, Xenophon and Plato.” Today the University enrolls a large number of Greek students, most of them on financial aid.

⁶ The Classics Department at Princeton has a long and distinguished history dating back to the founding of the College of New Jersey. Up until 1919 when the curriculum was reformed to allow electives, all Princeton students were required to learn ancient Greek. Edward Capps, Professor of Classics at Princeton from 1907 to 1936, left his mark on Greek education by chairing the boards of two American-sponsored institutions in Greece, Athens College and the American School of Classical Studies at Athens. Capps also led American efforts to help Greece during the two World Wars.

⁷ Princeton was one of the first American universities to establish the teaching of Classical

phy,⁸ and Byzantine Studies⁹ in America. Owing to Keeley's presence here and his translations of modern Greek poetry published by the Princeton University Press, Princeton's name also became associated with Modern Greek Studies even before the University made a continuing commitment to this new field. Not surprisingly, the Modern Greek Studies Association had its first office here (with Keeley as its first President) and held its first symposium at Princeton in 1969.¹⁰

In the 1970s Modern Greek Studies were slowly incorporated into Princeton's undergraduate curriculum, either in the form of regular language courses taught by Professor Richard Burgi, or as student-initiated seminars in literature taught by Keeley. One graduate student, Rachel Hadas, who earned her Ph.D. in 1982, studied with Keeley and Robert Fagles and wrote a dissertation on George

Archaeology in the late nineteenth century, and was one of the founding institutions of the American School of Classical Studies (ASCS) at Athens in 1881. For a history of the early years of Classical Archaeology at Princeton, see Marilyn Aronberg Lavin, *The Eye of the Tiger: The Founding and Development of the Department of Art and Archaeology, 1883–1923*, Princeton University (Princeton: The Department of Art and Archaeology and The Art Museum, Princeton University, 1983). In this century scores of Princetonians have been involved in excavations in Greece, most notably in the Agora of Athens, where the first director was Professor T. Leslie Shear, Sr. The Agora excavations were later directed for many years by Professor of Art and Archaeology T. Leslie Shear, Jr., Class of 1959, who earned his Ph.D. at Princeton in 1966. The current director of the Agora excavations is John McK. Camp II, Princeton Ph.D. 1977. Many Princeton alumni have served as directors of the ASCS, most recently William Coulson, Princeton Ph.D. 1968, and before him Stephen Miller, Princeton Ph.D. 1970 and Professor of Art and Archaeology Richard Stillwell, Class of 1921 and Princeton MFA 1924, who was also Director of the Corinth excavations. In the last ten years Professor William A.P. Childs, Class of 1964 and Princeton Ph.D. 1971, has led Princeton's excavation in Polis Chrysochous, Cyprus, training many undergraduate and graduate students.

⁸ Professor Gregory Vlastos arrived on campus in 1955 and, under his leadership, Princeton became the first American university to establish the field of Classical Philosophy as part of the undergraduate and graduate curriculum in Philosophy. See Alexander Nehamas, "Gregory Vlastos," in Patricia H. Marks, ed., *Luminaries: Princeton Faculty Remembered* (Princeton: Association of Princeton Graduate Alumni, 1996), pp. 341–350.

⁹ Princeton's leadership in Byzantine Studies in America was established by the presence of such scholars as Howard Crosby Butler, Earl Baldwin Smith, Charles Rufus Morey, and Kurt Weitzmann, all of the Department of Art and Archaeology; Oliver Strunk and Kenneth Levy in the Department of Music; and the Orthodox theologian Father Georges Florovsky. The papers of most of these scholars are housed in Firestone Library, while the Index of Christian Art at Princeton continues to attract scholars from all over the world. For a history of Byzantine Studies at Princeton, see Kurt Weitzmann, "The Contribution of the Princeton Department of Art and Archaeology to the Study of Byzantine Art," in Slobodan Curcic and Archer St. Clair, eds., *Byzantium at Princeton: Byzantine Art and Archaeology at Princeton University* (Princeton: Department of Art and Archaeology, The Art Museum, and Princeton University Library, 1986).

¹⁰ *Modern Greek Writers*, a volume of essays based on the symposium papers, was edited by Edmund Keeley and Peter Bien and published by the Princeton University Press in 1972.

Seferis and Robert Frost; she is now a Professor of English literature at Rutgers and a distinguished poet and translator.

It was on this intellectual and institutional legacy that the Program in Hellenic Studies was founded in 1979 with an endowment set up by Princeton alumnus Stanley J. Seeger, Class of 1952, an ardent philhellene and now a citizen of Greece. The Seeger Hellenic Fund was created to “advance the understanding of Greece and its influence . . . and to stimulate creative expression and thought in and about modern Greece.” The Program, led successively by W. R. Connor, Princeton Ph.D. 1961, Edmund Keeley, and now by Alexander Nehamas, Princeton Ph.D. 1971, has focussed on the development of a curriculum in Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies,¹¹ on strengthening Princeton’s connections to Greece and Greek scholars and academic institutions,¹² and on a series of publications in Modern Greek Studies.¹³ Having built on a distinguished tradition in Classical and Byzantine Studies, Princeton is now a leading center for teaching and research on modern Greece, its literary accomplishments, history, politics, and culture.



As Princeton’s Hellenic Studies Program continues to grow, it attracts and supports increasing numbers of graduate students¹⁴ and research scholars¹⁵ from around the world. Developing research

¹¹ Since 1985, the Program in Hellenic Studies has offered an undergraduate Certificate in Hellenic Studies. Each year, more than fifteen classes are offered in Byzantine or Modern Greek Studies. In 1996, a new graduate program in Classical and Hellenic Studies was approved by the faculty.

¹² The Program in Hellenic Studies maintains exchange programs with a number of Greek institutions, including the University of Thessaloniki and the American School of Classical Studies at Athens, and enjoys close scholarly ties with several other Greek institutions, such as the Hellenic Research Foundation, the Gennadius Library, the Benaki Museum, and the Hellenic Literary and Historical Archive.

¹³ The Princeton Modern Greek Studies series is jointly sponsored by the Program in Hellenic Studies and the Princeton University Press. It includes fourteen titles in modern Greek literature, history, and anthropology. Princeton University Press also publishes more than sixty other titles in Byzantine or Modern Greek Studies.

¹⁴ Currently at Princeton there are more than twenty enrolled graduate students in several disciplines whose work focusses on Byzantine or Modern Greek Studies. Many of these students are supported by the Program in Hellenic Studies with graduate fellowships or special prizes.

¹⁵ Every year, the Program in Hellenic Studies supports more than twenty-five visiting research fellows or writers-in-residence from Greece. Most of these visitors make extensive use of the collections in Firestone Library.

resources in post-Classical Greek Studies has been a priority for the Program for the last decade or so. In close collaboration with the Library, and with the generous assistance of Princeton alumni and the Friends of the Library, it has been possible to build an impressive teaching and research collection in Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies to complement the University's distinguished holdings in papyri, incunabula, Classics, Classical Archaeology, Byzantine manuscripts, and Byzantine Art. Collecting focusses on areas of existing strengths, such as modern Greek literature and theater, Anglo-American literary philhellenism, travellers to Greece and the Levant, modern Greek politics, and United States-Greek relations during this century.

Today, Princeton's holdings in twentieth-century Greek literature consist of an outstanding collection of several thousand volumes, including more than 2,000 first, annotated, or inscribed editions¹⁶ in the Department of Rare Books and Special Collections. Firestone Library also holds important manuscripts of modern Greek writers as well as the papers of leading translators and scholars of modern Greek literature. Anyone wishing to study the development of the field of Modern Greek Studies in America or the internationalization of modern Greek literature would need to come to Princeton to work in the collections.

Princeton's modern Greek literature archives (containing manuscripts, correspondence, ephemera, photographs, recordings, etc.) are quite substantial (more than 200 linear feet) and growing. While it is impossible to do justice here to the wealth of the collections, one cannot resist referring to certain gems that they contain: George Seferis's manuscripts of works that he wrote in residence at Princeton, his personal library of his own works (annotated) in Greek and other languages, and his correspondence with T. S. Eliot, Henry Miller, and Edmund Keeley; Odysseus Elytis's unpublished manuscripts and correspondence with the eminent Italian critic and translator Mario Vitti; Kimon Friar's correspondence with Nikos Kazantzakis; the letters and manuscripts of Demetrius Capetanakis contained in the Lehmann Family Papers; and the archive of the Modern Greek Studies Association and its scholarly journal. These

¹⁶ These books are included in the Modern Greek libraries of Kimon Friar, Edmund Keeley, and Mario Vitti that are held in the Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Firestone Library.

and many other smaller collections are invaluable resources for students and visiting scholars not only in Modern Greek, but also in Comparative Literature.

The correspondence between the great Greek poet George Seferis and Edmund Keeley, published here for the first time,¹⁷ takes us through twenty years (1951–1971) of literary collaboration and friendship. Keeley's introductory essay and the actual letters also provide insight into the unique problems relating to literary translation, as well as the problem of creating an audience for the poet in the English-speaking world. The letters also record Seferis's emergence as the conscience of his country during the difficult days of the military dictatorship (1967–1974).

In the first half of the period covered, George Seferis, a member of the Greek diplomatic corps, moved from London to the Middle East, Cyprus, Athens, New York, and back to London, retiring as ambassador to England ("George Seferis" was the pen name of the diplomat George Seferiades). He spent the last ten years of his life in Greece, except for a few trips, including two to Princeton, first in 1965 to receive an honorary doctorate and second in 1968 to take up residence at the Institute for Advanced Study. Keeley's introductory essay and the letters provide an outline of Seferis's preoccupations and concerns during his time in the United States.

While in Princeton, Seferis wrote his famous *Cheirographo Okt. '68* (Manuscript Oct. '68), a scathing critique of the Greek junta, censorship, and the present human condition. He also wrote one of his last poems, "Letter to Rex Warner," which Keeley was asked to translate after the poet returned to Athens. The following excerpt evokes the atmosphere and landscape that Seferis encountered in Princeton where his friend, the novelist and translator Rex Warner, visited him:

Years went by and I found you again
on soil lush with vegetation,
where poison ivy sometimes lies in wait
and studious children learn
to unravel wise books
and the labyrinth of love.

¹⁷ A Greek edition of the correspondence will be published in Athens by Agra Publishers in the autumn of 1997.



Ambassador George Seferiades and Mrs. Seferiades in London, 1961. The carved stone mermaid on the mantel was the poet's talisman. Photograph courtesy of Anna Londou and the Cultural Foundation of the National Bank of Greece. Used by permission.

You always celebrated Homer and his breed.
A squirrel — spasmodic circumflex —
climbed higher and higher up a giant tree
and you watched it
laughing.

Our life is always a separation
and a more difficult presence.

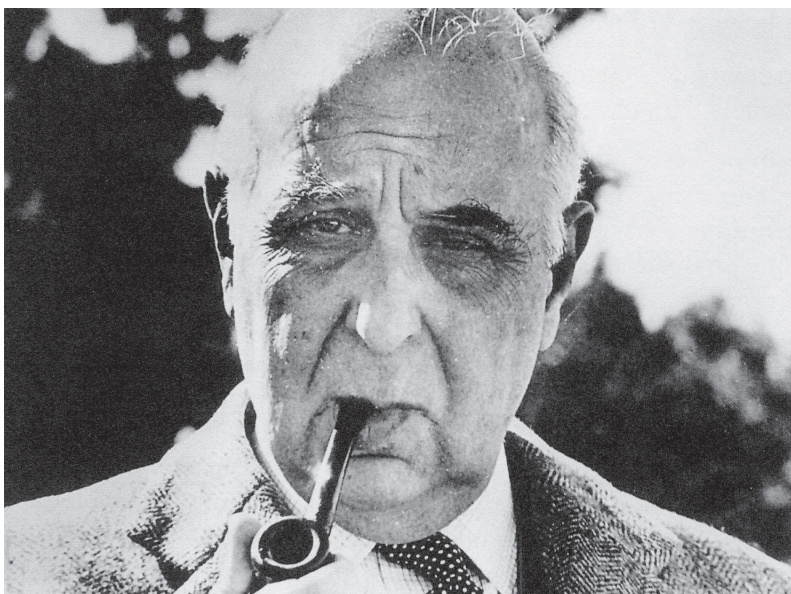
The reference to Homer, an ever-present figure in Seferis's poetry, brings to mind a reported story about the poet after a reading he gave at Princeton:

STUDENT: Mr. Seferis, who is the world's greatest poet?

SEFERIS: Homer, my boy, *Homer*!

Seferis's response expresses his firm belief in the continuity and contemporary relevance of the Hellenic tradition, as well as his view of his own position within it.

The manuscripts of *Cheirographo Okt. '68* and "Letter to Rex Warner," as well as extensive correspondence and other materials relating to George Seferis in America, are housed in the Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Firestone Library. They were recently donated to the Program in Hellenic Studies and the Library by the family of the poet, his widow Maro Seferis and his stepdaughter Anna Londou, as an acknowledgement of Princeton's honoring of the poet's work and of the University's support for the study of modern Greek literature, an international literature that is now firmly established in the English-speaking world.



George Seferis in 1967. Photograph courtesy of Anna Londou.

The King of Asini¹

BY GEORGE SEFERIS

TRANSLATED BY EDMUND KEELEY AND PHILIP SHERRARD

Ἀσίνην τε . . . — *ILLAD*

All morning long we looked around the citadel
starting from the shaded side there where the sea
green and without lustre — 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 monotonous see-saw motion,
growing weaker and weaker.

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 Asini, 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:
the same sound that our oars make in the sea.
The king of Asini a void under the mask

¹ From "Logbook I," in *George Seferis: Collected Poems*, revised edition. Translated, edited and introduced by Edmund Keeley and Philip Sherrard (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995). Reprinted here with the kind permission of Princeton University Press, Edmund Keeley, and Denise Sherrard.

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 travelling like a fish
in the dawn calm of the sea:
a void everywhere with us.
And the bird, a wing broken,
that flew away last winter
— tabernacle of life —
and the young woman who left to play
with the dog-teeth of summer
and the soul that sought the lower world gibbering
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
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 waned so strangely in our lives,
those who remained the shadow of waves and thoughts with the
seas’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 unremitting
despair
while the yellow current slowly carries down rushes uprooted 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:
‘*Ἀσίνην τε . . . Ἀσίνην τε . . .*’. If only that could be the of king Asini
we’ve been searching for so carefully on this acropolis
sometimes touching with our fingers his touch upon the stones.

Asini, summer ’38 — Athens, Jan. ’40

Helen¹

BY GEORGE SEFERIS

TRANSLATED BY EDMUND KEELEY AND PHILIP SHERRARD

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 raving of the frenzied slave-woman.

‘The nightingales won’t let you sleep in Platres.’

¹ From “Logbook III,” in *George Seferis: Collected Poems*, revised edition. Translated, edited and introduced by Edmund Keeley and Philip Sherrard (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995). Reprinted here with the kind permission of Princeton University Press, Edmund Keeley, and Denise Sherrard.

Platres: where is Platres? And this island: who knows it?
I've lived my life hearing names I've never heard before:
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 alters 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
with the large eyelids,
she was there, on the banks of a Delta.

And at Troy?

At Troy, nothing: just a phantom image.
That's how the gods wanted it.
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 desolated 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 wisp 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,
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.

Corresponding with George Seferis, 1951– 1971

BY EDMUND KEELEY

When George Seferis (pen name of George Seferiades¹) received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1963 — the first Greek Nobel laureate in any category — the Permanent Secretary of the Swedish Academy, Anders Osterling, concluded his presentation of the poet by suggesting that modern Greece’s “rich literature has had to wait perhaps too long for the Nobel laurels.” He was right: at least two other Greek writers, Nikos Kazantzakis and Angelos Sikelianos, had been nominated with enthusiasm in the past but had failed to be so honored. And Seferis appears, in all humility, to have taken up the Permanent Secretary’s theme by devoting almost the whole of his Nobel lecture to an outline of the literature of modern Greece, beginning with the poetry and drama of the seventeenth-century Cretan Renaissance, the Ionian School of Dionysios Solomos and Andreas Kalvos, and Seferis’s immediate predecessors, the poets Kostis Palamas, C. P. Cavafy, and Sikelianos. To most American lovers of poetry, only one or two of these names are likely to have any significance, but as Seferis suggests, they represent the most recent flowering of the longest literary tradition in the Western world, whose language has survived in some form since before Homer’s time.

There have actually been two persistent forms of the language, the spoken and the purist, and these have struggled to dominate literature in several periods of Greek history, most recently in the conflict between “demotiki” and “katharevousa” that began even before Greece liberated itself from Ottoman occupation in the early nineteenth century. That conflict appears to have ended once and

¹ George Seferis is sometimes rendered as Giorgos (or Georgios) Sepheris, and Seferiades as Sepheriades (or Seferiadiis).



George Seferis (right) and Edmund Keeley in Athens, 1969, with the carved stone mermaid. Photograph by Dimitris Papadimos, © E.L.I.A. (Hellenic Literary and Historical Archives Society). Used by permission.

for all with the demise of the 1967–1974 Colonels’ dictatorship, years during which political oppression was matched by a linguistic violence most evident in the ludicrous purist malapropisms of dictator George Papadopoulos. But the language has always been in flux — a healthy thing in Seferis’s view — and the best Modern Greek writers, especially the poets, have always had to find a way to resolve the particular conflict they inherited. They have done so either by creating some kind of balance between the purist and the spoken, as in Alexandros Papadiamandis and Cavafy, or by creating their own language based on the spoken tradition, as Solomos was the first to attempt successfully and as Seferis was the most recent to promote with both simplicity and eloquence, whether his medium was the subtly evocative lyricism of his poetry or the carefully crafted prose of his essays and journals.

Seferis reveals his lyrical ambition in a much quoted passage from a poem written while he was in Egypt during the Second World War:

I want nothing more than to speak simply, to be granted
that grace.
Because we've loaded even our song with so much music
that it's slowly sinking
and we've decorated our art so much that its features
have been eaten away by gold
and it's time to say our few words because tomorrow our
soul sets sail.²

It took Seferis half a lifetime of perfecting his style, of assimilating influences from French Symbolism and T. S. Eliot's modernism and of making these new in a Greek way, before he arrived at the grace he sought. And he did so by following the prescription he reveals in one of his last poems, presumably set in the patio garden of his Athens home:

Accept who you are.
Don't
drown the poem in deep plane trees;
nurture it with what earth and rock you have.
For things beyond this —
to find them dig in this same place.³

Henry Miller was among the first to discern the secret source of Seferis's developing genius. During his one visit to Greece in 1939, Miller was fortunate enough to be introduced to both the poet and the poetry by George Katsimbalis, who became Miller's hero in *The Colossus of Maroussi*, as Seferis became among his intimate companions on the voyage of discovery that the American recorded in what many consider his best book. Miller found that Seferis's poems of the prewar period were becoming "more and more gem-like, more compact, compressed, scintillating and revelatory," and he felt that he had "begun to ripen into the universal poet by passionately rooting himself in the soil of his people." That rooting was more complex than Miller could have seen in his brief visit,

² George Seferis, "An Old Man on the River Bank," translated by Edmund Keeley and Philip Sherrard, in *George Seferis: Collected Poems*, Revised Edition (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995) pp. 146–147.

³ George Seferis, "Three Secret Poems: Summer Solstice, 7," in *George Seferis: Collected Poems*, p. 209.



George Seferis in the patio of his home at Agras Street, Athens, 1970. Photograph courtesy of Anna Londonou.

but he touched on one of its sources when he suggested that Seferis's passion for his own country and his own people — a thing Miller thought himself incapable of feeling about America — was not manifest in “a hidebound chauvinistic way but as a result of patient discovery following years of absence abroad.”

It would appear that Seferis's passion grew with one or another form of exile, beginning with his dislocation by losing his childhood home in Smyrna after the Asia Minor catastrophe and continuing through his years of foreign diplomatic service from the lowest to the highest rank in a number of countries — England, Albania, Syria, Egypt, South Africa, Italy, Turkey, Lebanon, and England again. This travelling far from home, especially a home that was unrecoverable, gave him an affinity with Homer's Odysseus and his companions that engendered several of the major voices in his poetry, whether that of the weakest companion, Elpenor, or that of the poet's Odyssean persona, sometimes called Mathios Paskalis or Stratis Thalassinos (Stratis the sailor). The poet's passion for his country had both a light and a dark side. There is in his work the yearning for a homeland where the almond trees blossom, the marble gleams in the sun, the sea breaks into propitious

waves, a land of the living blessed. But at the same time the poet lets us know that this land — so small, so poor, so ancient — is scarred by a tragic history and a persistent contemporary sorrow, and its beautiful islands seem always just beyond the homesick voyager's reach. Perhaps the most famous line in Seferis's poetry, heard again and again in Athenian literary circles, is the one that opens a poem with the self-mocking title "In the Manner of G. S.": "Wherever I travel Greece wounds me."⁴ The wounding is that of a bittersweet nostalgia, of a longing to return to the light by a contemporary Odyssean soul already too familiar with the darkness of the asphodel plain.

Seferis's effort to perfect his prose style also took some years, and the source of his major inspiration in this mode was a seemingly curious one. In his Nobel lecture, the poet tells us that "no other man has taught me more how to write prose" than one General Ioannis Makriyannis, who learned to write in his fashion after the age of thirty-five in order to record his experience of the Greek War of Independence and its aftermath in a mid-nineteenth century document without punctuation that, in Seferis's view, "resembles a wall built stone by stone; all his words perform their function and have their roots; sometimes there is something Homeric in their movement." That wall is invoked again in a lecture on Makriyannis that Seferis delivered in Alexandria, Egypt, during the Second World War, where he concludes that this writer's "finished building" left "the imprint of the adventures of an uninterrupted human action . . . to which we give the name of style or rhythm."

Makriyannis' model inspired Seferis to write honestly, clearly, in a personal style and rhythm that were able to forward an immense sensitivity yet without the "false pretenses of rhetoric" that his predecessor had also rejected, so that some think Seferis's contribution to Greek prose as great as that to Greek poetry. But equally important, the Makriyannis *Memoirs*⁵ also inspired the particular vision of the Greek spirit that Seferis carried with him as both poet and diplomat. In his Alexandria lecture, he tells us that "the content of Makriyannis' writing is the unending and tragic struggle of a man who, deeply rooted in the instincts of his race, is striving for

⁴ In *George Seferis: Collected Poems*, p. 52.

⁵ The English translation by H. A. Lidderdale has the title *Makriyannis: The Memoirs of General Makriyannis* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966).

freedom, justice, and human dignity,” and as “the free man, the just man, the man who is the ‘measure’ of life,” Makriyannis embodied “the one basic idea in Hellenism.” Seferis goes on to speak of justice in the Hellenic sense as a matter of proper measure, of avoiding hubris, that excess of arrogance that brought Xerxes to defeat at the hands of the Greeks when he outrageously flogged the sea. And in another context, the poet tells us that the Greek concept of hubris embraces nature as well, since even the sun cannot overstep its measure; if it does, as Heraclitus pointed out, the Erinyes, handmaids of Justice, will track it down as relentlessly as they did Orestes.⁶

This theme, and the poet’s belief in the process of human rejuvenation that he sees in the Greek light, are most forcefully expressed in the long, three-part poem called “*Thrush*” that he wrote on his return to Greece at the end of his wartime service with the Greek government-in-exile. The poem grew out of a major personal crisis perhaps equal to what he had known on losing his home in Smyrna during his early twenties (dating the progress of Seferis’s life is easy because he was born with the century on day 29 of a leap year February — which allowed him to claim, with a small ironic smile, that he was one-fourth as old as he seemed). This second crisis was at least in part the product of his having to serve two masters — his government and his muse — for much of his adult life, since he could hardly support himself on writing alone. The tension caused by his public service became especially acute during the pre-war and war years, beginning with his duties in the Department of Press and Information under the Metaxas dictatorship and coming to a head after his wartime years in Egypt and South Africa. His mood at the time of his return finds its first expression in certain lines of a poem called “Last Stop”, written in October 1944, while he was waiting to cross over from Italy to Greece:

Man frays easily in wars;
man is soft, a sheaf of grass,

⁶ The lecture, “Makriyannis,” is included in George Seferis, *On the Greek Style: Selected Essays in Poetry and Hellenism*, translated by Rex Warner and Th. D. Frangopoulos (Boston: Little Brown and Co., 1966), pp. 25–65. The allusion to Heraclitus appears in the essay “Letter on ‘*The Thrush*’”, p. 104.

lips and fingers that hunger for a white breast
eyes that half-close in the radiance of day
and feet that would run, no matter how tired,
at the slightest call of profit. . . .
when the harvest comes
some call out to exorcize the demon
some become entangled in their riches, others deliver
speeches.
But what good are exorcisms, riches, speeches
when the living are not there?⁷

Exactly two years later, Seferis, still spiritually exhausted and in search of renewal, took leave from the Foreign Ministry in order to find peace and solitude on the island of Poros where his sister-in-law owned a villa called "Serenity." His journal reports: "I came here last Wednesday, when a long period of my life in service had come to a close — eight or nine years, starting from the period of the Anschluss. The Ministry has given me two months' vacation. . . . I'm thinking of spending it here or wherever they will leave me in peace. I want to be able to think . . . I carry much filth within me that must go." He begins to serve his muse again, reading and writing during the day with the shutters closed and the electric light on because the beauty outside constantly interrupts his work.

It takes three weeks for the poet to find the serenity he longs for, and it comes with a kind of mystical experience. On the morning of October 21, he is wakened by voices calling "The sun! The sun!" and he opens the shutters to see the "the huge disk of the sun" colored as he has never seen it: a bit lighter than blackberry juice. When he goes out on the veranda sometime later, the sun now high, he tells us that it "was impossible to separate the light from the silence, the silence and light from the calm. . . . The sea had no surface; only the hills opposite didn't end at the earth's rim, but advanced beyond, below, starting all over again with a fainter image of their shape which vanished softly into faraway emptiness. There was a sense that another side of life exists." After he returns to his room "almost a visionary" and closes the shutters again to allow in only "the dim light of the north," he begins the poem that

⁷ *George Seferis: Collected Poems*, p. 155.



A pine tree near the Church of the Holy Virgin, Podithou, Cyprus. The photograph was taken by George Seferis in 1954. George Seferis's Photographs of Cyprus, Manuscripts Division, Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library. Used by permission of the Cultural Foundation of the National Bank of Greece.

delivers him from his eight- or nine-year agony.⁸ The opening lines offer a metaphor for the mood he has been trying to escape:

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.

By the end of the poem, many lines later, the poet has invoked Socrates, the persecuted but still the quintessential just man, to show us how to find our way home, our Ithaka. And home has become a rejuvenating — and beyond that, a transcendent — light that he tells Robert Levesque, his French translator, unites the angelic and the black in our world and appears in the last lines as “an affirmation of a moment of dazzling and eternal life.”⁹ That moment reveals the possibility of both an earthly and a heavenly love that can transform even the tragic progeny of Oedipus:

Sing little Antigone, sing, O sing . . .
I'm not speaking to you about things past, I'm speaking
about love;
adorn your hair with the sun's thorns,
dark girl;
the heart of the Scorpion has set,
the tyrant in man has fled,
and all the daughters of the sea, Nereids, Graecae,
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,

⁸ *George Seferis: A Poet's Journal, Days of 1945–1951*, translated by Athan Anagnostopoulos (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), pp. 39–40, 51–52.

⁹ “Seferis” in *La permanence de la Grèce* (Paris, 1948), p. 338.

because the pine trees will vanish, and the mirrored
mountains, and the chirping of birds
the sea will empty, shattered glass, from north and
south
your eyes will empty of the light of day
the way the cicadas all together suddenly fall silent.¹⁰

This visionary moment, following a liberating release from the anxieties of war and exile, was to have a strong influence on Seferis's subsequent work, especially bringing forth recurring images of the Greek light as a transforming agent associated with the theme of resurrection. That theme comes to show roots not only in the ancient world of gods and goddesses, of heroes and heroines, as in the above passage, but in the Christian tradition as well, an increasingly significant resource in Seferis's most mature work and in modern Greek culture more generally (as is suggested below in the poet's 1962 "debate" with Zissimos Lorenzatos). In personal terms, Seferis's journals reveal that his split obligation continued to cause tension at certain times, especially when he became both emotionally and professionally involved in the Cyprus crises of the 1950s as a member of the Greek delegation to the United Nations and as Ambassador to Great Britain, and, after his retirement to his home in Athens, during the harshly oppressive early years of the 1967–1974 dictatorship.



The correspondence between Seferis and myself sometimes reflects the pressures of moments of crisis in his life, but for the most part they remain the subtext to the more literary and informal dialogue in the letters. These, written almost entirely in English, cover a period of twenty years, beginning in the year before I actually met the poet and ending just before his terminal illness in the summer of 1971. The correspondence is rather sporadic in the 1950s, and in those years it focusses on two principal themes: my effort to learn what I could from the poet about his work while I was writing my doctoral dissertation at Oxford and, later in the decade, my collaboration with Philip Sherrard on a translation and presenta-

¹⁰ *George Seferis: Collected Poems*, pp. 161, 169–170.

tion of selected poems by Seferis in our anthology *Six Poets of Modern Greece*.

In the decade of the 1960s, the correspondence becomes weightier, and it is shaped by a series of events that inspired more frequent exchange. Among these are Seferis's receiving the Nobel Prize in 1963, the volume of his collected poems in English translation that Sherrard and I began to work on in 1964, Seferis's trip to the United States to receive an honorary doctorate from Princeton University in 1965, the political situation in Greece and the advent of censorship under the Colonels' dictatorship immediately following the coup of April 1967, Seferis's residence at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton in 1968 and his inner debate over becoming the conscience of his country, and, finally, the preparation during 1969 of a comprehensive interview for the *Paris Review* series.¹¹

The correspondence in the early 1970s is perhaps the most casual and in some ways the most personal. It includes Seferis's urgent requests for pipe tobacco and books (one of these relating to his growing infirmity), a curious yet revealing exchange about a misunderstanding involving our mutual friend the critic Zissimos Lorenzatos, and a moving letter from Maro Seferis following her husband's death. My remarks will now focus specifically on the letters that are gathered here, and the commentary will be arranged chronologically and in keeping with the themes and preoccupations that I have just outlined.

1951–1952

In 1951 I was a twenty-three-year-old graduate student who had enrolled at Oxford to specialize in English literature but had begun instead to take my first awkward steps into what was for me the totally new field of Modern Greek literature, steps that eventually carried me through a D. Phil. dissertation on Anglo-American influences in the poetry of Cavafy and Seferis. It was Constantine Trypanis, then the Bywater and Sotheby Professor of Byzantine and Modern Greek at Oxford, and George Savidis, then a student

¹¹ My interview with Seferis, recorded in his apartment at the Institute for Advanced Study, was first published in the Fall 1970 issue of the *Paris Review*, reissued in their *Writers at Work*, Fourth Series, edited by George Plimpton (New York: Viking Press, 1976), and included as a "Postscript" to my collection of essays, *Modern Greek Poetry: Voice and Myth* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983).

of the Classics at Cambridge, who were largely responsible for encouraging me to abandon my passion of the moment, Yeats and the Irish theater, and turn to an older passion, the modern culture of Greece, where I had spent three years of my childhood and, after my graduation from Princeton University in 1949, a year teaching English at the American Farm School in Salonika.

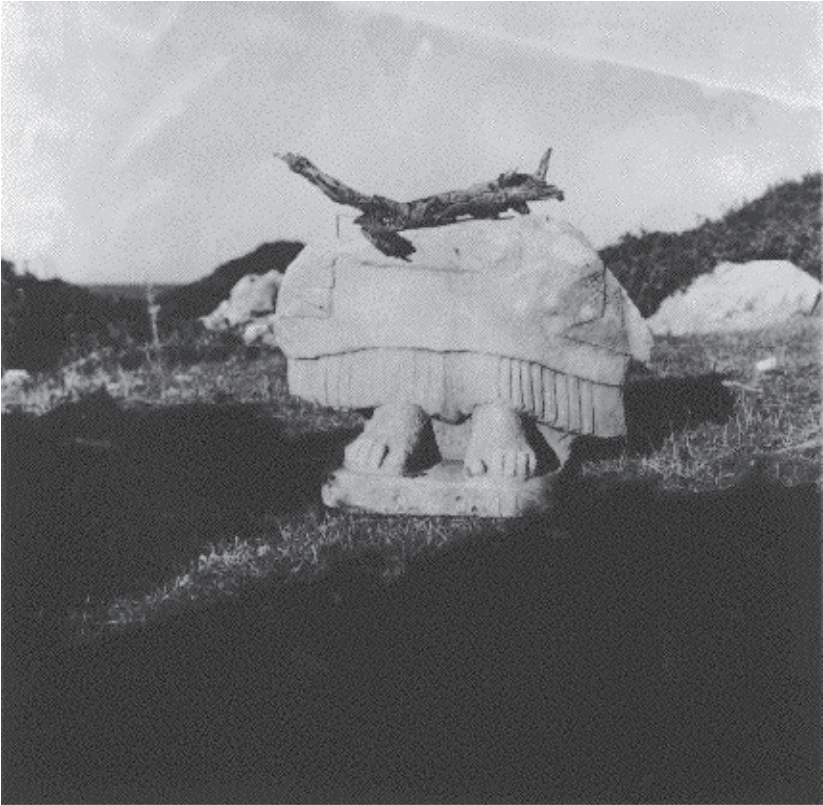
By May of 1951, my third term at Oxford, I was married to the only other student of Modern Greek at the University, Mary Stathatos-Kyris, and I was partway into a dissertation on what at that time was meant to be a critical study of Cavafy, Sikelianos, Seferis, and Elytis. My exploration was to begin with Seferis, whose work seemed the most accessible to me because of my enthusiasm for T. S. Eliot, who had been the subject of a long paper I had written as an undergraduate at Princeton. But entirely accessible Seferis's poetry was not. I therefore wrote the poet a rather too expansive and unembarrassed letter in May of 1951 requesting a response to no less than six fairly broad questions about his poetry. The letter, though addressed vaguely to the "Foreign Office of Greece, Athens," must have reached the poet eventually, since it exists in his archive, but it went unanswered. Yet well before an answer could have arrived, that letter was followed by another (actually sent the following day to the same address) in which I expressed my fear that I may have given the poet the wrong impression. I did not want him to think that I had not read his poetry thoroughly or had been "lazy in expending thought over the interpretation," so I went on to cite certain sources for his symbolism that I could identify, but reaffirmed my worry about the meaning of specific symbols, "such as the statues, stones, the woman who reappears continually, and any number of others."

This second letter, also to be found in the Seferis archive, must have simply compounded the poet's bewilderment about such an aggressive inquiry by this unknown and rather brash American, even if he was only twenty-three at the time. In any case, that letter also remained unanswered, as did a third, handwritten, that I mailed to an unspecified London address ten days later, this one occasioned by my having learned to my delight that Seferis was not in Athens but in London, recently appointed to the Greek Embassy there as Counsellor, which made an actual meeting with him possible — at least that was the hope I then expressed. My words

"in care of the address on the letter-head" were heavily underlined by the poet. Since the letter-head address is "Avery House, 1 Queen's Gate Gardens," where I was apparently staying only "until Saturday evening of this week," it is likely that the letter did not arrive on the poet's desk in time for him to send an answer to Avery House, and if my earlier letters addressed to the "Foreign Office of Greece" did not make their way to him until they had been forwarded from Athens, he had no other way of getting in touch with me before I left England to spend the summer in Greece. A little over one year later, I tried again, when my dissertation had been reduced to the poetry of Cavafy and Seferis and was very near completion: "Dear Mr. Seferis," I wrote, "I don't know whether you remember me, but I am the young man who approached you over a year ago in connection with a thesis I am writing, . . ."

The result of this persistence was an invitation to tea in early June of 1952 at Seferis's apartment near Sloane Square. I was beside myself with joy. What an opportunity to clear up tenacious ambiguities, even if it was at the last minute. My wife and I were received graciously by Mr. and Mrs. Seferis, he a heavy man, bald-headed, round-faced, with dark eyebrows separated by deep frown lines, the eyes penetrating, the mouth always on the verge of curving into a smile, and she a slight woman with beautiful, delicate features and golden hair. We had our tea, and then the poet and I withdrew to one end of the living room for our talk about his poetry and some of the remaining problems I had in understanding it. Six hours later, the bleary-eyed poet, speech increasingly slow, suggested that maybe we had talked enough about his work, since it was clear that I now understood it better than he did, even if I continued to make the mistake of seeing everything symbolically. "Those statues, my dear," he said at one point. "Those statues are not always symbols. They exist. If you travel in Greece, you will see that statues belong to the landscape. They are real. And the stones. The stones are there under your feet, my dear, or there in front of you for your hand to caress."

The conversation had gone on so long because I had been unrelenting in my pursuit of possible meanings and the poet had been very reticent about answering my questions directly, so that I kept feeling that his potentially valuable commentary was constantly slipping through my fingers. Of course he was trying very hard to save



A fragment of a statue of Aphrodite Akraia ("Aphrodite at the Edge"), Boos Oura, Cyprus. The photograph was taken by George Seferis in 1954. George Seferis's Photographs of Cyprus, Manuscripts Division, Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library. Used by permission of the Cultural Foundation of the National Bank of Greece.

his poetry from too much compromising analysis, while I was trying very hard to extract any sort of interpretation that could be turned into critical prose. At one point I suggested that part of the obscurity I was encountering in his poems derived from the absence of punctuation, and I cited a specific passage — I think it was in *Mythistorema*¹² — where the addition of a comma at the end of a line might make all the difference. The poet just stared at me, but from the other end of the room, Maro Seferis's voice rang out in a deep lament: "Put in a comma for the boy, George, help him, for heaven's sake" (Vale ena comma yia to pedi, Yiorgo, voithise ton, yia onoma tou theou).

I learned an important lesson from this encounter, soon reinforced by my experience with other self-assured artists of some stature. No poet worth his or her salt, however generous to the young or the old, is going to restrict the richness of his or her verse by giving an unassailably precise reading of this or that line, especially in front of somebody aspiring to put that reading into the relative permanence of print, whether in Greek or in English or in some other language. Seferis's generosity was large enough to allow him to forgive my post-graduate assault on his work, and this first meeting did not preclude others that eventually led to an easy kind of friendship. And I think that friendship emerged partly because I was never again eager to ask him a question that might lead to a specific interpretation of one line or another, or even to a bit of extra punctuation, though I did ask him questions of a broader kind in the interview that I conducted in 1968, some sixteen years after this first meeting, when the poet was himself an "advanced student," as he put it, at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton.

1955–1959

The correspondence in these years has to do mostly with my early efforts to translate and publish some of Seferis's poetry in the United States and, more substantially, with a 1956 essay I wrote on the relationship between the poetry of Seferis and that of T. S. Eliot and with the anthology of six Modern Greek poets that Philip Sherrard and I met to plan in 1955 and completed in 1959. My letter to Seferis in April 1955 antecedes this long-term project but

¹² *George Seferis: Collected Poems*, pp. 3–28.

reports, with evident pride, that I have placed my first two translations (“The Mood of a Day” and “The King of Asine”¹³) in *Partisan Review* — what I call “the leading literary quarterly in this country” — and that I am also about to deliver my first lecture on Seferis “with readings.”

The setting of the lecture was the “English Club” of Princeton’s Department of English, a forum for the faculty — especially the younger faculty — to present their work in progress to their colleagues (I was then an instructor in the Department, the lowest rank). The lecture focussed in part on Seferis’s relation to T. S. Eliot. It was received with tolerance by most of my colleagues and with a degree of enthusiasm by the few in the Department who were interested in contemporary poetry that was not strictly in the Anglo-American tradition. But from the less-than-mysterious language of silence and gesture in the audience, it became clear to me that some of the older, more conservative members of the Department thought T. S. Eliot an inappropriate subject for serious scholarship, let alone a Greek poet working somehow in his wake.

Seferis’s amiable response in May to the news of these beginning efforts on my part was compensation enough for the moment, but when the English Club lecture became the basis for my first article on Seferis’s poetry, published a year later, I hoped for a more elaborate — if possibly critical — commentary from the poet, given my focus on the influence of Eliot.¹⁴ My letter of 9 November 1956 points to my having sent Seferis a copy of the article, presumably during his November visit to the United States, and a January 1957 letter from Eliot to Seferis mentions my having sent Eliot the same article, which earned from him the epithet “interesting.”¹⁵ But no response to my effort from Seferis. Though this disappointed me at the time, I simply took it to be further evidence of the poet’s reticence in offering commentary that might tend to be taken as authoritative evidence of his intention.

¹³ “Asine” is the form in which the title originally appears. In later editions it appears as “Asini.”

¹⁴ “T. S. Eliot and the Poetry of George Seferis,” *Comparative Literature* 8, no. 3 (Summer 1956): 214–226.

¹⁵ In his letter, dated 4 January, Eliot reports in a P. S.: “I have recently received and read the off-print of an interesting article by an American scholar, comparing your work and mine. I expect that you also will have received a copy.” Eliot to Seferis, 4 January 1957, Selected Papers of George Seferis, Manuscripts Division, Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

The fact is that Seferis did reflect on my essay, though his remarks did not reach me until I had completed the first draft of my comments here. His remarks came by way of a xerox copy of his 18 November 1956 letter now included below (the heading “The Plaza . . . New York”), discovered in his archive by his step-daughter, Anna Londou, in October 1996. Either Seferis decided not to mail the letter back in 1956 — again, out of second-thought reticence? — or it was a casualty of what he then called “the life I am leading” as a travelling senior diplomat with the Cyprus crisis evidently much on his mind.¹⁶

The letter, in retrospect, offers early confirmation of several conclusions about his work that emerged over the years. He finds my article “true philologically” but “untrue” if he makes “the attempt to recollect [his] own experience.” Before he gets to that attempt he mentions a tongue-in-cheek “dedication” to a chapbook printing of Eliot’s “Marina” in the Ariel Poems group, sent to a friend, a remark that speaks of his having discovered at last a poet *he* has influenced. The implication is that Seferis was cultivating the same garden of imagery as Eliot sometime before the Greek poet first came across the poem “Marina” in 1931. He goes on, “talking seriously,” to confirm the point he made in our first conversation about his work in Sloane Square during June of 1952: his images emerge not so much from invention — or symbolic extension — as from things he has actually seen, for example (along with the statues and stones of the literal Greek landscape mentioned earlier), the “refugees, monks, and Dead Sea” of his journey to Jerusalem as Rommel advanced toward Alexandria, Egypt, during the African campaign of World War II.¹⁷ Seferis then indicates that my evocation of Paul Éluard in connection with the early poem “Mood of a Day” is irrelevant since he hadn’t read Éluard until years after his poem was written. He concludes with several revealing comments on the mythological background of other poems. The early poem “Companions in Hades” turns out to have been part of an aban-

¹⁶ Seferis served as Director of the Second Political Bureau of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs during 1956–1957, and in 1957 was a member of the Greek delegation to the United Nations in New York during discussions of the Cyprus question.

¹⁷ In my 1956 article I drew an extensive parallel between Seferis’s “Stratis the Mariner on the Dead Sea” (the poem’s English title at the time) and aspects of both *The Waste Land* and *The Hollow Men*, beginning with Seferis’s refrain, “Jerusalem, ungoverned city,” and Eliot’s repeated phrase “Unreal City.” In the various editions of *George Seferis: Collected Poems*, “Stratis the Mariner on the Dead Sea” is called “Stratis Thalassinos on the Dead Sea.”

doned sequence once called “Notes on the Odyssey” (Scholia stin Odysia), and the principal sources for “hints” in his “mythological matters” came more from James Joyce and, before him, Jules Laforgue, than from Eliot, though he admits to being indebted to Eliot “for other things” that remain unspecified.

A major facet of my intention in the 1956 article — along with that of providing an outline of Eliot’s influence on Seferis — was to challenge what I took to be Timos Malanos’s implication that Seferis was deliberately imitating or adapting Eliot in much of his work. To that end I demonstrated stylistic and metaphoric parallels between their work that were pure coincidence (e.g., in Eliot’s *Dry Salvages*) and thematic parallels that were “the common property of their generation” (e.g., the theme of what Seferis called “thirsting despair”). But thirteen years later I had to admit, in a second essay focussed on the “mythical method” in Seferis (this after years of translating and teaching his work), that in writing my early article “I was still too close to a dissertation . . . on English influences in Cavafy and Seferis — still too enamored of “the possibility of establishing parallels, borrowings, and other comparative interests” to look at “this aspect of the poet’s work with full objectivity.”¹⁸

This second essay was meant to be a reappraisal of the Eliot-Seferis relationship in which I tried to demonstrate that, though both poets make use of a “mythical method” as Joyce and Yeats first introduced it, there is a substantial distinction between them, Eliot working by way of a certain poetic collage in many voices, while Seferis worked in chiaroscuro with what is essentially a single, unifying voice or persona. I also tried to illustrate that Seferis’s method is not as constant as I once thought, and though clearly influenced by Eliot’s “dramatic manner of expression” (Seferis’s own phrase), it became a personal mode that, unlike Eliot’s eclectic mode, carries the reader to the level of myth only after winning his sympathy and belief “by convincingly representing the present reality sustaining his myth — a contemporary, Greek reality always.”¹⁹ My hope at the time was to counter exaggerated argu-

¹⁸ The article, “Seferis and the ‘Mythical Method,’” first appeared in *Comparative Literature Studies* 6, no. 2 (June 1969) and was republished in my collection *Modern Greek Poetry: Voice and Myth*.

¹⁹ The phrase in quotation marks is repeated from my 1966 article, “Seferis’s Elpenor: A Man of No Fortune,” first published in the *Kenyon Review* 20, no. 3 (June 1966) and reprinted in *Modern Greek Poetry: Voice and Myth*.

ments about the extent of Eliot's influence in a critical debate that appeared to have no end, especially in Greece, and my late effort to emphasize Seferis's originality was no doubt partly the consequence of my conversations with the poet — and certain of his astute friends — over the years. But Seferis's unmailed letter of 1956 could have provided some early authorial substantiation in this effort of a kind that his apparent reticence sought to avoid.

Along with the question of Eliot's influence and a series of exchanges about specific problems in rendering individual words and lines, the correspondence in these years raises the difficult question of tact when a poet has to deal with competing translators, all of whom are more or less friends of the poet: in this instance, besides myself, Philip Sherrard and Rex Warner. I had met Philip Sherrard for the first time several years after the two of us completed our doctoral dissertations in England on contemporary Greek poetry — in those days, as far as I know, the only graduate students working on modern Greek poetry anywhere in the world, which generated an unspoken bond between us that soon became a spoken one, lasting forty years. In the early 1950s, I had come across some translations of Cavafy that Sherrard had published in the British quarterly *Encounter* — very fine translations, I thought. It occurred to me then that we might collaborate in some way by bringing together a selection of translations from the poets both of us had worked on separately while writing our doctoral dissertations.

This thought led to a meeting on the island of Thasos in the summer of 1955, where Sherrard was vacationing with his family and two British friends, Jack Rivas and Jeffrey Graham-Bell, all strong walkers. It was the 15th of August, feast day in the high, inland town called Panagia, and that is where Sherrard and his companions were headed when my wife Mary and I tracked him down. I joined his group for the climb to the village, and though I was the youngest of the four, I remember falling behind constantly and ending up sitting alone by the side of the road for a long interval to catch my breath, so that when I arrived in the village square, Sherrard and his friends were already well into celebrative eating and drinking and in a very congenial mood. Our collaboration was sealed over the second bottle of raki, an easy sealing because we agreed then and there to create an anthology of translations simply by bringing together what he had on hand of Cavafy and

Sikelianos that he had translated for use in his dissertation and what I had on hand of Seferis, Elytis, and Gatsos. I soon added some Antoniou, and that is how the anthology, first mentioned in my letter to Seferis of 1 October 1955 and outlined in the enclosure to my letter of 30 October, came to life, the earliest of the five volumes of translations, with a number of revised editions, that Sherrard and I collaborated on over the next forty years, until his death in 1995.²⁰

In my 10 August 1959 letter from Salonika, I tell Seferis that Sherrard and I have completed the final text of our anthology, “which will shortly be in the hands of the publisher,”²¹ and that we have chosen a title for it: “The Asphodel Plain.” As a kind of joke, I signed the letter “Elpenor Keeley,” my first move toward informality, though it was not until several years later that I felt free to drop the formal Edmund Keeley in favor of his diminutive Greek version of my nickname “Mike”: “Michalaki.” I didn’t receive an answer to the August letter, but shortly thereafter I must have either met with Seferis in Athens or spoken to him over the phone, because my next letter to him, mailed from the American Academy in Rome (where I had gone for a year to write a novel on a Guggenheim fellowship) outlines an elaborate argument against a request Seferis had apparently made that Sherrard and I not include the full translated text of “*Thrush*” (“*Kichli*”)²² in our selection from his work to be offered in our anthology but publish only our version of the third section of the poem (which includes the passage discussed above).

Seferis’s motive in this was to protect his friend Rex Warner, with whom he was then collaborating on a selected translation of his work, and with whom he continued to collaborate into 1960.²³ From a letter that Seferis wrote Warner on 21 June 1959,²⁴ it is

²⁰ Keeley and Sherrard, trans., *Six Poets of Modern Greece* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1960; New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961). The essentially amiable and fruitful character of this collaboration is outlined in my essay, “Collaboration, Revision and Other Less Forgivable Sins in Translation,” in *The Craft of Translation*, ed. John Biguenet and Rainer Schulte (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), pp. 54–69.

²¹ Thames and Hudson, London.

²² The title of this poem, named after a ship that sank off Poros during World War II, should be for that reason within quotation marks and also underlined because it was published initially as a separate volume (1947). In these letters it appears variously without quotation marks or within quotation marks but without underlining and only occasionally as it should appear. I have left the title in each instance as the correspondent chose to offer it.

²³ The Rex Warner translation, *George Seferis: Poems*, was published in England by the Bodley Head Press in 1960 and in the United States by Atlantic Monthly Press in 1961.

²⁴ In the Rex Warner file of the Seferis archive in the Gennadius Library.

clear that the problem of accommodating this friend was on his mind from early in the summer, when I apparently approached him for formal permission regarding the selection of his poems to be included in the anthology that Sherrard and I had been working on sporadically for four years (both of us were working on other books during that period) and planned to finish in August — as proved to be the case. Seferis writes Warner in June that he would like to ask his opinion “about another matter — Edmund Keeley came to see me the other day and asked me the permission to include some of my poems in an anthology of modern Greek Poetry . . . ,” and he goes on to list the Seferis poems I had listed in the table of contents of the projected anthology that I had sent him back in October 1955, though now, four years later, with the addition of several poems from *Mythistorema*, the three-part poem “*Thrush*,” and the substitution of “Engomi” for “Three Mules.” Seferis concludes: “I told Keeley that I cannot give him an answer before I consult you. Do you think that this anthology might create difficulties for the book we are planning together?”

From the same letter we learn that Kimon Friar, one of the earliest and most prolific translators of Modern Greek poetry into English, including Kazantzakis’ vast sequel to Homer’s *Odyssey*, was also approaching Seferis for rights at this time: “Kimon Friar who after his Odyssean success seems to be in the earthly paradise (Hollywood — radio — book societies — all the means of spreading and crushing thought are now in his hands) wrote to me that he was getting ready a book of translations of my poems to be published by Simon and Shuster [*sic*]. I answered to remind him that he had not the rights and to tell him that I had other commitments (without mentioning you). Friar whatever his talent is sometimes silly, and now, I am afraid, he has become sillier.”

Warner answered Seferis three days later. About Friar: “I’m sure you’re getting some very high-praised soliciting from Kimon Friar. I review his ‘Odyssey’ in this month’s London Magazine.” About Keeley: “My first reaction to Keeley’s proposal is to be rather against having so many of your poems published in another book. Also I wonder what the book is. Thames and Hudson usually go in for very well done books of photographs. But we can talk about this.”²⁵ Apparently they both ruminated over the matter until September,

²⁵ Warner to Seferis, 24 June 1959, Seferis archive, Gennadius Library.

when Seferis evidently decided that he owed Warner the gesture of limiting Keeley and Sherrard to a partial rendering of the poem “*Thrush*.” Before receiving my extended argument against this gesture from Rome, Seferis had the following commentary from Sherrard to challenge his thinking: “Keeley has been writing to me about the difficulty of including in that anthology your ‘Thrush.’ It would be a great pity, it seems to me, if it has to be cut. It is a good translation — better I think than any other I’ve seen, though the only other I’ve seen is frankly bad, so this is not saying much; and there is little more irritating than an extract only from an individual poem. I gather though that the question is more one of tact than of anything else — that you don’t wish in any way to upset Warner, who hopes to get out a selection of your work. This *is* tricky, I admit. I wonder whether if we mentioned in our volume that Rex Warner intends to bring out a fuller selection of your work, this would not compensate? (tho’ in fact I don’t think translations of this kind exclude each other — rather they stimulate interest). Keeley has of course published this version of the poem already, which would seem to be another reason why Warner should not really have cause for complaint. Anyhow, do what you can to allow both versions if it can be done without any personal difficulty — Keeley has worked extremely hard on his translations of your poems — I don’t think you are likely to have such alive *and* faithful English translations for a long while, and they are certainly, toute blague à part, much superior to Warner’s, as far as I have seen those by Warner — and he will be most disappointed if he has to cut. But if it can’t be it can’t be.”²⁶

My letter from Rome some two weeks later was only slightly less ardent if also a degree less candid. I argued that the suggested excision would “radically limit the work’s effectiveness,” that it would be the equivalent of anthologizing only the last section of *The Waste Land*, that at this late date it would not only mean eliminating seven pages of text but also altering the content and arrangement of the notes, that it would require us to write a preface describing the two missing sections of the poem, and so forth. I added that Sherrard and I did not quite understand what advantage Rex Warner stood to gain if we were to “perform this awkward surgery,” and I reaffirmed

²⁶ Sherrard to Seferis, 9 September 1959, Seferis archive, Gennadius Library. For the full text of Sherrard’s letter, see the Appendix.

Sherrard's suggestion that in our publication we acknowledge Warner's intention of bringing out a more complete selection of Seferis's work. And when I went on to mention several "fine evenings with George Savidis and with Nikos Gatsos [who] incidentally, both agree strongly with Sherrard and me regarding *Thrush*," I was clearly bringing all my forces to bear, not very subtly — though at that time I did not know that Seferis had actually written Savidis in June to outline our anthology and to ask him to think about the "problems" it raised of often duplicating the Warner selection.²⁷

I think Sherrard and I were right to argue as we did for a complete "*Thrush*," but had I then been more aware of how much effort Seferis himself had put into Rex Warner's version and how close he felt to that translator, I might have expressed myself in a way that showed a larger understanding of Seferis's loyalty to his long-standing friend, who in due course became my friend too. In any case, we see from Seferis's letter of 29 September, addressed to "Michalaki Elpenor," that the poet gave in to our persuasion — supported in the end, it seems, by Rex Warner as well — and allowed "*Thrush*" to appear whole in the anthology, now no longer named "The Asphodel Plain" but "Beyond the Statues." On the subject of the title, Seferis tells us that he does not think our choice of title a happy one because "Beyond the Statues" for a modern Greek means something like "after the classical Greek, after the Greeks you are taught about," not much better than the original title, which to him suggests "the plain of the dead," a suggestion that contradicts our preface to the anthology, "where you seem to believe that there is still life for poetry in Greece." Partly as a consequence of this letter, Sherrard and I finally discarded both of our provisional titles and settled for *Six Poets of Modern Greece*.²⁸ In June of 1960, Rex Warner wrote Seferis to say that he hoped to have "the Keeley + Sherrard book by next week" and would be reviewing it for the *Times Literary Supplement*.²⁹

²⁷ Keeley to Seferis, 26 September 1959, Seferis archive, Gennadius Library.

²⁸ The anthology was first published under this title by Thames and Hudson, London, 1960, and by Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1961. A later selection from the anthology under the title *Four Greek Poets* was published by Penguin Books, London, in 1966, and revised selections under the titles *The Dark Crystal* and *A Greek Quintet* were published by Denise Harvey and Co. in 1981 and 1992.

²⁹ Warner to Seferis, 14 June 1960, Seferis archive, Gennadius Library.

The principal issue that comes up in the correspondence of this year is the setting of Seferis poetry to music. In my January letter I enclosed something that I thought might “surprise — perhaps even shock,” the poet: settings of four *Mythistorema* poems³⁰ by my friend and colleague at Princeton, Edward Cone, whom I describe as “among the more distinguished composers in America.” With the composer at the piano, the songs were sung by Bethany Beardslee, at that time one of the finest singers of “difficult” contemporary music. The concert took place in New York on 1 March at the Y.M.H.A. Poetry Center before a relatively learned audience of Professor Cone’s friends, students, and colleagues, and some others interested in either contemporary music or Modern Greek poetry. The response was enthusiastic on the part of those who were well-versed in music, less so on the part of those interested in Seferis’s poems. In his letter of 4 February, Seferis expresses his dubieties about the project: “I cannot imagine what the result of such a marriage can be. Perhaps I shouldn’t try — I am too much involved.” And he asks for my impression should I hear the songs. My rather mixed response comes on 11 February, and since I speak in that letter of a pending “dress rehearsal,” I must have heard the songs in advance of that rehearsal and subsequently at the New York concert. In any case, I had another chance to hear them some thirty-five years later at a concert that was arranged by the Program in Hellenic Studies at Princeton on the occasion of my retirement from the University, and my education in contemporary music during the intervening years, limited as it was, made the songs considerably more palatable to my ear, though still “difficult.”

In general Seferis appeared to be dubious about the settings that Greek composers gave his poems. I remember that he once complained about the distortion that occurred in Theodorakis’ immensely popular setting of his early poem “Denial” (Arnisi): no break after the colon in the lines “With what spirit, what heart, / what desire and passion / we lived our life: a mistake! / so we changed our life.” And I remember that he nodded in agreement one evening when Maro Seferis commented ironically on Theodorakis’ setting

³⁰ Numbers 3, 15, 22, and 24.

of *Mythistorema* 23, the next-to-last poem in the sequence of twenty-four: “He [Theodorakis] makes it sound like a tarantella.” The song was generally taken to be symbolic of hope, of better days just ahead (“A little farther / we will see the almond trees blossoming / the marble gleaming in the sun . . . ,”) so much so that the song was sung with some passion by political prisoners held at the Averoff Prison during the 1967–1974 dictatorship. Seferis himself clearly gave it a more ambiguous, certainly less hopeful, reading, no doubt in view of the images of an endless voyage “on rotten brine-soaked timbers” that lead up to this concluding evocation of an Ithaka that is still out of sight.

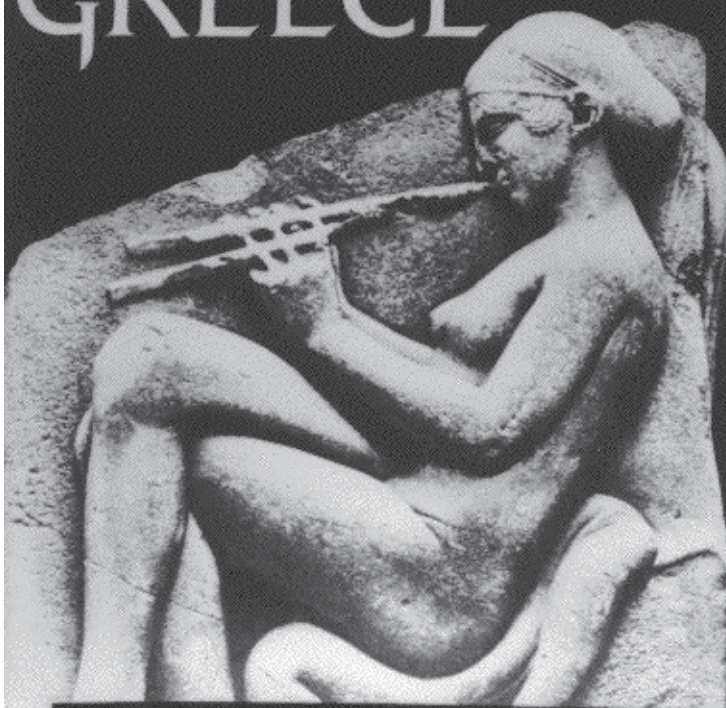
During the summer of this year I sent Seferis a copy of my second novel, *The Gold-Hatted Lover*, and received in response what I took to be an indication that our rather formal relationship could move, as it in fact soon did, toward a more casual friendship. At least that is how I interpreted his bit of amiable irony about the novel’s title before he had actually read the book: “I have no doubt that the gold hat is sound as well as the lover.” Later in the summer, in a letter addressed to “Michalaki Damaskine” (“Michael the Damascene,” an amusing — and perhaps amused — reference to my place of birth, where my father was then serving as an American Foreign Service officer), Seferis acknowledged receiving his complimentary copy of *Six Poets of Modern Greece*, which he found “beautiful,” and he humorously added that he preferred it to any volume “I have ever been stamped in.” This comment referred to the rather unusual boards, which included the Greek initials of the six poets in sequence stamped in gold, a principal feature of the book’s elegant design, which included rich gray stock and an imaginative jacket showing an ancient female flautist from a funerary relief. Later jackets did not please the poet as much, especially the British edition of our translation of his collected poems,³¹ which showed the Parthenon against a brown background: “More appropriate for a soap advertisement,” he said to me in conversation.

In the same summer letter, Seferis comments on copies of two translations that I had sent him in advance of their publication in *New World Writing*.³² He had recommended that I translate “Helen” as one of the poems in his Cyprus volume, *Logbook III* (Imerologio

³¹ London: Jonathan Cape, 1969.

³² “Helen” and “Pedlar of Sidon,” in *New World Writing* 20 (1962): 42–45.

SIX POETS OF MODERN GREECE



CHOSEN, TRANSLATED, AND INTRODUCED BY
EDMUND KEELEY AND PHILIP SHERRARD

Photo: John Blazejewski

Dust jacket of *Six Poets of Modern Greece*, published by Alfred A. Knopf in 1961. George Seferis was especially fond of this design. Courtesy of Edmund Keeley.

katastromatos, G), which might be among the more accessible to American readers. I had offered the journal “Pedlar of Sidon” on my own authority but was rather surprised that Seferis had doubts about it. With some justice he must have felt that its mild parody of Cavafy would pass unnoticed by most American readers of his work, and without that dimension, the poem appears slight. That reservation would no longer ring true thirty-five years later, when Cavafy’s work was familiar to most dedicated readers of poetry in the United States.

1963

This was the year Seferis received the Nobel Prize and suddenly emerged into international prominence. During the week before that happened, I wrote him to ask his permission to include an emendation of his essay “Letter to a Foreign Friend,” which had to do with his discovery and appreciation of T. S. Eliot, as part of a special section of *Poetry* (Chicago) to be devoted to contemporary Greek poetry (along with Seferis, Elytis, Gatsos, and Sinopoulos) in translations by George Savidis and me. In a subsequent letter (11 January 1964), I suggest that “this should prove to be the best thing of its kind to have appeared in this country” (i.e., America), and I therefore asked Seferis’s further permission to include three poems of his that Philip Sherrard and I had translated recently so that his contribution to the special issue would be at least equal to those given to the other poets — a consideration clearly reflecting Seferis’s sudden eminence in the United States and elsewhere in the world.

The fact is that Seferis’s award in October 1963 not only influenced the course of his life but also, to some degree, that of his closest disciples. The announcement was cause for instant celebration among his intimate friends in Greece who, according to George Savidis, quickly gathered at his house in Agras Street to congratulate the poet, and abroad among his translators, some of whom were soon called upon to give a public account to their countrymen, through the news media and at academic gatherings, of this relatively unknown poet’s works and days (as also happened when Odysseus Elytis received his Nobel Prize sixteen years later). My telegram promising to drink, that noon in October, to Stratis the Mariner,



George Seferis (right) receiving the Nobel Prize diploma and medal from the King of Sweden, 1963. Photograph courtesy of Ana Londou; used by permission of the Cultural Foundation of the National Bank of Greece.



George Seferis with the daughter of the King of Sweden during the Nobel Prize dinner at the Palace, 1963. Photograph courtesy of Ana Londou; used by permission of the Cultural Foundation of the National Bank of Greece.

Mathios Paskalis, Elpenor, Helen, “and the other members of your magnificent family” was followed, on 27 October, by a more sober and elaborate letter of congratulation which also outlined a proposal for a bilingual Vintage paperback edition of a selection of Seferis’s poems. It had come to me by way of Alfred A. Knopf, publishers of *Six Poets of Modern Greece* and the parent publisher of the Vintage series. The postscript reveals that I called Rex Warner, then in the hospital, to tell him the good news about Seferis’s award and to invite him to Princeton to raise a glass of retsina in the poet’s honor.

Rex Warner did visit me and my wife in Princeton at some point (our friendship had begun the previous year during a very amicable meeting at the Writers Workshop in Iowa), but I don’t recall how soon it was after Seferis’s Nobel Prize that Warner came to our house to meet with those of my friends who knew his or Seferis’s work, and a few who knew both (my subsequent letter to Seferis, dated 21 March 1964, mentions parenthetically that Rex Warner “visited me here [i.e., in Princeton] last weekend”). In any case, Seferis’s response to my 27 October letter some four days later brought Rex Warner back into our correspondence, because the poet said in effect that he could grant approval for the proposed Vintage paperback only if Rex Warner and Atlantic Monthly Press, American publishers of Warner’s 1961 selection of translations, *George Seferis: Poems*, granted their permission. Seferis also indicated that he would be unable to “answer any letter till the end of December,” which effectively concluded the year’s correspondence. As it turned out, the Vintage prospect was soon lost among more ambitious projects, again a consequence of Seferis’s sudden international recognition.

1964

Seferis’s first letter in the new year (dated New Year’s Day) offers an outline, from the poet’s point of view, of a proposed selection of his essays for translation into English from the Greek volume, *Dokimes*, to be published by the Atlantic Monthly Press under the direction of Seymour Lawrence. As I mention in my letter to Seferis dated 11 January, I had initially suggested this project to Seymour Lawrence, and I had been asked by him if I might be interested in taking on

the translation. I agreed to do so with the help of my wife, but as I indicate in the 11 January letter, I found the project a demanding one, and I asked for two summers to complete it, time enough to consult with Seferis during my normal summer months in Greece and to do the research that would be involved in addition to the translating while carrying a full teaching schedule at Princeton (I had also begun to work on a new novel, but that news I kept to myself). Seymour Lawrence decided that he couldn't give me that much time, and I gather from Seferis's response to my letter on 14 January that Seymour Lawrence reported to him that I had said it was impossible for me to deliver the manuscript "in less than two years," and since "he feels it is important to publish as soon as possible," I had "graciously stepped aside."

This development apparently irritated Seferis, who "got rather confused with this affair," and it seems he thought I had not made my need for time clear from the beginning, though I had in fact stated my position on that as soon as it became part of the negotiations. What I had asked for was, in effect, not two years but a bit more than a year-and-a-half (through the summer of 1965, as Seferis himself noted in his handwritten comment at the top of my 11 January letter). In any case, the project soon went forward with Rex Warner and Th. D. Frangopoulos as the joint translators, and the selection of essays, much as originally planned and then revised with Seferis's advice, was published by Atlantic Monthly Press in 1966, some two years after this January exchange.³³ But Seferis's letter of 1 January, outlining his initial response to my plan, gives us some useful insight into what he thought would be most appropriate for an English-speaking audience approaching his critical writing for the first time — to my mind, easily the best literary criticism of his generation in Greece in both style and substance.

Several items in Seferis's response to my initial list stand out. He tells me that the essay on Eliot and Cavafy is "O.K." but needs some editing (one wonders what would be edited in or out). Seferis would like the essays on Palamas, Theophilos, and "certain parts" of the Eritocritos added — again, those "parts" left tantalizingly undesignated. The "More on the Alexandrian" commentaries on Cavafy's work he finds possibly tiring for those readers with no Greek, though "too many discussions on texts" would hardly in-

³³ The English title is *On the Greek Style: Selected Essays in Poetry and Hellenism*.

timidate those readers of the time brought up on the New Criticism and its aftermath if an adequate translation of Cavafy's poetry were at hand. But in the case of Seferis's debate with Tsatsos, the poet justly questions whether foreign readers who do not have Tsatsos's replies to Seferis's argument beside them and are "ignorant of the situation in Greece" would find the debate "understandable."

Perhaps most illuminating is the poet's emphatic rejection of those parts of his "Letter on *'Thrush'*" essay which he had excised for publication in *Dokimes*, though they were still available to the Greek reader in the much more expansive form that appeared in *Anglohellenic Review* (Angloelliniki epitheorisi)³⁴: "but if the whole of it — I object." Seferis never explained his objection in so many words, but it is apparent from some of his passing remarks (and from implications that emerged from my very first encounter with him) that he felt the original form of the essay had spelled things out too blatantly and had been used by critics and even friendly readers to explain away much that he would have preferred to remain suggestive and evocative beyond precise definition. And he apparently deleted sections of that essay from his mind over time. It was about two years after this letter, while discussing an article I had written on the Elpenor figure in Seferis for the *Kenyon Review*,³⁵ that the poet raised an objection to my having identified Elpenor as the "youngest" of the companions in *Mythistorema* 12, who won the coin with a throw of the dice and "disappeared." I was startled: "But you are the one who made that identification," I answered, "in your essay, Letter on *'Thrush'*." Seferis demurred. He went into his study and brought down the original version that had appeared in *Anglohellenic Review* and handed it to me. When I found the reference and pointed to it for him, he mumbled something to the effect of "that essay was a mistake; it tells more than it should."³⁶

Also revealing is the poet's comment on the Makriyannis essay, originally the Alexandria lecture discussed above. By 1964, Makriyannis

³⁴ Vol. 4, no. 12 (July–August, 1950).

³⁵ "Seferis's Elpenor: A Man of No Fortune," *Kenyon Review* 20, no. 3 (June 1966), reprinted in *Modern Greek Poetry: Voice and Myth*.

³⁶ The essay appeared in the July–August 1950 issue and was reprinted in a much truncated version both in Seferis's collection of essays, *Dokimes*, and in the English language selection of those essays, *George Seferis: On the Greek Style*. In both, the *Mythistorema* reference to Elpenor, along with much else, is excised. For a complete English version of the essay, see James Stone's translation in *Journal of the Hellenic Diaspora* 7, no. 2 (Summer 1980).

had been thoroughly rediscovered by Athenian intellectuals in touch with postwar literary developments, but Seferis's comment, with more than a drop of acid, seems to refer back to the essay's war-time source, when it was no doubt true that the public who heard the lecture in Alexandria were in large part ignorant of Makriyannis's importance as writer and thinker. In any case, Seferis was probably right to imply that many foreign readers would be equally ignorant in the mid-Sixties, though that was perhaps no excuse for allowing those newly interested in the Nobel laureate's literary enthusiasms and insights from remaining so — as his translators evidently decided in the end by including the Makriyannis essay in their selection.³⁷

Seferis's comment in his letter on *Turning Point* (Strophi) and *The Cistern* (I sterna) echoes his marginal note to my 11 January letter and points to a reticence that became a subject of debate in further correspondence during following years and is still not entirely resolved, as I indicate below. His letter concludes with a reference to his essay "Letter to a Foreign Friend," which I asked permission to amend in my letter of 18 October 1963, for publication in a special Greek issue of *Poetry* (Chicago) and which I subsequently sent him for his review. My draft of the emendation included the phrase "great churchmen" for *megalous pateras tis ecclisias*, and the poet rightfully indicates that he prefers the phrase "Great Fathers of the Church" (which I ended up rendering as "great Church Fathers"). Even more important is his addition of "now" to the phrase "but without mystics," this omission the result, he indicates, of a "typographical error" in the Greek text — one that would appear to promote a curious misreading of the history of the Greek Orthodox Church!

The "error" was in fact more complicated. Zissimos Lorenzatos, in his 1961 essay "The Lost Center" dedicated to Seferis, takes up the poet's phrase as it was originally published in Greek in 1949 ("we are a people . . . without mystics")³⁸ and argues that this statement by his friend of many years "seems to me not so much the confession of a man who has acquired firsthand knowledge of the

³⁷ A British edition of *George Seferis: On the Greek Style* was published in London by The Bodley Head, 1967, and in Athens by Denise Harvey and Company, 1982.

³⁸ *Anglohellenic Review* (*Angloelliniki Epitehorisi*), January–February, 1949, republished as Part 2 of the preface to the second edition of Seferis's translation, *T. S. Eliot: The Waste Land and Other Poems* (Athens: Ikaros, 1949).



Fresco at the Monastery of St. Chrysostomos in Cyprus. The photograph was taken by George Seferis in 1953. George Seferis's Photographs of Cyprus, Manuscripts Division, Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library. Used by permission of the Cultural Foundation of the National Bank of Greece.

living spiritual tradition of Greece (the only one we have), but the involuntary repetition . . . of the familiar self-projection of European *rationalism* on ancient Greece, thanks to which our spiritual tradition has been consistently deformed and ignored by the still flourishing humanism of the Renaissance.”³⁹ And Lorenzatos proceeds to outline the long tradition of Christian mysticism in the East that Seferis’s phrase appears to ignore, citing name after name of those qualifying for the designation “mystic.”

At some point before my translation of the phrase reached Seferis in 1963, this and other passages in the Lorenzatos essay had clearly touched a vulnerable spot in the poet, who was a lifelong advocate of the humanist aspects of Hellenism, though, as I have suggested above, also increasingly drawn to the Christian tradition after “*Thrush*” for certain otherworldly images (for example, that of the “Assumption” in the 1955 poem “Engomi”). There is a document in the Seferis archive that consists of notes and draft letters variously dated in 1962 that the poet apparently prepared as a kind of commentary on Lorenzatos’ essay but finally did not mail to his friend. Among the notes, one crossed-out passage reads: “but we are a people with great Church Fathers but without mystics — you are a splendid mouse — for remembering that. I accept that the phrase is inadequately expressed — I should have written but *today* without mystics — because naturally I couldn’t mean that Byzantium didn’t have any mystics.” And a passage in the draft letter addressed to “Zissimos” dated “7/2/62,” after quoting the phrase in question, reads: “you are a real mouse to have pulled that out of a hole. The more precise expression would have been “but *today* — this “today” I thought was understood — without mystics” again understood to be “of the Western kind” — the subject being the mysticism (o altra cosa) of Eliot. I had some knowledge of the names you enumerate. . . .”

Two years later, in keeping with Seferis’s suggestion, “today” becomes “now” in the corrected English version of the phrase that appeared in the October 1964 issue of *Poetry*. And in the 1974 (posthumous) edition of Seferis’s essays, the poet adds the following foot-

³⁹ *The Lost Center and Other Essays in Greek Poetry*, trans. Kay Cicellis (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 140. Lorenzatos’ essay first appeared in Greek in the collection of essays by various hands, *Via Ton Seferi (About/For Seferis)* in Athens (1961), honoring the thirtieth anniversary of the publication of Seferis’s first volume, *Turning Point (Strophi)*.

note after the phrase in question: “Here I feel the obligation to note that in the third edition of my book [i.e., translation] *T. S. Eliot: The Waste Land*⁴⁰ I corrected the phrase ‘but without mystics’ to ‘but *today* without mystics.’ That is the form in which I had the phrase in mind, with the connotation of today, not of a historical past of unspecified times, as we are accustomed to mean when we express ourselves in the present tense.” The issue that Lorenzatos raised in his essay about the questionable influence of Western humanism and the need, in his opinion, for Greek poets and men of letters (presumably including Seferis) to rediscover the lost center of their Eastern Orthodox faith was more fundamental than the commentary on this single phrase of Seferis’s suggests, but the initial omission of the word “now” or “today” on the poet’s part (alas, not merely a typographical error) served to highlight the issue, though in the end Seferis, for one reason or another, apparently decided not to bring his side of the debate thoroughly into the open even in the form of a detailed letter to his friend Lorenzatos.

The more persistent and time-consuming (if less theoretical) issue that emerged in Seferis’s 14 January letter appears earlier, when the poet turns to the first of the “new projects” I had proposed in my letter of 11 January, namely a “more or less complete” translation of his poems into English by Keeley and Sherrard.⁴¹ Seferis here indicates that this project can go forward only if the publishers of the Warner version of his selected poems in England and America grant permission for a new translation of those poems included in their selection (and not included in our *Six Poets of Modern Greece*, which preceded the Warner volume). Seferis’s impulse is again “to be fair in that sort of matters,” which meant first of all protecting the legitimate interests of his friend Rex Warner. But it turned out that he was also worried about his legal obligation to the Bodley Head Press in England and the Atlantic Monthly Press in America, and this brought on a dialogue that continued to the end of the year.

The question of Rex Warner’s possible concern about this new project was settled quickly. In my letter of 21 March, which outlined

⁴⁰ Athens: Ikaros, 1965.

⁴¹ Sherrard also wrote Seferis on 16 January to express his willingness to “cooperate” in this new project if Seferis “would like it and feel it to be deserving.” See Sherrard to Seferis, 16 January 1964, in the Appendix.

a detailed proposal from Princeton University Press for a bilingual, annotated edition of Seferis's collected poems, with distribution in England by way of Oxford University Press, I report that, after speaking with Warner about this projected possibility, "he is in full sympathy with the proposal since it involves a more or less complete edition of your work to be presented by two distinguished scholarly presses" — a generous response that became characteristic of Rex Warner, especially in his later years, when he continually put Seferis's interests ahead of his own.⁴²

In the main body of my letter of 21 March, I appear to be acting as agent for Princeton University Press after a conversation with the Director, Herbert Bailey. I was in fact enthusiastic about the prospect of a Princeton University Press edition of Seferis's poems, first of all because the Press was willing — as very few, if any, other American presses would have been — to offer a bilingual collection of the full range of Seferis's work, and also because it was producing at that time unusually handsome books. But had I been older and wiser, I would have brought a qualified literary agent into the negotiations at the very start for the purpose of establishing a better royalty rate for the poet and his translators in view of Seferis's eminence and the fact that three recipients would be sharing the proposed 10 percent royalty, and I would have limited the grant of translation rights to the United States rather than the world (that limitation and a better royalty rate were in fact granted by the Press in the case of the collected edition of C. P. Cavafy's poems negotiated some ten years later).

Seferis's response to my letter of 30 March comments justly and succinctly on the question of royalties as item number one: "they are the lowest I have *ever* had." On the question of rights, the poet tells me that he believes that he is not legally "bound to the Bodley Head" (or, by extension, "the Atlantic press") but that "morally I do not want to give rights to another translator without the approval of Rex Warner," and he encloses a copy of his agreement with the Bodley Head for me to use in getting advice on the legal issue. Another condition: "I object to having the Greek text in the

⁴² As it turned out, the projected arrangement with Oxford University Press faltered at some point, and rights for a British edition were eventually bought, through Princeton University Press, by Jonathan Cape, who eventually issued a bilingual paperback edition as well.

second part of the book (this text is after all the original).” And his agreement that the contents should be as substantial as possible depends, in the end, “on the possibilities of the translation.”

My further negotiations with the Director of Princeton University Press, Herbert Bailey, are outlined in my letter of 17 April. I lost on the question of royalties: after “bargaining like a true Levantine,” I got no more out of Mr. Bailey “than a tolerant smile,” and in the end that meant a meager 5 percent to the poet and an even more meager 2½ percent to each of the translators. It is at this point that an agent would have helped. But I could report that Mr. Bailey agreed to an “*en face*” edition, which “delighted” me, and his reading of the Bodley Head contract was consistent with Seferis’s feeling that the Bodley Head held rights only to the particular translations by Rex Warner included in his volume. Regarding Rex Warner, I offered to get his permission in writing, though I suggested that Seferis might prefer to do so himself.

That is what the poet preferred — as I learned from his postcard dated 15 May, where he notifies me that he had written Rex and has his answer, “full of understanding as always.” Seferis also reported not having yet heard from Herbert Bailey, Director of Princeton University Press, but he must have soon after mailing the card, because Bailey sent him a letter on 28 April in which he affirmed that the Greek text would appear *en face* and in which he did his best to justify the Press’s royalty scale by stating that it was “the highest ever provided by Princeton University Press” — no higher had been offered other Nobel Prize winners such as Albert Einstein and C. N. Yang or four of the Press’s Pulitzer Prize winners — and that he believed “our Trustees would be extremely reluctant to authorize a higher royalty than we have ever paid before.”⁴³ This was no doubt a just assessment of the Trustees likely position, though the Director might have presented them with the argument that in the case of this particular Nobel Prize winner, the standard royalty had to be shared with two translators. Bailey also gave the poet his opinion that the Bodley Head contract “refers clearly only to the particular translation of Mr. Warner and not to any other possible translation or to the original Greek itself.”

In his answer to Herbert Bailey’s letter on 10 June, Seferis writes

⁴³ Appendix, Bailey to Seferis, 28 April 1964.

that, since he is not “an expert on the technicalities of the matter,” presumably the question of rights, “I rely upon your interpretation of the Agreement with the Bodley Head.”⁴⁴ But the legal question was not settled with finality until the end of the year. Princeton University Press apparently felt that they ought to have a professional legal opinion, and this they solicited from Greenbaum, Wolff & Ernst, described by Gordon Hubel of Princeton University Press in a 24 September letter to Seferis as “the foremost American copyright lawyer.” The attached legal opinion, reports Mr. Hubel, is a clear statement which “supports our interpretation of your agreement with the Bodley Head,”⁴⁵ and in my letter to Seferis two days later, I add my support to that position. Regarding a second question still open (raised much earlier in Seferis’s letter to Mr. Bailey of 10 June), that is, whether a possible future paperback should have the Greek text *en face* as well, Mr. Hubel tells the poet that “we prefer not to make a definite contractual commitment on this at the present time.” Seferis eventually wrote Hubel that he agreed to consider that question “open for the time being,”⁴⁶ but Hubel’s September letter, with the legal opinion attached, proved persuasive regarding the contract in general, because Seferis wrote me on 8 November (after his recent trip to Spain and a prodding letter from me on 4 November) that “I think the legal opinion which Princeton Press forwarded me should satisfy everybody concerned and I am ready to sign the contract and send it to Philip.” His note to me of 12 December confirmed that he had done so. The year ended with the beginning of a project that kept Philip Sherrard and me occupied on and off with various editions of the collected poems over the next thirty years, culminating in the revised edition of 1995, which appeared during the summer after Philip Sherrard’s death in May of that year.

1965

The successful completion of arrangements for the Princeton University Press edition of Seferis was at least partly responsible for

⁴⁴ Appendix, Seferis to Bailey, 10 June 1964.

⁴⁵ See the Appendix, Gordon Hubel to Seferis, 24 September 1964.

⁴⁶ Appendix, Seferis to Hubel, 4 January 1965. The first paperback edition (1971) was English-only, the second (1981) bilingual, and the third (1995) English-only.

the poet's receiving an offer (in January, I gather from my letter dated 18 January) to attend the Princeton University graduation in June and receive an honorary doctorate. It is an aspect of the tradition in the awarding of honorary degrees at Princeton that the honorary "graduand" (as those so awarded are called) have, if at all possible, some past connection to the University. Though Princeton University Press is not a part of the University, it is sufficiently attached to it through its trustees and editorial board to have provided the necessary link in Seferis's case.

Whether or not the committee awarding honorary degrees actually holds firmly to this tradition in its evaluation of candidates — and there is evidence that it certainly does not always — the committee sometimes evokes the lack of a past connection to Princeton as grounds for turning down this or that candidate, as happened when Princeton's Program in Hellenic Studies proposed Odysseus Elytis for an honorary degree on several occasions (I was told by the committee's secretary: "Winning the Nobel Prize is not enough. How could the committee choose among all the writers and other deserving candidates who have won that prize?"). In any case, 1965 was a year in which the committee appeared to focus on artists after a dearth of such awards, as I mention in my 18 January letter. It turned out that the other artists honored with Seferis were not, as I originally thought, a painter and a composer but the painter Andrew Wyeth and the poet-playwright Archibald MacLeish, who was among the poets Seferis had included in his collection of translations, *Andigraphes*, and an ardent patron of Seferis's work (as his generous endorsement on the jacket of the second edition of the collected Seferis soon testified).⁴⁷

During the previous summer I had spoken to Seferis about the possibility of his giving a lecture at Princeton during the spring of 1965, and it is clear from my letter of 26 September 1964 that Seferis was contemplating a trip not only to the United States but to Japan as well, which Faulkner had also visited at some point following his Nobel Prize. From the reference to "Mr. Miller" and the Institute for Contemporary Arts in my 18 January letter, it

⁴⁷ "This is a book and a translation worthy of Seferis, which is to praise it as highly as it could be praised. If any contemporary poet could be said to be essential, Seferis is that poet, and this is the true body of his work admirably, beautifully, and intelligently presented."



Photo: John Blazewski

George Seferis (left), with Princeton President Robert F. Goheen, poet Archibald MacLeish, and artist Andrew Wyeth, at the Commencement ceremony in June 1965, when Seferis received an honorary degree from Princeton. Selected Papers of George Seferis, Manuscripts Division, Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

appears that Seferis was still planning a lecture tour under the auspices of the Institute at the time the honorary degree invitation from Princeton reached him. But we learn from Seferis's letter of 1 February that "unexpected circumstances" prevented him from going through with the planned visit both to the United States and to Japan. This news meant no honorary degree, since the graduand's presence at the presentation ceremony is an essential requirement at Princeton (as it is at most American universities).

The warmth of Seferis's regret at losing this opportunity "to see two friends: you in your home and Rex Warner" did not serve to mute the honest disappointment I felt over this development, too mildly expressed in my letter of 13 February. In that letter I forwarded an offer on the part of the Secretary to the Princeton Trustees which I thought had little prospect of being realized: that Seferis fly over to the United States simply to accept the degree and re-

turn “at your convenience — the day following, if your commitments in Athens are pressing.” Much to my surprise, Seferis accepted this invitation “in principle,” and the correspondence that follows is largely concerned with the negotiations that made this shorter trip a reality, including arrangements regarding transportation, hotels, appropriate dress before and during the ceremony (sweater and raincoat for the cool evenings, black tie for the President’s reception, academic hat and gown of a certain size, etc.), and the proper way to identify the graduand. The poet tells me on 6 May that “The Degree is conferred to Seferis and not the diplomat. Seferis should be mentioned always at the ceremony (the same happened in Cambridge, Stockholm, Oxford and Thessaloniki.) But in a biographical note I feel bound to mention my passport name [i.e., Seferiades].”

The correspondence also outlines negotiations regarding a public reading that eventually took place at the Guggenheim Museum under the sponsorship of the Academy of American Poets, then administered by Elizabeth Kray (who had approached Seferis in this connection much earlier, at least before the fall of 1964).⁴⁸ Seferis read a selection of his poems in Greek — his preferences noted in his hand on my *aérogramme* to him dated 25 May — and I read the same poems in English translation. The hall was crammed full, as I remember, with a number of local poets in attendance and many fans from the Greek community, and the response was warmer than I had expected. It did not rise, however, to the ecstatic level with which audiences greeted Seferis three years later, during a reading tour arranged while he was at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, after the advent of the 1967–1974 dictatorship. Though Seferis’s honorary degree at Princeton in June 1965, and his reading that month under perhaps the best of literary auspices in New York, helped to bring him closer to the American community of poetry lovers, at least in the eastern United States, it was his increasingly clear image among Greeks and Greek-Americans as the national poet of Greece and therefore that country’s first “voice” — a role the poet himself denigrated — that soon led to both the adulation and the inner turmoil that Seferis experienced during his subsequent visit to America.

⁴⁸ As we learn from her letter to Seferis of 18 November 1964, where she speaks of “again writing you.” For the text of the letter, see the Appendix.

It is clear from my letters in the first months of 1965 that Philip Sherrard and I were already hard at work on the translation of Seferis's collected poems (18 January: "I have 12 poems still to translate before my half of the volume is complete"; 13 February: "I continue to work on the Collected Poems. We will have . . . a thick manuscript to consider when we see you in June"; 1 May: "I am working on poems from Log Book III, which means that I will have my half of the Complete [*sic*] Poems ready in draft by the time you reach this country"). But there were problems. The first issue that came up in connection with this project — and it is an important issue perennially debated by translators — had to do with the translation of Seferis's rhymed verse and, more generally, any rhymed verse. Part of my assignment for the collected edition was the long early poem "Erotikos Logos," and I wrote on 1 May to ask Seferis for permission to publish my translation in the *Virginia Quarterly Review* before it appeared in book form. Mine was an unrhymed version of the strictly rhymed decapendasyllabic original, and I enclosed it with my letter in the hope that it would be reviewed by the poet and receive his blessing.

Seferis's response was in a postscript to his letter dated 6 May that was mostly about further details having to do with the honorary degree. The poet was good enough to say that my translation represented a great deal of work and showed a great deal of skill and understanding, but . . . — and he then went on to argue against a translator's attempting to offer unrhymed versions of rhymed poems, citing Dante as his final authority on the basis of a passage in the *Convivio* (quoted by Seferis in an English translation by somebody): "Let everyone know that nothing which hath the harmony of musical connection can be transferred from its own tongue into another without shattering all its sweetness and harmony." The poet concluded that unrhymed versions not only sacrifice the rhyme "but at least half of the poem," and it is therefore better, if one has to offer a translation "at all costs," to do so in good prose and "explain to the reader."

Though Seferis suggested that we let the matter wait for our meeting in Princeton twenty-five days hence, the issue was not resolved until a year or more later, and the resolution — which followed further debate at some point — was not a version in prose of this and others of Seferis's rhymed poems, but a decision by the

translators to place all of their translations of rhymed poems in a separate section at the back of the collected edition. This arrangement finally had the poet's blessing, but I am no longer sure that it is appropriate. I give some weight to Roderick Beaton's well-grounded suggestion that it might be better at this point to begin the volume of translations not with *Mythistorema* but with *Turning Point* (Strophi), followed by *The Cistern* (I sterna), as in the Ikaros edition, so that the English-speaking reader might have some sense of how Seferis's "poetic 'voice' modulated constantly from one poem and one collection to the next" after his having started out "with an almost unrivalled mastery of the technical properties of form" that never left him, even if that mastery "must be next to impossible" to convey in translation.⁴⁹

But the reader might well ask if that reordering would be fair to the poet after his clearly expressed dissatisfaction with unrhymed versions that are set up as poetry. I would be tempted to answer that argument by reminding the reader that the second translation by George Seferis in his 1965 collection of translations, *Andigraphes* (a volume published in the year our debate occurred), is an unrhymed version of W. P. Yeats's very tightly rhymed poem "Sailing to Byzantium," and farther along in the collection we find an unrhymed version of W. H. Auden's elaborately rhymed "Musée des Beaux Arts" — as far as I can judge the Greek, both quite acceptable unrhymed translations of two contemporary masterpieces in English. This effort on Seferis's part, along with his generally forgiving nature, might make a reconsideration of the placing of the Keeley-Sherrard unrhymed versions of Seferis at least forgivable.

1966

A second issue in connection with the translation of Seferis's collected poems came up in the autumn of 1966, as publication of the volume was imminent: what sort of introduction to the collection was most appropriate? — again the kind of issue that is of perennial concern to poets and their translators. In September, Seferis wrote me in response to my request that he sign a letter addressed to Penguin Books which would require the publisher to pay him a portion of the royalty receipts from *Four Greek Poets*, a paperback

⁴⁹ *Modern Poetry in Translation* 8 (1995): 230.

anthology reprinting translations of Cavafy, Seferis, Elytis, and Gatsos that had appeared in *Six Poets of Modern Greece*. Seferis expressed his entirely justifiable unhappiness about our having excluded, under space constraints imposed by the publisher, a selection of Sikelianos's poetry, further evidence of Seferis's abiding faith in the genius of this predecessor (I recall a dinner conversation in London some years earlier when I had suggested to Seferis that, indisputably grand as some of Sikelianos's poetry was and however important his contribution to the Modern Greek literary tradition, he was not, finally, as great a poet as his near contemporary, William Butler Yeats. "How can you be sure of that?" Seferis exclaimed. "How can you compare greatness from one tradition to another? For me, a Greek, Sikelianos is as great as Yeats is for you, an American Irishman"). In his September letter Seferis adds that he hopes "to have a compensation with the Princeton edition" of his collected poems for the Keeley-Sherrard delinquency of eliminating Sikelianos from the Penguin anthology, but then abruptly indicates his worry about the prefatory matter in the collected edition in a way that worried me.

In this connection, after an initial debate about various strategies for complementing the translations (specifically where to put biographical material, discussion of certain problems of translation, and commentary on the poetry itself), Sherrard and I had settled during the summer of 1966 for putting biographical material in a concluding note, placing our views on translation issues in the acknowledgement section, and limiting other commentary to a relatively brief Foreword that we hoped would introduce Seferis's work to a new audience that knew him only partially if at all. What Seferis expresses in his September letter is his concern about even this limited mode of introduction, and he refers to a meeting with our mutual friend George Savidis during which Savidis "didn't seem to be quite happy about the introductory pieces of the book." He goes on to say that "I believe appreciations of the poet in this book are redundant," then adds his opinion that we, the translators, should limit ourselves to the role of translators and not of judges.

This letter clearly distressed me, and it did so for several reasons. I sent off a three page, single-spaced reply that the reader will no doubt find excessive. The first thing that distressed me was the report of George Savidis' apparent reaction to the Foreword.

As I indicate in my letter, when I had spoken to Savidis before leaving Athens that summer, he had seemed to me neither for nor against the Foreword, and his only expressed criticism had been that the translators had not given enough space to specific critical commentary on the poetry. I shared George Savidis' sentiments in that regard, but Philip Sherrard did not, and I doubted that Seferis would.

But the more substantive cause of distress was my deep-seated feeling that Seferis's poetry was still not broadly read in America even after his receiving the Nobel Prize and therefore required at least enough of an introduction to establish his importance to readers in the English-speaking world. And I knew for a fact that introductory appreciations of relatively unknown foreign poets, however distinguished in their own country, were traditional in American publishing — and in this case an introduction of some kind was strongly advocated by Princeton University Press.⁵⁰ So, in response to Seferis's opinion that "appreciations of the poet in this book are redundant," I suggested, "with all due respect," that an appreciation would in fact be traditional rather than redundant, and I was pedantic enough to dig up all the recent sources in this connection that I could find in Princeton's Firestone Library and list them for Seferis: four relating to translations of the Nobel laureate Boris Pasternak, two relating to the Nobel laureate St.-John Perse. I put particular emphasis — rather unsubtly — on what T. S. Eliot had to say about his introduction to a translation of St.-John Perse's *Anabase*: "I am by no means convinced that a poem like *Anabase* requires a preface at all. It is better to read a poem six times, and dispense with a preface. But when a poem is presented in the form of a translation, people who have never heard of it are naturally inclined to demand some testimonial. So I give mine hereunder."

I concluded my letter to Seferis by hoping that he would find our revised Foreword at least neutral enough not to dampen his enthusiasm "for an edition that is the culmination of a long-standing love for, and involvement with, your work on the part of both Philip and me," and I sent a blind copy of this letter to Philip Sherrard.

From my letter dated 6 November it appears that Sherrard dis-

⁵⁰ See the 5 October 1966 letter to Seferis from Herbert S. Bailey, Seferis's answer to that letter, and Bailey's answer to Seferis, all in the Appendix.

cussed the Foreword with Seferis and sent me suggested revisions that I was able to incorporate into the galleys of the collected edition, then on my desk. I also suspect that, in the end, George Savidis also put in a good word on behalf of our revised Foreword, whatever his earlier ambiguities. And it is possible that Herbert Bailey's two letters to Seferis helped to persuade the poet to mute his objection. In any case, the only direct response from Seferis that I received to my perhaps too elaborate defence of introductions was a succinct reference in a postcard dated 10 November: "After Philip's alterations (which I have not seen) I feel there is no room for further discussion about the *foreword*." Then, in connection with a clipping of a *New York Times* review by Kimon Friar of Seferis's selected essays, *On the Greek Style*, that I had enclosed in my letter of 6 November (along with a payment for a translation of one of his poems that I had published in a quarterly), Seferis gave this "cutting" a cutting remark, even though Friar's review was highly appreciative: "Indebted for sending me the N. Y. Times cutting. The writer is a clever and shallow busy-body." This, added to Seferis's earlier remark to Rex Warner, was evidence that there had been some sort of unfortunate falling out between the poet and Friar, who was perhaps the first after Henry Miller to promote Seferis's work in the United States.

It was not until almost a year later that I could be absolutely certain that "no room for further discussion" meant that Seferis had fully acceded to our having a Foreword of the kind Sherrard and I finally offered Princeton University Press. In his letter of 21 October 1967, on receiving his copy of *George Seferis: Collected Poems*, the poet writes, among other comments on the edition: "As for the foreword, my feeling is that it's taken now its best form." End of issue.

The correspondence of 1966 leads me to conclude that George Seferis, however much strength and occasional acidity he brought to his opinions and however concerned he might have been about the proper presentation of his work abroad (even if he usually declined to comment in detail about our translations), was in essence a patient and tolerant man. It was Seferis's accommodating sensibility and cosmopolitan intelligence that permitted both Philip and me to develop an amicable personal relationship with the poet over the years, and this provided rewards for us that helped to make up

in some measure for the agony, the sweat, and the inevitable sense of inadequacy that comes with translating work as subtle in the original as Seferis's proved to be.

1967

The correspondence in this year begins in February, with Seferis on vacation in Delphi ("I worked hard enough the last months of the year and needed it"), responding to a letter of mine (missing from the archive) after what the poet calls a "lapse." I had apparently forwarded Seferis an invitation to take part in the Spoleto festival from my friend Patrick Creagh, an Irish poet and translator of Italian then living in Rome. The "carrot" held out by the mention of T. S. Eliot's having attended a previous festival evidently did not impress Seferis: "Festivals may be profitable enterprises for T. S.; not for me." Besides, he lets me know, he had turned down an earlier invitation to Spoleto the year before Eliot accepted his, the kind of remark that makes me wonder if Seferis hadn't wearied a bit of the constant link between his name and Eliot's over the years, even if many suspected — credibly, I would say — that Eliot, most eminent of Nobel laureates in those days, had strongly supported the Greek translator of *The Waste Land* for the Nobel Prize.⁵¹

The 9 February note from Seferis also mentions several recent essays that he posted to me "many weeks ago by surface mail" — though why that way he does not explain — and he adds, almost casually it seems, that he is also sending me copies of his latest volume of poems, *Tria Kryfa Poimata* (Three secret poems), along with a translation, *I Apokalypsi tou Ioanni* (The apocalypse of St. John), both published by Ikaros in 1966. In my response to the new poems on 17 March, I was honest enough to add to my comment on "the richness of their simplicity" (which curiously reminded me of a like quality in Solomos) that, after several readings, I was still planning to go on reading them slowly. I did so over a period of years before I felt I had begun to fathom *not* their simplicity but

⁵¹ Seferis first published his translation of Eliot, *I Erimi Chora kai alla poimata* (The Waste Land and Other Poems) in 1936, and there were several subsequent editions. The translation was accompanied by valuable notes for those who had access to them — notes especially illuminating that early in the history of the extensive criticism that Eliot's work eventually generated.

their rich complexity, so dependent on a familiarity with Seferis's earlier verse, which the poems exploit in interesting ways, and on his development — especially beginning with “*Thrush*” (“*Kichli*”) — of a voice that becomes increasingly visionary, grounded, as I've suggested above, in both ancient Greek and Christian images.⁵²

I soon found out that Seferis's not having sent Sherrard and me a copy of his *Three Secret Poems* early enough to have allowed us to include this volume in the collected edition was deliberate on the poet's part. When I told him at our next meeting in Greece that, if necessary, we would have slowed the process of bringing out the collected edition had he let us know a new volume as important as this latest one was in the works, he said with a little smile that he wanted the poems to “breathe” on their own a while and only in Greek before they appeared as part of his collected works in English.

At the time I took this to be a reasonable position and swallowed my disappointment that our title for the collected edition, no longer a complete edition, had to carry the dates 1924–1955, but Sherrard and I both had more uncomfortable second thoughts about this omission when three translations of the new volume by other hands appeared within the two years following our collected edition, those by Walter Kaiser and Peter Thompson apparently authorized, the other by Paul Merchant not.⁵³ Seferis explained at one point that he hadn't been able to resist allowing Walter Kaiser to translate those new poems “because he did me the great compliment of writing to say that he was learning modern Greek simply to read my work in the original.” Along with the force of that compliment, Sherrard and I felt that the poet was responding to an abiding sense of propriety that any writer would find understandable: no single translator or collaboration of translators should have the exclusive right

⁵² The visionary aspect of Seferis's development is a theme I explore in “*Nostos* and the Poet's Vision in Seferis and Ritsos” in *Ancient Greek Myth in Modern Greek Poetry*, ed. Peter Mackridge (London: Frank Cass, 1996).

⁵³ Walter Kaiser, *Three Secret Poems* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1969); Paul Merchant, “Three Secret Poems,” *Modern Greek Poetry in Translation* (London, 1968); Peter Thompson, “Three Private Poems,” *Agenda* 7, no. 1 (Winter 1969): 35–49. In my letter of 28 September 1970, a marginal note in my hand raises the possibility with Seferis of my “ignor[ing] the pirated version” of *Three Secret Poems* in the revised “Bibliographical Note” that I was then preparing for the 1971 paperback edition of the *Collected Poems*. Since Paul Merchant's version did not end up in the list of “Selected translations of Seferis into English . . .,” I assume that this was the translation that Seferis considered pirated (the term he had used in conversation with me at an earlier point).

to render a given writer's work. The case of Cavafy, who was held hostage in America by a single translator for some years, had long since convinced me that translation should remain a shared feast, available to various hands and open to new renderings from generation to generation. In any case, after a breathing of some fourteen years, Sherrard and I included our version of *Three Secret Poems* in the expanded 1981 edition of *George Seferis: Collected Poems*, the book's title no longer restricted by dates.

The reference in Seferis's note from Delphi to Mrs. Kaiti Katsoyianni's book of correspondence between her and the famous Greek conductor, Dimitri Mitropoulos, initiates a project that occupied my wife Mary for several years. Her translation of the correspondence was eventually published by the New York Philharmonic and became the impetus for several visits over time with the venerable and endlessly high-spirited Katsoyianni sisters in Kifissia, sometimes in the company of Seferis, and after his death, in the company of Zissimos Lorenzatos. These were occasions for talk about and reminiscence of Athens — and especially Kifissia — as it was before gray concrete began to sprout in various monstrous shapes throughout Athens and its suburbs to confine the possibility of green thoughts in open spaces.

The single remaining issue regarding the collected edition of Seferis that the correspondence takes up before the volume actually appeared in the summer of 1967 is that of the Yannis Moralis frontispiece, chosen from the various illustrations that the painter provided for a 1965 edition of Seferis's poems published in Athens by Ikaros. Seferis's note dated 21 April (presumably written before the Colonels and their tanks took over the streets of Athens in the early morning hours of that day) complains both about Princeton University Press's apparent failure to get in touch with either the painter or the Greek publisher and about the "wretched \$100" fee that the painter is to receive for the reproduction of his work.

The Press's parsimony embarrassed me as well, but as I explain in my letter of 2 May, I had to bargain energetically to have the fee raised from the original offer of \$10–\$20 to the very modest sum that was finally agreed upon. And my assurance that the reproduction "will come out very close to the original color of the painting" proved illusory. Seferis's letter of 10 October, which speaks of liking the volume's "physical appearance," also speaks of "the

Moralis discoloration.” My explanation of that (on 30 October) is that it was a last-minute “eccentricity” on the part of the book’s designer, the famous P.J. Conkwright, a gentleman close to retirement who had received a number of citations over the years for his book designs and who now performed more or less as he — and he alone — pleased.⁵⁴ In the same letter I mention that the book’s editor at the Press, Eve Hanle, had another tongue-in-cheek suggestion regarding the cause of the “discoloration”: Mr. Conkwright, she hypothesized, was color-blind. In any case, the dominantly pink tones of the 1967 frontispiece had turned a more appropriate gray-blue for the 1981 edition, which followed on Mr. Conkwright’s retirement.

Seferis’s reference in his 10 October letter to the “omnibus train” aspect of the book’s jacket had to do with the standard practice by Princeton University Press of using both the backside and the reverse side of their book jackets to advertise a number of other books on their list. After Seferis’s complaint, an exception to that practice was made for subsequent editions of his collected poems.

Almost hidden in the correspondence of the spring and fall of this year (interrupted, as usual, during the summer months, when I was in Greece) was the event that was to influence Seferis’s life profoundly in the days following, as was true of his countrymen generally, if less dramatically so for most. My first reference to the Colonels’ coup of 21 April appears in my letter of 2 May, where I say that the situation in Greece “upsets me” and that I hope to talk about it when my wife and I reach Athens in late June. In the same letter I mention that my brother, Robert (known generally as Bob), is serving in the political section of the American Embassy in Athens and is “no doubt very busy these days.”

We learn from Seferis’s first letter to me after the summer interruption, dated 10 October, that my brother has met with the poet in order to deliver “the first copy of the Princeton Seferis” and that the poet, who has had “some experience about diplomats,” likes him. That meeting was in fact the beginning of a long-term relationship between the poet and my brother, both of whom ap-

⁵⁴ See the special issue of the *Princeton University Library Chronicle* 56, no. 2 (Winter 1995), dedicated to P.J. Conkwright. It was also published in hardcover: Mark Argetsinger, *Harmony Discovered: P.J. Conkwright in the Tradition of Classical Typography* (Princeton: Princeton University Library, 1995).

peared to be especially at ease with each other not only because they were experienced diplomats but also because they shared a love of literature, my brother having been an English major at Princeton and a budding writer during his undergraduate and graduate years. But what Seferis underlines in his subsequent letter as that which he finds attractive in my brother is not his “learning” but his “frame of mind.” In any case, during the course of the next two years, until my brother was transferred to the United States in the summer of 1970, he and Seferis met fairly regularly, and they corresponded during the months before Seferis’s death, following my brother’s departure from Greece.⁵⁵

In his postcard of 7 April 1968, Seferis reports that “Brother Robert brought me our passports with the U.S.A. visas,” thus assuring the exit of the Seferises from Greece and their entry into America in connection with the poet’s pending appointment at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton. At some point later in the dictatorship, Seferis called on my brother to come to Agras Street in order to do him a favor: the poet had just learned of the arrest of Eleni Vlachou’s husband for having a weapon of some kind in his home in violation of the junta’s early decree that all weapons in the hands of private citizens be turned over to the police. According to my brother’s account of this episode, Seferis saw the arrest as a revengeful response by the junta to Eleni Vlachou’s having ceased publication of her conservative newspaper following the 1967 coup. Seferis handed my brother a revolver and a box of cartridges: “Please take these with you, and when you next go out for a sail in your sailboat, throw them into the sea.” My brother in fact took the revolver and box of cartridges out of Greece on his departure and later turned them over to me for my Seferis archive.

In my letter of 30 October 1967, along with conveying news about Jonathan Cape’s decision to bring out an English edition of Seferis’s collected poems (this by arrangement with Princeton University Press, who held world rights to the translation) and also Archibald MacLeish’s generous comment on the book, I mention almost casually my having made an approach to the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton regarding the possibility of their inviting Seferis to the Institute during the following year. What had moved me to

⁵⁵ See Appendix, Robert Keeley to Seferis, 4 August 1970, 12 February and 18 April 1971.

do this was Seferis's remark, in his letter of 10 October, that he didn't "feel in a very good mood for creative work." I took this to be a covert allusion to the debilitating influence of the Greek dictatorship and its policy of censorship, which had been in place for almost six months by that time. In any case, on 2 December Seferis reports that he has received a letter from the Director of the Institute for Advanced Study, Carl Kaysen, inviting him to the Institute for either a term (i. e., six months) or a year, and he confirms that "during the last months" he has "begun to feel rather uneasy with my writing," to the point where he feels "the need of some sort of ventilation, at least for one term."

It is clear from this letter that Seferis had taken the invitation seriously enough to consider a possible topic to work on at the Institute — the "myths and legends in Plato" — and also to decide that the fall of 1968 would be the best time for him and his wife Maro to travel to the United States for two reasons: "April '69 is too remote," and "they say autumn is beautiful in your lands." In responding to his letter on 11 December, I join Homer Thompson, the distinguished classical archaeologist and Director of the Agora excavations, in encouraging Seferis to think of visiting the Institute for two terms rather than one, though I actually doubted that he would commit himself to that long a period away from home, as proved to be the case: three weeks later a postcard from Nafplion arrived with the news that Seferis had accepted the Institute's invitation for the fall term, 1968.⁵⁶

As it turned out, after that term of quiet contemplation in the green expanses of the Institute, the poet tried unsuccessfully to return for the fall of 1969, but in his letter of 19 January to Homer Thompson, he reports that Carl Kaysen had told him it was the Institute's policy "to space visits" and the fall of 1969 was "a difficult period as there was a heavy demand for memberships."⁵⁷ But in December 1967, still well within the first year of the dictatorship, the poet's frame of mind seems to have precluded the possibility of long or repeated periods abroad. We learn from his 27 December 1967 letter to Franklin Ford at Harvard University that the advent of censorship under the Colonels' regime has not only led to his unwillingness to publish anything in his country "as long as this

⁵⁶ See Appendix, Seferis to Carl Kaysen, 25 December 1967.

⁵⁷ See Appendix, Seferis to Homer Thompson, 19 January 1969.

situation lasts,” but has caused him to feel that “if there is no freedom of expression in one’s own country, there is no such freedom anywhere in the world,” and this has made him conclude that the “condition of the emigrant does not attract me: I want to stay with my people and share its vicissitudes.”⁵⁸

At that moment, Seferis’s frame of mind precluded his accepting a year-long appointment as Charles Eliot Norton Professor of Poetry at Harvard, which suggests that he considered the visiting term at Princeton a kind of interval for, as he put it, “ventilation” rather than for concentrated work. And even though he continued to think in terms of working on Plato, in particular “those rational elements in his writing,”⁵⁹ there is some evidence that his expressed feelings about the effect of the Colonels’ censorship on freedom of expression “anywhere in the world” may have in fact inhibited his writing — anyway his writing of poetry — while he was in Princeton. In response to my question “Did you get some work done?” raised in *The Paris Review* interview that I conducted with Seferis late in his stay at the Institute,⁶⁰ the poet found it hard to speak about actual work accomplished. He said that he had “an inner feeling” that he had not lost his time, but he could not “mention anything really done” except that “I wrote a poem of two lines.”

That poem is surely the one that appears at the conclusion of the prose manuscript of some twenty pages of differing lengths that Seferis in fact wrote while at the Institute, a series of notes, under the heading “Cheirographo Okt. ’68” (Manuscript Oct. ’68), that comment on his daily life from October to December and that offer thoughts on both his personal situation and the situation in Greece.⁶¹ The two-line poem, a take-off on the slogan “A Greece of Greek

⁵⁸ Appendix, Seferis to Franklin Ford, 27 December 1967. The letter is in Selected Papers of George Seferis, Manuscripts Division, Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library. A translation of it into Greek appeared in *Giorgos Seferis: Cheirographo Okt. ’68* (George Seferis: Manuscript Oct. ’68), ed. P[avlos] A. Zannas (Athens: Diatton, 1986).

⁵⁹ Appendix, Seferis to Carl Kaysen, 25 December 1967.

⁶⁰ Fall 1970. See also *The Paris Review: Writers at Work*, Fourth Series.

⁶¹ The manuscript is among the Selected Papers of George Seferis, Manuscripts Division, Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library. It was published in Greek as *Giorgos Seferis: Cheirographo Okt. ’68* in an edition by P. A. Zannas. The editor provides an illuminating introduction that places these notes in the context of Seferis’s “Cheirographo Sep. ’41” (Manuscript Sept. ’41) and his developing position regarding public commentary on political issues, especially with reference to his stance in connection with the 1967–1974 dictatorship.

Christians” promulgated by the Colonels’ dictatorship, may be translated as follows (“fire” meaning a command to a firing squad):

Out of Stupidity
Greece; fire! Of Greeks; fire! Christians; fire!
Three dead words. Why did you kill them?
Athens summer — Princeton N.J. Xmas 1968

1968

In January of this year my wife and I joined the British novelists Kingsley Amis and Elizabeth Jane Howard, then married to each other, for a trip to Mexico. I had taken up snorkeling with a passion in those days and soon moved on to scuba diving, which is in part what I meant by saying in my 5 January letter to Seferis that I hoped “to spend much of my time underwater, where one is spared the changing sound of horror and idiocy that sometimes torment one in the open air.” I also meant the remark to be a covert allusion to the dictatorship, ever more entrenched in Greece after the sorry failure of King Constantine’s December 1967 attempt to overthrow the Colonels. Seferis’s response a week later was rather slyly humorous, perhaps a covert allusion on his part not only to the contemporary situation in Greece but also to his poem “Stratis Thalassinós on the Dead Sea” (“. . . we continue our tour / many fathoms below the surface of the Aegean”): “Some years ago when I was led to consider strange conditions in the sea’s bottom I was horrified. I wonder if six months underwater wouldn’t lead you to feel the same horror and idiocy that torment us in the open air.” In the same letter the poet brings up the issue of his having turned down the Harvard invitation for 1969–1970 and encloses the above-mentioned letter to Franklin L. Ford that outlines his rationale, based on the presence of censorship in Greece.

It is clear from this exchange that Seferis was increasingly concerned about the situation in his country and no longer as reluctant to refer to it in his letters as he had originally seemed. The concern pursued him to the United States, though most of the correspondence preceding his arrival is devoted to less compelling matters: his housing and financial arrangements with the Institute

in Princeton, the delay by Princeton University Press in sending Nikos Karydis of Ikaros a copy of the *Collected Poems* (this occasioned in part by their having confused my older brother, Hugh, then working for Mobil Oil in Nigeria, with my younger brother, Robert, at the American Embassy in Athens, both on a list of those to receive complimentary copies), and the poet's travel plans in April and May. Except for an August note from Seferis to tell me that he and Maro are on their way to visit Patrick Leigh Fermor in Kardamyli, our correspondence in this year ends with my usual summer visit to Greece, where we communicated by telephone, and Seferis's subsequent fourteen-week visit to Princeton, which was soon followed by my return to Athens on leave for the spring and summer of 1969.

What does not come into the correspondence is the pattern of events that followed on Seferis's arrival at the Institute for Advanced Study in mid-September. Aspects of this are reported in the introduction to the *Paris Review* interview referred to above: along with his quiet encounter with the changing colors of the fall season and exotic squirrels crossing his lawn, the series of readings that we took part in jointly at Harvard University, Princeton University, Rutgers University, and in the cities of Pittsburgh, Washington, D. C., and New York. I point out in the introduction that the response of the various audiences included both a degree of bewilderment and of adoration, each at times surprising the poet, but I now see that the reading at New York's Y.M.H.A. Poetry Center was perhaps crucial in helping the poet to formulate a public stance regarding the dictatorship.⁶²

During the question period following the New York reading, Seferis was asked directly about his feelings regarding the situation in Greece, and when he refused to answer the several probes of this kind, the murmured dissatisfaction on the part of some in the audience clearly disturbed him. At dinner in his honor that evening he explained his reason for not answering some of the questions, a position related to his refusal to become an emigrant: he didn't think it was right to criticize his government while he was safely abroad in a

⁶² The reading took place on 2 December, and it was introduced by Senator Eugene McCarthy, the unsuccessful Presidential candidate and occasional poet who admired Seferis's work. As Seferis was leaving the United States to return to Greece in December, he sent the Senator a telegram thanking him for the gift of *And Time Began* (see Appendix).



Photograph © by Jill Krementz

George Seferis (left) with Senator Eugene McCarthy and Edmund Keeley
at the Y.M.H.A. Poetry Center, 2 December 1968, when Seferis was
challenged to comment on the Colonels' dictatorship in Greece.

Photograph used by permission of Jill Krementz.

foreign country at a time when others were suffering in Greece for their opposition to the Colonels' regime (e.g., our friend Pavlos Zannas, to whom we had dedicated our reading at Harvard and who was then incarcerated in Greece for his dissidence). Seferis hadn't made this position clear to his audience, some of whom clearly thought he was evading the issue, as did some at the dinner table even after hearing his explanation. And subsequently, during my late December interview with him, his seemingly rather pee-vish responses to my questions regarding his possible responsibility toward the cultural life around him and his potential role as a spokesman and public conscience, suggest to me that he was deeply tormented by the issue during those days.

Something of the same state of mind comes to the surface in his manuscript notes written while he was at the Institute. And I gather that Maro Seferis had been pressing him to take a firmer stance during these days, though exactly what she had in mind remains obscure (Zannas concludes his introduction to the October '68 manuscript by stating that Seferis "had already decided — as Maro Seferis testifies" to prepare a statement against the dictatorship by the time he left Princeton on 29 December 1968).⁶³

In any case, as I report in some detail in my essay on Seferis's "political" voice in *Modern Greek Poetry: Voice and Myth*, it was two months later, when he was again settled into his home on Agras Street, that he came out into the open with a dramatic, uncompromising, and broadly heralded public statement about the "state of enforced torpor," the "intellectual values . . . about to sink into swampy stagnant waters," and the tragedy that "awaits, inevitably, in the end" for dictatorial regimes that appear to have an easy beginning.⁶⁴ By the end of March 1969, Seferis had in fact become the spokesman for all those Greek intellectuals, politicians, and ordinary citizens who opposed the dictatorship, and his invocation of ultimate doom for the colonels proved grandly prophetic.

⁶³ *Giorgos Seferis: Cheirographo Okt. '68*, p. 67.

⁶⁴ For my translation of the text of Seferis's statement, see the Appendix, "George Seferis's Statement of 28 March 1969." A typescript copy, in Greek, of the statement is in the Selected Papers of George Seferis, Manuscripts Division, Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

1969–1970

During these two years my correspondence with the poet was largely limited to the fall months of each year because I was on leave in Greece from late January through part of September in both years. In late August of 1969, I sent Seferis a note to say that we hoped to have an evening with him on Skyros, where we would be visiting in the company of the English novelists Kingsley Amis and Elizabeth Jane Howard, companions on our earlier trip to Mexico. As it turned out, we had several easy-going, fluid evenings on Skyros with the Seferises and other writers who happened to be vacationing on the island, including our mutual friends Stratis Tsirkas and Joy Koulendianou and the French novelist Natalie Sarraute. Seferis appeared to be much more at peace with himself than he had seemed during his last days in Princeton and the early months of the new year, the change in his mood no doubt a consequence of his public statement in late March. As I report in my essay on Seferis's "political" voice, he told me soon after that major event in his life that "the only emotion I felt once I'd made the decision to speak was intense liberation."⁶⁵

The correspondence through the rest of the year is given over mostly to minor matters: some talk about the first Modern Greek Studies Association symposium at Princeton in November, attended by, among others, his old friend and my new friend at the time, Zissimos Lorenzatos, and by Peter Levi, who delivered a paper on Seferis; his need for packets of "pipe bowl polisher and mouthpiece cleaner" and the special brand of pipe tobacco (Balkan Sobranie) that was apparently easily available only at the Palmer Square tobacconist in Princeton; and orders for several books, including Picasso's erotic engravings, Pound's *Guide to Kulchur* and *The Spirit of Romance*, and Ruth Benedict's *Patterns of Culture*. The only pending literary matter had to do with my translation of the poem "Letter to Rex Warner," which the poet had handed me before I left Greece at the end of the summer and which I translated in October and revised in November, after receiving the poet's suggestions. The poem, one of the few the poet published abroad during the dictatorship, appeared in *Encounter* in February 1970.

By the end of 1969, I had begun to address my letters to "G.S."

⁶⁵ "Seferis's 'Political' Voice," p. 109.

GEORGE SEFERIS

LETTER TO REX WARNER

resident of Storrs, Connecticut, U. S. A.
on his sixtieth birthday

translated from the Greek by Edmund Keeley

At the time we met
you were telling ~~about~~ ^{the tale of} the wild goose chase
in the kingdom of hermaphrodites;
there the football field
had known a shameless slaughter.
I was returning from a ~~resplendent~~ marble stadium
where the obstinate ~~wounded~~ marathon runner, ^{wounded,}
saw the track ^{ing} ~~smile~~ in blood.
^{That} This way I came to understand you and we became friends.

^{walking in}
We were ~~on our way to~~ a country ruined by the war,
where they'd crippled even the dolls of children.
The light, quick and strong,
bit into everything and turned it to stone.
We walked among
bicycles and kites,
we watched the colors but our talk
strayed to that ^{restless} ~~insurable~~ horror.

Years went by and I found you again
on foreign soil, ^{luxuriant,} ~~where~~ the vegetation ~~burst~~.

Photo: John Blazewski

Draft of the translation by Edmund Keeley of George Seferis's "Letter to Rex Warner,"
1969. Edmund Keeley Papers, Manuscripts Division, Rare Books and Special Collections,
Princeton University Library.

rather than to the more formal “Mr. Seferis,” and by the end of 1970, “G.S.” has become “George,” a sign that after his time in Princeton and after my recent long periods on leave in Greece, our friendship was now on what is called “a first-name basis.” My first letter to “G.S.” in January of 1970, anticipating my arrival in Athens at the beginning of February, is a ten-item “quick report” mostly fulfilling old business and reporting on recent publications, his and mine. The second “G.S.” note simply reports the publication of the Warner poem in *Encounter*, with my audacious comment that the one by Borges in the same issue is “not nearly as good as yours,” and the news, which I hoped would delight him, that “the bulk of your tobacco left yesterday.”

The correspondence in the fall of 1970 is fragmentary, notes on postcards except for the businesslike letter in September regarding an updated bibliography for the paperback edition of the *Collected Poems*. But the first of the three postcards in December has an ominous overtone in retrospect: an urgent request by the poet for a book by Mensendiech called *Look Better and Feel Better* and news that Seferis has been to Paris and back, which means that his earlier refusal to travel on an ordinary rather than a diplomatic passport, all that was offered him at that time by the Greek junta,⁶⁶ then had to be qualified for the only reason he allowed: a medical necessity. On 22 December I responded with a postcard saying that I couldn’t find the book in Princeton and had asked Harper and Row, the publishers, to mail it directly to Seferis by air mail. The year closes out with a second urgent postcard from Seferis asking for the book because he needs it “for a cure I’m submitted to.”

Though I didn’t realize it at the time, this signalled the sad beginning of the end. There had been an episode that summer that should have served as a warning about the poet’s increasingly precarious health. In July my wife Mary and I had arranged to take him and Maro to Skinia near Marathon for their first summer swim. It was a hot day, the broad pine-crested beach completely deserted (inconceivable these days), the sea serene. All of us went for the water as quickly as we could, and I didn’t stop my free-style dash toward the Eubean shore opposite until I was out of breath — and when I did, I heard Mary shouting a full-voiced warning:

⁶⁶ See “Seferis’s ‘Political’ Voice,” p. 110.

the poet was apparently in trouble, revolving off-balance in the same spot, the water shoulder high. I swam back as quickly as I could and helped the others to drag him out onto the beach. His eyes were closed and there was no clear sign of life in him. Maro breathlessly suggested that we raise him upside down to drain out the water he had swallowed. I thought that a hopeless prospect, especially given his weight, and, holding onto him to turn him over for artificial respiration, I said in Greek that the problem was not the water he might have swallowed but what water there was in his lungs — only instead of saying “lungs” (*pnevmones*) under the pressure of the moment, I said “spirits” (*pnevmata*). Suddenly Seferis sat up and glanced at me: “Spirits, the man says. There’s nothing wrong with my spirits. And you’re supposed to be my translator.” Then he looked off into the distance. “Those mountains over there. Like a parched woman spread out under the sun.” We knew at that point that the poet was still very much alive and more or less well, but given the difficulty he had keeping his balance even out of the water, there were grounds for worry.

1971

The exchange of letters and postcards in this year, though on a “George” and “Mike” basis, suggests less communication than star-crossed miscommunication. My first letter in January expresses my distress over my apparently faltering efforts to get the Harper and Row volume *Look Better and Feel Better* into Seferis’s hands. The response to my letter was a postcard from the poet addressed to “Dear Professor” and saying that “no book . . . nor anything similar to a book has reached me up to now. It is a pity, Iago” (that cutting allusion to Act iv, Scene i, of *Othello* rather amused me at the time, but not very much in retrospect). A postcard from me six days later — no doubt crossing his to me — tells of my having failed to find the book in New York but my hope that the Harper and Row copy had reached him. And on 2 February, after making pencilled notes on the question, I wrote the poet a day-by-day account of “my frustration with Harper and Row,” this “brief itinerary” meant to show him that I was “really faithful despite contrary indications.” To end the letter on a positive note, I mentioned that I would be teaching Seferis’s poetry for four weeks — equal to the

time given Cavafy — in the first “official” course on Modern Greek poetry included in the Princeton University curriculum (unofficially over the years I had offered students poems by Cavafy, Seferis, and other Greek poets on any occasion and under any pretence I could find to introduce them into literature courses under my supervision). Since there was no further response from Seferis regarding *Look Better and Feel Better*, the Harper and Row copy sent by air mail from Scranton, Pennsylvania, on 14 January must have reached him in late January or early February.

The exchange in the latter month again involves some kind of miscommunication. My reconstruction of what happened in those days leads me to think that, following the Modern Greek Studies Association symposium at Princeton in the fall of 1969, several of those who heard Zissimos Lorenzatos’ paper thought that an important contribution to the emerging study and appreciation of Modern Greek literature in the English-speaking world might be made by a volume of Lorenzatos’ essays offered in English translation. I gather from my letter to Seferis of 6 February 1971 that this thought took on substance when two readers of the proceedings from the Princeton symposium then under consideration by Princeton University Press (published in 1972 as *Modern Greek Writers*) recommended that the Press “investigate the possibility of bringing out a full volume of Zissimos’ essays.”

The subsequent “investigation” included a request to me by Miriam Brokaw, senior editor at the Press, for the names of several established men of letters in Greece familiar with Lorenzatos’ *Meletes* (Studies / Essays) and “capable of offering an opinion regarding the propriety of their publishing an English edition of his work.” I included Seferis’s name among those I thought qualified to offer an opinion, and given his close association with Lorenzatos over the years, I assumed it would be a favorable one. Apparently when Seferis responded to Miriam Brokaw, she shared his response with me (I take that to be the “previous letter” referred to in Seferis’s 11 February postcard). He appears to have told her that he did not feel he could provide an endorsement of the Lorenzatos project because “I don’t know enough of the American public.”

I find this a curious position in view of Seferis’s having had a fairly clear opinion about what might or might not be most suitable for the American public among his own essays and even some

of his poems (e.g., his comments on the proposed selection from *Dokimes* in January 1964, and his dubieties about “Pedlar of Sidon” in July 1961). But the “Dear Keeley” salutation of his 11 February postcard, and the tone of it, echo the irritation in my 6 February letter (especially at the implication that I was somehow involved in a “scheme”). And though Seferis’s refusal “to be ‘first man’ in anything” is touching, it is inconsistent with the fact of his preeminence as a man of letters in Greece at that time. In any case, the Press finally submitted a selection of Lorenzatos’ essays to a translator, the distinguished novelist Kay Cicellis, and the volume was published in 1980 under the title *The Lost Center and Other Essays in Greek Poetry*.

In anticipation of the usual summer meetings with Seferis, our correspondence through March and April begins to thin out, though the usual conviviality soon returns. But the problem of Seferis’s weakening health emerges from the background when, in his letter of 3 March, he gives that as one reason for his not being able to accept my invitation, as president of the newly-formed Modern Greek Studies Association, to participate in the Association’s symposium set for May at Harvard University. Also emerging from the background in the same letter is his continuing commitment to stand firm, if silent, under “present circumstances” in Greece, again presumably along with his countrymen who are opposed to the dictatorship and living under censorship. This is his second reason for not travelling to the United States in May to be present when designated an honorary foreign member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters (though he is clearly pleased by this gesture, especially under the sponsorship of George F. Kennan, an admired colleague from his days at the Institute for Advanced Study). In retrospect, the reference to his health problem, never specifically identified, appears especially ominous, and, as it turned out, he and I had only limited opportunity to meet that summer before he was hospitalized with his fatal illness.

The final bit of confusion in these last months of correspondence has to do with my unsuccessful efforts to see that the poet receive his due copies of the *Paris Review* interview and a copy of *C. P. Cavafy: Passions and Ancient Days*, both mentioned in my letter of 27 February. It took two months, until early April, for these items to reach Seferis. In the case of the interview, this occurred despite

my constant prodding of the New York *Paris Review* office, inquiries that became especially urgent after Seferis's postcard of 20 March in which he points out that George Katsimbalis had received a copy of the interview and Henry Miller had written him a "moving" letter about it (an accurate epithet),⁶⁷ but no copy had yet arrived for the person interviewed — and the poet went on to ask that I explain to the editor of the journal, George Plimpton, "that this attitude is inconvenient to his trade if not just rude." As my letter of 12 April indicates, I did in fact call George Plimpton and received from him yet another assurance that the complimentary copies of the interview had been sent off to Greece some weeks previously, which raised in his mind the possibility that there was "some difficulty in the Greek mails," a remark that struck in me the "ominous note" of possible interference by the censors working for the Colonels' dictatorship. In any case, Plimpton promised to send off another set of complimentary copies immediately. And from Seferis's postcard sent on 12 April (for some unexplained reason "posted by *ordinary mail*," which made me feel that Seferis was "throwing a bottle into the sea," as he once reported feeling in writing Henry Miller from Pretoria, South Africa, in 1941),⁶⁸ I learned that "at last!" one copy of the *Paris Review* had reached the poet presumably by way of my solicitation and another two by way of Henry Miller. Seferis added, with perhaps understandable irony from his perspective of the moment, that "they don't seem over there, under the shadow of Agha Khan, to indulge in lavishness." Yet, after Seferis received his two copies from Paris,⁶⁹ it seems that the poet may have eventually received at least five copies of the issue, in the end perhaps a sufficient if too casual generosity, at least by American (if not by Greek) publishing standards.

In the same postcard, our last communication by mail, the question mark after "new" in the reference to the new Cavafy volume of translations anticipates the poet's dubiousness about that project

⁶⁷ Henry Miller to Seferis, 16 February 1971, Selected Papers of George Seferis, Manuscripts Division, Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

⁶⁸ A copy of the letter, dated 25 December 1941, and headed "G. St. Seferidis / First Secretary, / Greek Legation / Pretoria (South Africa)" is in the Seferis archive at the Gennadius Library.

⁶⁹ Appendix, Maxine Groffsky to Seferis, 22 March 1971. In this letter from the Seferis archive, Gennadius Library, Maxine Groffsky, Paris editor of the *Paris Review*, indicates that she is sending Seferis two copies of the interview by air mail — even if that is normally the responsibility of the New York office — and apologizes for the delay.

— not just the selection of translations that George Savidis and I offered in *Passions and Ancient Days* but the original publication, in 1967, of the so-called “unpublished poems” found in the Cavafy archive from which our selection was drawn. As the poet anticipates, this became a topic of conversation during one of the few meetings the poet’s failing health allowed us that summer before he was hospitalized. George Savidis had mentioned at one point during the course of our working together on our selected translation of these “new” poems that Seferis had expressed his discomfort about the posthumous publication of poems found in Cavafy’s archive — in fact, the posthumous publication of any material that the poet himself had not authorized for publication. I agreed with Savidis’ position that anything Cavafy truly meant to suppress could have been suppressed very simply by the poet’s destroying the manuscript material in his hands, as Cavafy had done with most of his early poems by the time he reached the age of thirty-eight in 1911. And this is the point I reaffirmed in conversation with Seferis, only to find him shaking his head and saying, almost under his breath, “I don’t know. I don’t mean to criticize. I’m just not sure it is right.”

Given this dubiety, I was quite convinced at the time that Seferis would make sure his archive was thoroughly cleansed of unpublished material which at some point in the future he would not be in a position to supervise. Either he decided that what he chose to leave behind could be legitimately edited by others after his death or the gods didn’t allow him the time and the occasion for a thorough cleansing. In any case, there is unpublished material, including poems, in his archive. And a volume of previously unpublished poems, a volume of limericks, and some nine volumes of prose notebooks were published under the editorship of others during the twenty-five years after his death, with one more of the latter still in preparation.⁷⁰

My recollection of the days following the conclusion of this twenty-year correspondence is darkened by the prolonged and melancholy period of Seferis’s eight-week stay in the Evangelismos Hospital,

⁷⁰ There is some evidence that at the time of his death the poet was preparing the volume of poems for publication, and the same is true of the first selection from his notebooks, published as *Meres tou 1945–1951* by Ikaros in 1973 and in English translation by Athan Anagnostopoulos, *A Poet’s Journal: Days of 1945–1951*, a year later.

which he entered on 22 July. My wife and I visited there regularly during those weeks and sat with others who joined the poet's family for the long vigil that led up to his death on 20 September. On one occasion during the last days Maro Seferis took us to the poet's room, but he was obviously suffering in a way that made it awkward for him to converse, so we stood in the doorway of the room for a silent moment or two and then returned to join the increasingly heavy flow of visitors in the waiting area on the ground floor, among these many young people who did not know the poet personally but simply wanted to pay their respects to the man who had shown them the path of principle in an anomalous time, when "oppression . . . shrouded the country," as he put it in his declaration against the Colonels' junta.

I had to return to Princeton to begin the fall semester in mid-September of 1971 and thus missed the remarkable outpouring of feeling, both personal and political, that attended the poet's funeral. In my essay on Seferis's "political" voice I offer an account of that unique moment in contemporary Greek history as it was reported to me by several friends who witnessed the funeral and wrote to me about it with eloquence. To suggest the intensity of the feeling displayed on that occasion, attended by so many who knew the poet not from his work — except, perhaps, for a few poems that had become popular songs — but from his courageous stance against the dictatorship, I will quote one passage in a letter that my friend the novelist Kay Cicellis sent me immediately after the funeral:⁷¹

The moment we emerged from the church into the open was overwhelming. We suddenly became aware of the enormous waiting crowd — then, quite spontaneously, untidily, they all began singing [a Seferis lyric set to music by Theodorakis: "On the secret sea-shore / white like a pigeon / we thirsted at noon: / but the water was brackish . . . "]. And with the song rising up, up, the sadness began to lift too and we floated along as if on air, the stream widening as we went along until it flooded the cemetery. Have you ever seen that quiet, tidy, civi-

⁷¹ Kay Cicellis to the author, *Modern Greek Poetry: Voice and Myth*, p. 116.

lized cemetery crowded? People converged to the grave from every alley, every pathway . . . with rallying cries, more songs.

An aspect of my own feeling in the months following the poet's death is in tune with the moving letter Maro Seferis sent me and my wife in November of that sad autumn. She speaks of "the void that George left me," of her exhausting efforts to arrange things as he would have wanted, and of her thoughts turning often to a better time in the past: their 1968 stay in Princeton and "how nice it was then in America."⁷²

It is that visit that remains the high point in my memory of the twenty-year relationship partly outlined in these letters, a progress in my case from admiring student of the poet's work to translator and critic of that work and finally to amiable companion in the presentation of that work to audiences in the United States. Something of these transitions is reflected in both the substance and the tone of the letters offered here, especially during the late years, when there was more room for humor, irony, even irritation, suggesting our having arrived at the kind of intimate engagement that made the poet's passing so painful to me personally. The end of our dialogue created the second great void in my intellectual life (the death of R. P. Blackmur caused the first, as I indicate in my letter of 13 February 1965) and, more important, the passing of Seferis in 1971 signalled the loss to Greek letters of one of the twentieth century's finest sensibilities in both poetry and prose. My hope is that a small measure of that sensibility survives in his letters to me, along with at least a partial image of the warm presence and acute mind that were as much his as his poet's heart.

⁷² Maro Seferis to Edmund and Mary Keeley, 19 November 1971, at the end of the correspondence.

Engomi¹

BY GEORGE SEFERIS

TRANSLATED BY EDMUND KEELEY AND PHILIP SHERRARD

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 gold 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 colour.

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.

¹ From "Logbook III," in *George Seferis: Collected Poems*, revised edition. Translated, edited and introduced by Edmund Keeley and Philip Sherrard (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995). Reprinted here with the kind permission of Princeton University Press, Edmund Keeley, and Densie Sherrard.

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 labouring, 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 herdsman 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, adamant
then they vanished: an Assumption.

The world

became again as it had been, ours:
the world of time and earth.

Aromas of terebinth

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.

The Cats of St Nicholas¹

BY GEORGE SEFERIS

TRANSLATED BY EDMUND KEELEY AND PHILIP SHERRARD

*But deep inside me sings
the Fury's lyreless threnody;
my heart, self-taught, has lost
the precious confidence of hope . . .*

— AESCHYLUS, *AGAMEMNON* 990 ff.

'That's the Cape of Cats ahead,' the captain said to me,
pointing through the mist to a low stretch of shore,
the beach deserted; it was Christmas Day —
' . . . and there, in the distance to the west, is where Aphrodite
rose out of the waves;
they call the place "Greek's Rock".
Left ten degrees rudder!
She had Salome's eyes, the cat I lost a year ago;
and old Ramazan, how he would look death square in the eyes,
whole days long in the snow of the East,
under the frozen sun,
days long square in the eyes: the young hearth god.
Don't stop, traveller.
'Left ten degrees rudder,' muttered the helmsman.

. . . my friend, though, might well have stopped,
now between ships,
shut up in a small house with pictures,
searching for windows behind the frames.

¹ From "Book of Exercises II," in *George Seferis: Collected Poems*, revised edition. Translated, edited and introduced by Edmund Keeley and Philip Sherrard (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995). Reprinted here with the kind permission of Princeton University Press, Edmund Keeley, and Denise Sherrard.

The ship's bell struck
like a coin from some vanished city
that brings to mind, as it falls,
alms from another time.
'It's strange,' the captain said.
'That bell — given what day it is —
reminded me of another, the monastery bell.
A monk told me the story,
a half-mad monk, a kind of dreamer.

It was during the great drought,
forty years without rain,
the whole island devastated,
people died and snakes were born.
This cape had millions of snakes
thick as a man's legs
and full of poison.
In those days the monastery of St Nicholas
was held by the monks of St Basil,
and they couldn't work their fields,
couldn't put their flocks to pasture.
In the end they were saved by the cats they raised.
Every day at dawn a bell would strike
and an army of cats would move into battle.
They'd fight the day long,
until the bell sounded for the evening feed.
Supper done, the bell would sound again
and out they'd go to battle through the night.
They say it was a marvellous sight to see them,
some lame, some blind, others missing
a nose, an ear, their hides in shreds.
So to the sound of four bells a day
months went by, years, season after season.
Wildly obstinate, always wounded,
they annihilated the snakes but in the end disappeared:
they just couldn't take in that much poison.
Like a sunken ship
they left no trace on the surface:
not a miaow, not a bell even.

Steady as you go!

Poor devils, what could they do,
fighting like that day and night, drinking
the poisonous blood of those snakes?
Generations of poison, centuries of poison.'
'Steady as you go,' indifferently echoed the helmsman.

Wednesday, 5 February 1969

The Seferis-Keeley Correspondence, 1951–1971

ANNOTATED BY EDMUND KEELEY

Most of George Seferis's letters and some carbon copies of my letters are part of my papers in the Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Firestone Library, Princeton University. The originals of my letters, some drafts and autograph copies of Seferis's letters, as well as most of the letters that appear in the Appendix to this collection, are from the Seferis archive housed in the Gennadius Library in Athens. I have transcribed the letters as they were written, with corrections only of obvious typing errors and, in the case of Seferis's English script, some spelling errors. A few quaint errors, such as those in Seferis's English usage and my early misuse of the word "hopefully," are marked [sic].

I am grateful to Don Skemer, Curator of Manuscripts, Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library, for facilitating my duplication of the documents that are now part of the Edmund Keeley Papers there. I am also grateful to Haris Kalligas, Director of the Gennadius Library, and the Gennadius Library staff for their help in arranging access to, and duplication of, the relevant documents in their collection, and to Maro Seferis and Anna Londou for permission to duplicate and publish those documents for which they hold the rights. Dimitri Gondicas provided valuable assistance in the dating and arranging of these letters, and Mary Keeley helped in the translation of the several letters and parts of letters written in Greek. I am especially grateful to Patricia Marks for her generous advice and devoted editorial work in the preparation of this collection. I also want to thank the Editorial Board of the Princeton University Library Chronicle for approving this publication under their auspices and the Princeton Program in Hellenic Studies for supporting its publication in book form.

—EDMUND KEELEY



149 Banbury Road
Oxford, England
May 3, 1951

Mr. George Seferiades¹
Foreign Office of Greece
Athens, Greece

Dear Mr. Seferiades:

I am currently doing research and preparing a thesis on Modern Greek poetry, under the supervision of Professor Trypanis and the Department of Byzantine and Modern Greek at Oxford.² The thesis will deal with your poetry and that of Kavafis, Sikelianos, and Elytes, and I expect to submit it for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. As an American, I am interested in the influence of English on Modern Greek poetry, though the poetry itself is of course my primary concern. I have spent more than five years in Greece, including three years of my childhood, and it is as much a part of my background as my own country.³ I am therefore interested in doing what I can to acquaint the English-speaking countries with the active, modern culture of Greece.

I have been recently studying your poetry with great interest, especially since I sense that you have introduced the same stylistic renaissance in Greece that T. S. Eliot accomplished in England, and I am a devout admirer of Eliot. However, I find that it is more difficult for me to trace the symbolic pattern of your poetry than that of Eliot. This is perhaps because your symbolism tends to be more personal, and because I am not always familiar with the necessary background. I realize that a poet wishes to allow a certain amount of elasticity of interpretation, but I also realize that this elasticity, of undeniable poetic value to the native, causes confusion and unintentional obscurity in the case of foreign readers. I

¹ The diplomat used his family name, "Seferiades," the poet his pen-name, "Seferis."

² Constantine A. Trypanis was Bywater and Sotheby Professor of Byzantine and Modern Greek at Oxford.

³ My father was American Consul in Salonika from 1936 to 1939, and I returned to Greece in 1947 and 1949–1950, in the latter instance as Fulbright Teacher of English at the American Farm School in Salonika.

expect that the above became apparent to you at the time of your excellent translation of Eliot's "Waste Land" (I heard a rendition of the translation at the British Council in Salonika last year.) Therefore, since it is my interest to convey something of the essence of your poetry to foreign readers, I hope you will not consider it presumptuous of me to ask you certain questions regarding the nature and background of your symbolism. You may not feel inclined to answer any of the below, and that is certainly a justifiable attitude on your part, but I assure you it would be of immeasurable value to me in completing my thesis.

1. To what extent do you feel an affinity to T. S. Eliot or any other English writers, such as Yeats, Houseman, etc.

2. What would you consider the most important sources of your symbols (as Dante, Christian theology, and the Grail Legends, Elizabethan and Metaphysical poetry, etc., are in Eliot, according to his own published notes.)

3. To what extent is your symbolism consistent, i. e. can a symbol repeated often in different poems, but in the same very general context, be considered to carry the same meaning.

4. Would you be inclined to comment on the general meaning of any of the specific symbols that recur throughout your poetry, such as the fated ships and voyagers, statues, stones, cisterns and wells, pines, the messenger, etc.

5. To what extent did the Asia Minor campaign or other modern historical events enter into the background of "Mithistorima" [*sic*] and other relevant poems (I am also interested of course in the general historical background of your poems.)

6. Any important biographical data in connection with your poetry that you would feel free to give.

You may feel that I am asking too much, and that may be the case, but I would appreciate any enlightenment, no matter how limited, even if it consists of a more or less candid reproach for my ignorance.

Yours sincerely,
Edmund L. Keeley



149 Banbury Road
Oxford, England
May 4, 1951

Mr. George Seferiades
Foreign Office of Greece
Athens, Greece

Dear Mr. Seferiades:

In reconsidering the letter I mailed you yesterday, I feel that I may have given you the wrong impression as a result of the way I worded several questions. I do not wish you to feel that I have not read your poetry thoroughly or have been lazy in expending thought over the interpretation. To the contrary, I feel that I do understand a great deal and have certain positive theories regarding your symbolism and the ideas I believe you are interested in expressing. My questions are more for the purpose of corroborating an already established analysis on my part. However, as a foreign reader, I find your poetry sufficiently difficult and obscure so that I do not feel as secure in my interpretation as I might with poetry of my own language. In other words, I do not wish to deceive anyone who may read my thesis, and get them started on a tangent at odds with the intended direction of your poetry.

In the question concerning the sources of your symbolism, I take for granted that you realize I understand the most obvious sources, such as Homer (especially "The Odyssey"), the legends surrounding the Trojan wars [*sic*], and many classical personalities. These are obvious in the poetry and are often referred to specifically. I am interested in the less apparent sources of the symbols. Also, concerning the historical and biographical backgrounds, certain events are obvious, especially through analysis of titles etc. I am interested in the extent they influence symbolism. Perhaps the greatest difficulty is caused by my attempt to interpret specific poetic symbols, such as the statues, stones, the woman who reappears continually, and any number of others. They make sense to me in certain contexts, but they are repeated so frequently in varied contexts that I cannot be sure on every occasion. That is why I am

interested in the extent these symbols are consistent and in their general meaning.

I could perhaps write a thesis on my current theories, but I would like to feel that I am on safer ground, not from pure vanity, but because I do not wish to mislead any potential readers and thus cause your poetry more harm than good. However, I am willing to gamble on my interpretations, as any critic with intellectual honesty should, and that is why I do not wish you to feel obligated to answer any of the questions.

I hope the intention of my letter is now more clear.

Sincerely yours,
Edmund L. Keeley



Avery House,
1 Queen's Gate Gardens,
London, S.W. 7
May 13, 1951

Dear Mr. Seferiades,

About ten days ago I wrote you two letters, addressed to Athens, concerning a D. Phil. thesis on Modern Greek poetry which I am submitting to the department of Byzantine and Modern Greek of Oxford University (under Professor Trypanis). As this thesis is concerned primarily with your poetry and that of Kavafis, Elytes and Sikelianos, I am very interested in discussing certain aspects of it with you. At the time I sent the above-mentioned letters to you, I did not know you had come to London, and since these letters may not reach you for some time, I would indeed appreciate the opportunity of meeting you personally. I shall be in London until Saturday evening of this week, and if you find a moment free during this period, would you be kind enough to let me know in care of the address on the letter-head.⁴

As an American who has spent more than five years in Greece (including three before the war), I am interested in doing what I can to bring the modern culture of Greece to the attention of En-

⁴ The concluding eight words of this paragraph are underlined in the original, presumably by the recipient.

glish-speaking peoples. That is why I would consider a personal talk with you invaluable in clarifying some difficulties I am faced with in my thesis.

Yours sincerely,
Edmund L. Keeley



24 Kennington Road
Oxford
May 26, 1952

Dear Mr. Seferis,

I don't know whether you remember me, but I am the young man who approached you over a year ago in connection with a thesis I am writing on Modern Greek poetry, i.e., Cavafy and Seferis.⁵ I am about at the end of the thread, and with a slight push will emerge into the light. I wonder if it would be possible to see you sometime in the near future, preferably towards the end of this week, in order to clear up a few points. I am sorry that the notice is so short, but things always become rushed at the end.

I must say that the way has been long and hard, but I have enjoyed it.

Sincerely,
Edmund Keeley



24 Kennington Road
Oxford
June 7, 1952

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Seferis,

Mary and I wish to thank you for your kind hospitality on Friday night and for bearing with us until such a late hour. I am afraid that I got carried away by my enthusiasm but having worked with

⁵ During the course of the previous year, my exploration of the poetry of these two poets had managed to fill some four hundred pages of dissertation prose and had thus precluded my critical consideration of Sikelianos and Elytis in this context, as originally planned.

such intensity over the past year on a mutual interest, I could not keep from availing myself of your attention as long as possible. I hope I was not too demanding or insistent. If it is any consolation, the visit was invaluable to me as you were most helpful.

I hope you will both come to Oxford before we leave so that we can have a chance to repay your kindness, and, this time, perhaps talk of less weighty and exacting matters.

Sincerely,
Mike Keeley



24 Kennington Road
Oxford
June 15, 1952

Dear Mr. Seferis,

Recently I wrote T. S. Eliot to ask his permission to quote a letter he had written George Savides [*sic*] regarding his acquaintance with the poetry of Cavafy. At the same time, I asked him about you. I have received Eliot's answer, and I thought you might be interested in learning what he has to say:

"I am indeed acquainted with some of Mr. Seferis's poetry, though, of course, I only know it in translation.⁶ I can decipher but hardly appreciate modern Greek poetry in its own language. I have a high opinion of Mr. Seferis as a poet, and so far as I can judge, his translations, especially of some of the choruses of *Murder in the Cathedral*, read extremely well."

Incidentally, I share Eliot's opinion.

Sincerely,
"Mike" Keeley

⁶ The translation in question is probably *The King of Asine and Other Poems*, trans. Bernard Spencer, Nanos Valaoritis, and Lawrence Durrell (London 1948), the only collection then in print.



PRINCETON UNIVERSITY
PRINCETON NEW JERSEY⁷

Department of English

April 6, 1955

Honorable George Seferiades
Royal Greek Legation
Beirut, Lebanon

Dear Mr. Seferis:

I thought you might be interested in knowing that two of your poems, "The Mood of a Day" and "The King of Asine", have been accepted for publication in the *Partisan Review*, the leading literary quarterly in this country. These two translations are among a number that I have completed since I did my thesis at Oxford, and I hope to publish several more this year. I am also delivering a lecture on your poetry, with readings, next week at a scholarly club of the University.⁸ I hope I will do my subject justice.

If you would be interested in seeing a copy of the translations, I will be happy to mail you one.

Kindest regards to Mrs. Seferis.

Sincerely,
Edmund Keeley



Legation Royale de Grèce

Beirut 31 May 55

My dear Mr. Keeley,

Thank you ever so much for your letter and copies of your translations.⁹ I am glad to hear that they are appreciated by competent

⁷ Inserted in Seferis's hand: "Department of English, McCosh 22."

⁸ The focus and context of the lecture, delivered before the "English Club" of Princeton's Department of English, are outlined above in my introductory essay.

⁹ Following my letter of 6 April 1955, I apparently mailed Seferis a selection of transla-

people. I would like to have a copy of the *Partisan Review* when the poems appear.

I remember our long talks in Sloane Street and I hope you are happy with your work in the University. Please give to Mrs. Keeley our kindest thoughts.

Yours Sincerely
George Seferis

I enclose some poems published last year and inspired from Cyprus where we have spent our holidays.¹⁰ *Diastimata ton stochasmon tou* (K. of Asine) means gaps of his thoughts — not rhythm [*sic*].¹¹



PRINCETON UNIVERSITY
PRINCETON NEW JERSEY¹²

Department of English

October 1, 1955.

Hon. George Seferiades
Legation Royale de Grèce
Beirut, Lebanon.

Dear Mr. Seferis,

Enclosed you will find translations of two poems which you sent me last May.¹³ With your permission I would like to include these poems, along with the selection I sent you previously, in an anthology of modern Greek poetry which I am preparing jointly with

tions of his poems that I had prepared for the “readings” mentioned in that letter. This, presumably, is the early “selection” referred to in subsequent letters.

¹⁰ The first Greek edition of *Logbook III*, published initially under the title *Kýpron, ou m'ethespisen* . . . (Cyprus, where it was decreed [by Apollo that I should live] . . .), a line spoken by Teucer in Euripides' *Helen*.

¹¹ The phrase, in the antepenultimate line of the second stanza of “The King of Asine,” was changed to “in the interludes between his thoughts” for publication in *Partisan Review* (see my letters below dated 30 October and 2 December), then was rendered by Philip Sherrard and me as “in the interstices of his thoughts” in the *Six Poets of Modern Greece* version (London: Thames and Hudson, 1960; New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961), and subsequently as “in the gaps between his thoughts” in the various Princeton University Press editions of *George Seferis: Collected Poems* (1967, 1969, 1981, 1995).

¹² Added in Seferis's hand: “Edmund.”

¹³ “Ayanapa I” and “Three Mules” from *Logbook III*.

Philip Sherrard.¹⁴ The anthology will also include a selection from Cavafy, Sikelianos, Elytis, Gatsos, and Antoniou.

I would be grateful for any suggestion you may have in connection with these translations. I have had trouble with two words especially: “tzelati” and “diploentelini.”¹⁵ I spent some time during my visit to Greece this summer trying to trace these words without success. If you find any other inaccuracies, would you be kind enough to let me know?

It was grand to see Greece again and of course we saw many mutual friends. Perhaps we will cross your path there next time. Another time is inevitable.

All the best to you and Mrs. Seferis,

Sincerely,
Edmund Keeley



Oct. 10, 55¹⁶

Dear Mr Kelly [*sic*]

I had your letter of the 1st just on my return from the Dodecanese where I spent my leave. I thank you for the translations.¹⁷ As you know perhaps from our talks in London, I feel more or less incompetent when I have to appreciate a translation of my work. But I wonder if a piece like the *Mules* could mean anything at all to a foreigner. It is too local. I would like therefore to ask you though reluctantly to exclude it from your selection.¹⁸ If you care to have something else in its place you might perhaps translate the poem which I'm sending you now and which is inspired from Euripides'

¹⁴ Sherrard and I met during the summer on the island of Thassos to initiate a plan for this anthology, which becomes the focus of a number of letters that follow and which we finally completed in the summer of 1959. For commentary on our twenty-five-year collaboration, see the introductory essay, above, and my essay, “Collaboration, Revision and Other Less Forgivable Sins in Translation,” in *The Craft of Translation*, ed. John Biguenet and Rainer Schulte (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), pp. 54–69.

¹⁵ Both Greek words are written in Greek characters. See the letter from Seferis that follows.

¹⁶ This is a partially corrected draft of a letter in Seferis's English script. A very similar but uncorrected draft of this letter exists in the Seferis archive of the Gennadius Library.

¹⁷ “Ayianapa I” and “Three Mules” (see the previous letter).

¹⁸ The “selection” that would be among the poems to be included in the anthology mentioned in the previous letter.

Helen.¹⁹ Tzelatis²⁰ (executioner) is a common word, it is explained in the Dictionary of Proia²¹ a basic dictionary. Diploendelini²² is a medieval word used by Ptochodromos: double breasted — kai tora diploendelinos kai pachymoularatos.²³ Of *her* two brothers is a mistake. Certainly the two executed brothers were not brothers to the mule.

Kind regards to Mrs. Keely [*sic*]

Yours sincerely
G S

P.S.1 Diorthosis²⁴ (corrections) King of A[sine].

P.S.2. I would like to know what poems of mine you intend to include in your anthology.



PRINCETON UNIVERSITY
PRINCETON NEW JERSEY

Department of English

October 30, 1955

Dear Mr. Seferis,

Thank you for your letter and for your notes on the translations. I have made the necessary changes in “The King of Asine” as far as the anthology is concerned, but I do not know if they can be incorporated in the *Partisan Review* as I doubt if they will send me proof sheets. I remember changing “rhythm” to “interludes” last Spring (“gaps” is a rather harsh word in that particular context). I will also withdraw “Three Mules” from the selection in the anthol-

¹⁹ The poem “Helen” from *Logbook III*.

²⁰ Written in Greek characters.

²¹ Written in Greek characters.

²² Written in Greek characters.

²³ Previous phrase written in Greek characters. The two words at issue here are from the poem “Three Mules” in *Logbook III*. Sherrard and I subsequently rendered “tzelati” as “hangman” in our collected editions of Seferis’s poems, and “diploentelini” as “rich in trappings.” Seferis’s suggested rendering here, “double-breasted,” is confusing. Four years later, in a detailed series of notes intended to assist Rex Warner in his rendering of the poem, Seferis rejects — with two question marks — Warner’s “doubly ecstatic” and adds: “the exact meaning is double-harnessed (sense of adornment) fully accoutred” (from Seferis’s letter of 28 November 1959, in the Rex Warner file in the Gennadius Library).

²⁴ Written in Greek characters.

ogy as you requested. I can perhaps substitute “Eleni” [Helen], if I get a chance to work on it in the near future; it is a fine poem on first impression, and it was good of you to send it to me.

I am enclosing a copy of the table of contents from the anthology as it stands now. Of course it may change considerably by the time of publication, depending on the publisher’s decision as to space, etc. This is intended more or less as a sample.

Best wishes to you and Mrs. Seferis,

Sincerely,
E. L. Keeley

[Enclosure]

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²⁵ This poem is crossed out.



Aérogramme

Department of English / Princeton University / Princeton, N.J.²⁶

December 2, 1955

Hon. George Seferis
Royal Greek Legation
Beirut, Lebanon

Dear Mr. Seferis:

I wanted to let you know that *Accent*, a publication of the University of Illinois, has accepted my translations of "Stratis the Mariner on the Dead Seas" [*sic*] and "Stratis the Mariner Among the Agapanthi", both of which are included in the selection that I sent you. *Accent* is a quarterly with a good reputation among the responsible critics in this country. I will send you a copy of the publication when it comes out; it will take some time, I imagine.

Best wishes to you and Mrs. Seferis.

Sincerely yours,
Edmund Keeley

P.S. I did manage to send a corrected copy of "The King of Asine" to the *Partisan Review* in good time. I have no idea when it will come out.

²⁶ Aérogrammes were single sheets of paper with an address label printed on the back; they were folded and sealed so that a separate envelope was unnecessary. The heading here (and in the aérogrammes that follow) is the return address that appears on the address side of the sheet. When the return address is also given on the letter side of the aérogramme, it, too, is transcribed.



PRINCETON UNIVERSITY
PRINCETON NEW JERSEY

Department of English

April 22, 1956

Hon. George Seferis
Royal Greek Legation
Beirut, Lebanon

Dear Mr. Seferis:

Enclosed you will find four poems that have been accepted for publication by *Accent*. I would be grateful for any suggestions that you may have regarding them, but I am especially interested in the meaning of *paphiopedila*²⁷ in line 4 of “Notes for a ‘Week’: Monday”. I have tried to trace it in our limited sources without success. “Sandals” is the best I can do without your advice. Incidentally, these poems are supposed to appear in the summer issue of *Accent*, so I would be grateful if you were to write me at your earliest convenience.²⁸

Accent originally intended to publish “Stratis the Mariner Among the Agapanthi”, as I wrote you some time ago, but they finally decided that they would not do so because it had already appeared some time ago in this country in a translation by Kimon Friar.²⁹ I tried to convince them that each translation is an individual work in itself and that translations vary in style and quality, but they preferred to select from poems hitherto unpublished. I therefore sent them “Hampstead”, “Monday”, and “Thursday” to supplement “Stratis the Mariner on the Dead Sea” (which they had ac-

²⁷ Written in Greek characters.

²⁸ From the letter that follows, I gather that Seferis answered this query with a postcard now missing from my archive and that he there identified the word as the flower that appears in the plural “paphiopedilums” in the early editions of *George Seferis: Collected Poems* and as “paphiopedila” in the 1995 revised edition.

²⁹ Kimon Friar was the prolific early translator of Modern Greek poetry into English, mentioned in the introductory essay.

cepted earlier). This explains why these three new poems were not included in the selection that I sent you last year.

Best wishes to you and Mrs. Seferis.

Sincerely,
E. L. Keeley



Aérogramme

Dept. of English / Princeton University / Princeton, N. J.

May 21, 1956

Dear Mr. Seferis,

Thanks for your card. A most embarrassing mistake, especially so since several native speakers of the language read the poem without noticing it.³⁰ I do have trouble at times with what you yourself call “the anarchy of our language”, but I hope that I make up for what I don’t know of Greek by what I think I know of the language of English poetry. Let us hope so, at least.

I appreciate your calling the mistake to my attention.

Sincerely,
E. L. Keeley

P.S. Incidentally, American horticultural books call the one flower “*Cypripedium*” and the other “*Paphiopedilum*”. Is this American ignorance, or another example of the anarchy of language?

³⁰ I assume the “mistake” has to do with my query in the previous letter regarding “paphiopedila,” but the missing postcard from Seferis may have pointed to another.



PRINCETON UNIVERSITY
PRINCETON NEW JERSEY

Department of English

July 12, 1956

Hon. George Seferis
Royal Greek Legation
Beirut, Lebanon

Dear Mr. Seferis,

Here is another poem which I completed recently for our anthology (with the help of Philip Sherrard).³¹ I think it is among the best in your latest collection. I have only one question about the translation: do you approve of the following rendition in the fourth stanza:

I looked at the sky's air, and it was full of wonder . . .

It seems to me that this rendition is in keeping with the spirit of your source in the Apocrypha (Book of James, xviii, 2) where the Greek word used is, as you know, "ekthamvon". Is my reading correct? I prefer it to "dimmed" or "dulled", which have an entirely different connotation.³²

I hope to send you a version of "Thrush" in the near future. It is still in the process of revision. I have just finished checking the proof of my "Stratis the Mariner" article, and the accompanying translations, so this too should be out in the next few weeks.³³

We are about to leave for London on a freighter for a month or so. We never seem to be able to sit still. Our address there will be

³¹ "Engomi" from *Logbook III*.

³² Seferis apparently never expressed an objection to the suggested rendering of this line, since it has survived all Keeley-Sherrard revisions of the poem.

³³ The article appeared as "George Seferis and Stratis the Mariner" in the Summer 1956 issue of *Accent*.

c/o Admiral Basil Kyris,³⁴ 19 Prices Gate Court, Exhibition Road,
S. W. 7.

Our best wishes to you both.

Sincerely,
Edmund Keeley



PRINCETON UNIVERSITY
PRINCETON NEW JERSEY

Department of English

July 13, 1956

Hon. George Seferis
The Foreign Ministry
Athens, Greece

Dear Mr. Seferis:

I just received a cheque for \$24.80 from Partisan Review as a royalty payment for my translation of "The King of Asine", which is to appear in the summer issue. The editor writes that it is the policy of the periodical to pay half of the fee to the author and half to the translator, but that they do not know your address and are therefore sending the entire royalty to me. This explains the enclosed cheque. Unfortunately I too do not know your current address (my wife tells me that you were transferred recently), so I am sending this to the Foreign Ministry. I hope it reaches you there. I just mailed you another letter yesterday (with a new translation) to the Legation in Beirut. I expect that they will forward it to you.

Would you be kind enough to write me your new address? We are about to leave for England where we will be visiting my wife's parents at 19 Princes Gate Court, Exhibition Road, London S.W.7.

All best wishes.

Sincerely,
Edmund Keeley

³⁴ Admiral Kyris was my father-in-law.



PRINCETON UNIVERSITY
PRINCETON NEW JERSEY

Department of English

c/o Admiral Basil Kyris
19 Princes Gate Court
Exhibition Road
London, S.W.7
August 2, 1956

Dear Mr. Seferis,

Here is a copy of "Thrush", which I said I would send you, translated by me and revised by Philip Sherrard. I think it is more accurate than Rex Warner's version, and I hope others find that it reads equally well.³⁵

Did you receive a copy of "Engomi", which I sent to the Legation in Beirut, and a letter addressed to the Ministry, which I mailed before leaving the States?

All best wishes,
Edmund Keeley

³⁵ Rex Warner was a novelist and translator of the classics and of *George Seferis: Poems* (London: Bodley Head, 1960; Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1961). I did not realize at the time — nor did Sherrard — the extensive help that the poet gave his friend Rex Warner in the translation of those poems — including "Thrush" — that eventually appeared in Warner's selection. Had I then had access to Seferis's archive in the Gennadius Library, I might have been more tactful in this letter and in subsequent dialogue having to do with Rex Warner's versions of Seferis, as Sherrard might have been, too.



PRINCETON UNIVERSITY
PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY

Department of English

November 9, 1956

Dear Mr. Seferis,

Thank you for your note.³⁶ I do hope it will be possible for us to see you when you are in New York. Could you let us know a convenient time to meet you by calling us here (we are only an hour away by train)? During the day I can be reached at Princeton 1-2300, Extension 866 or 597, or at my home number, Princeton 1-6111 W, sometimes during the day and always in the evening.

Of course we would love to have you visit us in Princeton, but I imagine you will be too busy. If you do happen to get a break, by all means come for dinner some evening.

My wife and I look forward to hearing from you.³⁷

All best wishes,

Sincerely,
Edmund Keeley

P.S. I expect you have not yet received *Modern Writing No. 3* with a translation of "The Mood of a Day" or *Comparative Literature* with an article on your poetry.³⁸

³⁶ The note is missing from my archive. It presumably let me know that Seferis would be in the United States during November. The single entry for that month in his journal, *Meres Z* (Days 7), tells of his attending, at the invitation of Dimitri Mitropoulos, a production of *Tosca* with Maria Callas at the Metropolitan Opera in New York.

³⁷ As is indicated in the letter that follows, Seferis called my wife and me during his New York visit, but I do not remember meeting him at that time.

³⁸ "T. S. Eliot and the Poetry of George Seferis" (Summer 1956).



PRINCETON UNIVERSITY
PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY

Department of English

November 18, 1956

Dear Mr. Seferis,

The editors of *Modern Writing No. 3* have just sent me a check for \$7.80 which I am supposed to split with you (this is for "The Mood of a Day", which I mailed to you this morning). I am therefore enclosing my check for \$3.90.

Thank you for calling us the other night. We look forward to seeing you when you return next month.

Best wishes,
Edmund Keeley



THE PLAZA
A HILTON HOTEL
FIFTH AVENUE AT FIFTY-NINTH STREET . NEW YORK 19, N.Y.

Sunday 18. 11. 56

Dear Keeley³⁹ —

All that (your essay on T. S. E. and me) is true and untrue.⁴⁰ True philologically and untrue if I make the attempt to recollect my own experience. When I first read *Marina* in the Ariel poems edition I sent one copy to Katsimbalis and one to another friend.⁴¹ I don't remember to which I dedicated the plaque with the words

³⁹ This letter, which Seferis never mailed, was retrieved from his archive by his stepdaughter, Anna Londou, in September, 1996.

⁴⁰ The essay referred to is my "T. S. Eliot and the Poetry of George Seferis," *Comparative Literature* (Summer 1956), mentioned in my letter of 9 November 1956. Some of the implications of Seferis's commentary on the essay — and of his not having mailed this letter — are explored above in the introductory essay.

⁴¹ Eliot's "Marina" was first published as a chapbook by Faber and Faber, London, in 1930. George Katsimbalis, the editor and bibliographer who was Seferis's close friend, was later celebrated by Henry Miller as the "Colossus of Maroussi."

“At last this is a poet whom I have influenced”. (1931: the time when the writers in Athens were declaring that I had stolen every poet *they* knew.) Talking seriously I think that Eliot is much more imaginative than I am. He invents where I copy. Jerusalem: Eliot never went there: where my Jerusalem is a copy of what I have seen (refugees, monks, and Dead Sea) when I was thrown amidst them at the moment of Romel’s [*sic*] advance.⁴²

The mood of a day (1928) has nothing to do with Éluard. I read Éluard many years after.⁴³ And the companions of Ulysses (1926) belong to a sequence of short poems (abandoned poems) which I had the intention to call Scholia stin Odyssia (Notes on the Odyssey).⁴⁴ Except my own problems in Greek tradition which are the main cause, I might say that in my mythological matters etc. I got much more hints from Joyce and before him from Laforgue (try to read sometime *Les Moralités Legendaires*) than from Eliot, to whom I am indebted for other things —

I would like to talk with you about all this. And I regret that the life I am leading made it impossible.⁴⁵

In any case *kali antamosi*.⁴⁶

Seferis⁴⁷

⁴² The reference is to Seferis’s poem “Stratis Thalassinós on the Dead Sea.”

⁴³ In my essay, speaking of Seferis’s debt to French symbolism and surrealism, I suggested that “We cannot read [Seferis’s] *The Cistern* without recalling Valéry, or “The Mood of a Day” without recalling Éluard.”

⁴⁴ The poet is here referring to the early poem “The Companions in Hades” (I Sindrofi ston Adi), in *George Seferis: Collected Poems*, revised edition, p. 236.

⁴⁵ As is suggested in my letters of 9 and 18 November, I had hoped to meet with Seferis during his brief visit to New York, but that did not happen. Seferis was much taken up, officially and personally, with the Cyprus crisis of those days.

⁴⁶ Previous two words written in Greek characters; the phrase means “till we meet again.”

⁴⁷ Written in Greek characters.



Aérogramme

Department of English / Princeton University / Princeton, N.J.⁴⁸

May 1, 1957

Dear Mr. Seferis,

I want to bring you up to date on the translations of your work that are appearing in this country. You will soon receive the selection that appeared this spring in *The Beloit Poetry Journal*, along with poems by Elytes, Gatsos, and Antoniou. I am terribly sorry about the typographical error in No. 12 of *Mythical Story*; the journal did not send me any proof so I had no chance to catch it, and there was certainly no error of that kind in my typescript. The intelligent reader would be able to figure out that broken cars and Elpenor do not belong in the same poem.⁴⁹

A quarterly published in St. Louis called *Perspective* has accepted six poems from *Mithistorima* [*sic*] (Nos. 1, 4, 5, 8, 10, 15); they hope to publish them in their summer issue. And my old friend *Accent* has accepted the version of "Thrush" which Sherrard and I worked on together. I believe I sent you a copy of this last fall, but if you don't happen to have it with you, you can either ask Sherrard for his if you should see him, or write me and I will have another copy made. The editors did not give me any indication of when the poem will appear, but I expect next fall or winter.

We are definitely sailing for Greece this summer, but, alas, not until July, if we stick to our current plan. Mary gets quite restless for Greece in late spring, so there may be a last minute revision. In any case, we will get in touch with you when we reach Athens.

All best wishes,
Edmund Keeley

P.S. Unfortunately the Beloit journal did not pay me for my contribution so I have nothing to share with you. I assume that the other two will eventually.

⁴⁸ At the top, in Seferis's Greek script: "apand. 12. 5. 57" (reply 12 May '57).

⁴⁹ The typographical error had "cars" for "oars."



c/o Mr. Bruce Lansdale
American Farm School
Salonika, Greece
Aug. 10, 1959

Dear Mr. Seferis,

I have just spent a week at Limni with Philip Sherrard, completing the final text of our anthology, which will shortly be in the hands of the publisher.⁵⁰ We are very pleased with it. As soon as I can find a reasonable typist, I will send you a copy of the revised text of the selection from your works; we have made a number of changes, and I think you will find the translation improved. Incidentally, we have a new title for the anthology: *THE ASPHODEL PLAIN*; and an epigraph from xxiv of the *Odyssey*.⁵¹ Both are of course especially relevant to your work.

We spent a most pleasant evening at Galini⁵² on Poros several weeks ago. Mrs. Dragoumi told us that you and Mrs. Seferis may be in Greece during September. If so, I hope we will have a chance to meet again at that time.

All best wishes,

Yours,
Elpenor Keeley⁵³

⁵⁰ I met with Sherrard at the place that became his home in Greece: Katounia, outside the town of Limni, on the island of Evia (sometimes transliterated as Euboea). This anthology was the first of a series of collaborative translations and revised editions completed over the next twenty-five years, before Sherrard's death in 1995. See my letter of 1 October 1955, above.

⁵¹ The title of the anthology became, in due course, *Six Poets of Modern Greece*.

⁵² Previous word written in Greek characters. "Galini" (Serenity) was the *pension* on Poros that belonged to the poet's sister-in-law and that is the setting of the 1947 poem "*Thrush*" ("*Kichli*").

⁵³ The signature, alluding to Odysseus's youngest companion and to the type of the average sensual man in Seferis's poetry from *Mythistorema* through "*Thrush*" ("*Kichli*"), is meant to be a joke.



c/o Mr. Bruce Lansdale⁵⁴
 American Farm School
 Salonika, Greece
 August 20, 1959

Dear Mr. Seferis,

Here is the final text of the selection from your work to be included in our anthology. As you will see, we have made a number of changes from the versions in your hands — changes for the better, I think.

If you have any suggestions regarding the translation, Sherrard and I would be most grateful to receive them before the text is published. My address beginning in October will be the American Academy in Rome, Via Angelo Masina 5.

I hope London is still as Mediterranean as it was when we left.
 Best wishes to you and Mrs. Seferis.

Sincerely,
 Edmund Keeley

Myth. 3 — pierced⁵⁵
 9 *may* revive
k of Asine terrible willow tree
 ” by the conviction
 Engomi
 wrestling — cheropalaima
 working hands
 skoinos = rush

⁵⁴ At the top of the page, in Seferis's Greek script: "B"(2').

⁵⁵ The notes in Seferis's mixed-script hand are on the original, now in his archive. They are suggestions regarding the translation of words in the following lines: *Mythistorema*, 3: l. 3; *Mythistorema*, 9: l. 6; "The King of Asine," l. 52; l. 54; "Engomi," l. 29; l. 49.



AMERICAN ACADEMY IN ROME
VIA ANGELO MASINA, 5
(PORTA S. PANCRAZIO)
ROME

CABLE ADDRESS
“AMACADEMY”

September 26, 1959⁵⁶

Dear Mr. Seferis,

I have just received a letter from Thames and Hudson regarding *Thrush* (the editor of the anthology, Mr. James Clark, has been on vacation for the past two weeks). My impression is that it would be awkward, though not impossible, to make at this late date the change that you suggested, that is, eliminating the first two sections of the poem and publishing only the third.⁵⁷ Whether or not it would be advisable to do so from an esthetic [*sic*] point of view is a matter about which the translators have no doubt: Sherrard and I both agree that the change would radically limit the work's effectiveness. It would be equivalent, for example, to anthologizing only the last section of *The Waste Land*. In both instances much of the power of the verse would be lost because the themes that give substance to it would be merely partial. We also do not quite understand what advantage Rex Warner⁵⁸ stands to gain if we perform this awkward surgery. Surely he too must see that the poem would be violated by an abridgement, and if his interest is in the verse — as it should be — he could not candidly recommend it. As Sherrard has suggested, we are perfectly willing to mention, in the preface to our notes, that Mr. Warner intends to publish a more complete selection from your work. Would this not satisfy him? Incidentally, the abridgement would not mean simply eliminating seven pages of text, but also altering the content and arrangement of our notes,

⁵⁶ A handwritten note in Seferis's Greek script above the date says “apantisa 29.9.59 kai estila adia yia poiemata anthologias” (answered 29 September '59 and I sent permission for poems in the anthology).

⁵⁷ The issue regarding the three-part poem “*Thrush*” (“*Kichli*”) and its inclusion in the anthology is explored at some length in the introductory essay.

⁵⁸ See my letter of 2 August 1956, especially the footnote describing Seferis's collaboration with Warner.

which would be a complicated business, causing another postponement of our schedule. What we would have to do is substitute in place of several other notes a long preface to the poem in which we tried somehow to describe the two missing sections, an operation which could only strike the reader as strange indeed — or else simply ignore the first two sections, which would probably be worse.

I believe, finally, that the poet should have the right to control the translation of his verse, and I want to honor this right in full honesty. If you still wish us to publish only the last section of the poem, that is what we will do. I hope, however, that you will decide to let us keep it in its entirety, as that seems to me the logical thing to do. But in order not to delay the publication of the anthology further, I am asking Mr. Clark to get in touch with you as soon as it is possible to learn your final decision. Then we will forget the matter and proceed as we can without further discussion.

I am sorry we missed you in Athens. We had several fine evenings with George Savidis⁵⁹ and with Nikos Gatsos⁶⁰ (incidentally, both agree strongly with Sherrard and me regarding *Thrush*). It is too bad that translators and poets did not come together for a celebration a la Henry Miller — if that is still possible in this somewhat dryer age.⁶¹ Now we are settled in Rome, looking forward to a year of unhampered enterprise: a novel, perhaps a play, possibly even a poem, who knows? It is a marvelous city. One must either burst with creativity like all these fountains in our neighborhood, or collapse under the weight of humility which so many grand monuments impose. One finally wants very little — yet everything: no more than to speak simply, to be granted this grace . . . , as a poet once put it.⁶²

All best wishes to you and Mrs. Seferis,

Sincerely,
Edmund Keeley

⁵⁹ The well-known editor and critic of the major modern Greek poets and co-translator (with me) of *Odysseus Elytis: The Axion Esti* (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh University Press, 1974).

⁶⁰ One of the poets included in *Six Poets of Modern Greece* and a distinguished presence among Athenian artists and intellectuals after his volume of poems, *Amorgos*, appeared in 1943.

⁶¹ The allusion is to Miller's *The Colossus of Maroussi* in which Seferis figures as a principal — along with Lawrence Durrell, George Katsimbalis, and others — of the group that entertained Miller during his visit to Greece in 1939.

⁶² The quotation is from Seferis's "An Old Man on the River Bank," quoted more fully in the introductory essay.



ROYAL GREEK EMBASSY
51, UPPER BROOK ST., W.I.

September 29, 1959

My dear Michalaki Elpenor,⁶³

Yr letter of Sept. 26. I enclose my permission to publish my poems in yr anthology. Rex Warner is a very nice chap. He never meant to create difficulties to you and Philip. But one has to understand his point of view. Anyhow the matter is now settled. Back from Greece I found on my desk the new typescript, your letter from Salonica, and a lot of work. I'll try to go through your translations and if I find something important I'll let you know.⁶⁴

I doubt if the change of yr title is a happy one — Beyond the statues for a modern Greek anthology means something like: after the classical Greek, after the Greeks you are taught about whereas [*sic*] the *Asphodel Plain* means the plain of the dead — which is contradicted by your preface where you seem to believe that there is still life for poetry in Greece. —

Rome, must be something quite different from Greece, I can well imagine it — mousiken poiei kai ergazou.⁶⁵

ever
G. S.

P.S. To my yesterday's letter⁶⁶

Myth-3 — pierced??⁶⁷ outstripped?

1 Myth 9 — *May* revive (may dropped)

⁶³ See my letter of 10 August 1959 and note 53. The two words, "Michalaki Elpenor," are in Greek characters. "Michalaki" is the diminutive form of "Michali" (Michael), the Greek equivalent of my nickname "Mike."

⁶⁴ Seferis apparently mailed a "P.S." to this letter the following day with a list of six suggested revisions (see below).

⁶⁵ "Make music and keep working."

⁶⁶ Notes by Seferis in English, a follow-up to his letter of 29 September 1959 (see note 55 above) and his second thoughts on his handwritten notes appended to my letter of 20 August. The numbering below appears to be in my hand.

⁶⁷ Above "pierced" I have written "(passed beyond)."

2 *K. of Asine* terrible⁶⁸ willow tree — don't like terrible (awful?)
" by the conviction ???⁶⁹

3 *Engomi*⁷⁰

4 ?? wrestling (cheropalema⁷¹ = labouring hands)

5 skoinos⁷² (schoinos not rush though with this meaning in classical Greek)
vgazi retsina⁷³

Queries⁷⁴

1. p. 23 — by the shore. (Argonauts)
2. titles in "Myth Story" crowded
3. Footnotes indicated by asterisk (inform reader)
4. p. 25 Indentations on run on lines?
5. p. 27 Has followed indentations in typed text.
(to speak of heroes?)
6. p. 36. Why turnovers in M.S. ?

⁶⁸ I have written "awful" above "terrible."

⁶⁹ I have written "decision" above "conviction."

⁷⁰ In Greek characters, and written between the lines.

⁷¹ In Greek characters; I have written "labouring hands" above "cheropalema."

⁷² In Greek characters.

⁷³ "It produces retsina" — by which Seferis presumably means not the wine that goes by that name but resin, normally called "retsini" in Greek. An arrow points from "skoinos" above to "vgazi retsina."

⁷⁴ On the reverse of the above notes, the following appears in my hand, presumably notes for the copy editor of the *Six Poets of Modern Greece* selection of Seferis's poems.



ROYAL GREEK EMBASSY⁷⁵
51 UPPER BROOK STREET
LONDON, W. 1, ENGLAND

June , 1959⁷⁶
Sept. 29, 1959

Mr. Edmund Keeley
Dept. of English⁷⁷
c/o American Academy
Princeton, New Jersey⁷⁸
Rome

Dear Mr. Keeley:

In answer to your recent request, I hereby notify you and your publishers in England and America that I have no objection to the publication of the selection of translations of my work⁷⁹ poems included in the anthology of modern Greek poetry which you are preparing in collaboration with⁸⁰ Philip Sherrard. I hold the rights for the poems in question. They are the following:⁸¹

Yours sincerely,⁸²

- a) From mythical story, Nos 1, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 12, 15, 22, 24
- b) The king of Asine
- c) S. the Mariner among the agapanthi
- d) an old man on the river bank
- e) S. the Mariner on the dead sea
- f) the Last stop

⁷⁵ What follows is a draft in my hand, prepared in June, then corrected by Seferis and attached to my letter of 26 September 1959, in his archive. A corrected draft, missing from my archive, was enclosed with the letter of 29 September, above, as is indicated in Seferis's marginal note at the top of my letter of 26 September.

⁷⁶ Crossed out.

⁷⁷ Crossed out.

⁷⁸ Crossed out.

⁷⁹ Word crossed out.

⁸⁰ The word "Mr." is inserted here.

⁸¹ Previous four words inserted.

⁸² Crossed out.

- g) Thrush
- h) Ayanapa I
- i) engomi

Yours sincerely
G S⁸³



AMERICAN ACADEMY IN ROME
VIA ANGELO MASINA, 5
(PORTA S. PANCRAZIO)
ROME

October 4, 1959

Dear Mr. Seferis,

Many thanks for your reply to my letter. I appreciate your quick response, and I am very pleased (as Sherrard will be also) that I can now write my editor to go ahead as originally planned. Many thanks also for the suggested revisions, which will be included in the final text (is “image of a form turned to marble with the decision of an eternal bitterness” better, as we originally had it?⁸⁴ I can’t find another meaning for “skoinos”⁸⁵; Rome is awkward for this sort of thing. I gather from your comment that it has something to do with resin).⁸⁶

All best wishes,

Edmund Keeley

⁸³ The list and signature are in Seferis’s English script.

⁸⁴ The reference is to line 14 of the fourth stanza of “The King of Asine.” The line in the anthology became “image of a form turned to marble by the decision of an eternal bitterness,” then, in the first edition of *George Seferis: Collected Poems, 1924–1955* (1967), “image of a form that the sentence to everlasting bitterness has turned to marble,” and in subsequent revised editions, the word “marble” has become “stone.”

⁸⁵ Word written in Greek characters.

⁸⁶ The word, from line 18 of the fifth stanza of “Engomi,” was rendered as “mastic” in the anthology and as “terebinth” in the various editions of *Collected Poems*. At the foot of my letter to Seferis of 20 August, the poet’s script has a note, not entirely legible, that appears to offer “rush” as a translation of “skoinos,” but his September 29 note rejects this “classical Greek” denotation. He subsequently offered no objection to “terebinth.”



c/o Robin Fletcher, Esq.
Trinity College
Oxford
May 17, 1960

Dear Mr. Seferis,

I am in Oxford until June 3, lecturing on Cavafy, Sikelianos, and Seferis.⁸⁷ Mary and I would like very much to see you and Mrs. Seferis while we are here. Might this be possible? We will be in London this weekend, through Sunday, but of course we can come in some day thereafter to suit your convenience. I have no business: the anthology is ready (i.e., in page proof) and due to come out in July — so I will not bore you with papers or questions of any kind. It would be a pleasure simply to talk.

All best wishes,

Sincerely,
Edmund Keeley



ROYAL GREEK EMBASSY
51, UPPER BROOK ST., W. 1

2 June 60

My dear Keeley,

Just back from Scotland I find your letter of the 17 May. Are you leaving really tomorrow? What hours do you propose for a meeting.

Hurriedly

Yours Sincerely
G. Seferis

⁸⁷ I substituted for C. A. Trypanis during Trinity Term in the Department of Byzantine and Modern Greek.



AMERICAN ACADEMY IN ROME
VIA ANGELO MASINA, 5
(PORTA S. PANCRAZIO)
ROME

June 11, 1960

Dear Mr. Seferis,

We did in fact leave before your note reached us (as a matter of fact, I received it here last night). I am sorry that we missed you in England. Is there any chance that you will be coming to Greece this summer? We will be there through July and August, c/o Mary's cousin, 2 Posidonos, P. Faliron. Do let us know if you expect to be in Athens.

The enclosed you have seen, but I thought you might want a printed copy for your "Seferis in America" file.⁸⁸

Best wishes,
Edmund Keeley



PRINCETON UNIVERSITY
PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY

Department of English
McCosh 22

January 31, 1961

Dear Mr. Seferis,

The enclosed will no doubt come as a surprise — perhaps even a shock — to you. The composer is among the more distinguished young composers in America; the songs will be performed in New York on March 1st (I will send you a program).⁸⁹

Has Thames and Hudson notified you that *Six Poets of Modern*

⁸⁸ The "enclosure" remains unidentified. It may have been an offprint of "The Last Stop," which appeared in the Spring 1960 issue of *The Colorado Quarterly*.

⁸⁹ The composer referred to is Edward T. Cone, a Professor of Music at Princeton. The enclosed score was of his settings of four poems from *Mythistorema* (Nos. 3, 15, 22, 24).

Greece will be coming out in America this May? The rights were bought by our best publisher of European literature, Alfred A. Knopf. Knopf should produce a handsome edition (they are resetting the book entirely). If it is received here as favorably as it was in England, it may have a reasonable sale.⁹⁰

We hope to be passing through London this summer, either on the way to, or back from, Greece. Our best to you and Mrs. Seferis.

Sincerely,
Edmund Keeley



ROYAL GREEK EMBASSY
51, UPPER BROOK ST. W1

4. feb. [*sic*] 61

Dear "Michalaki,"⁹¹

It was good to hear from you; thank you for the score of Mr. E. T. Cone. I cannot imagine what the result of such a marriage can be. Perhaps I should not even try — I am too much involved. If you hear the songs give me your impression. Thames and Hudson did not give me any notification. I hope to have a copy of the American edition and I will appreciate if you can send me any reviews of the book.

I intend to have a substantial stay in Greece this summer. Let me know in time your dates. I would like very much to meet you over there. Best wishes from both of us to your wife.

Yours sincerely,
George Seferis

(hurriedly)

⁹⁰ Whether or not the sale was "reasonable," Knopf kept their edition of the anthology in print for some twenty years.

⁹¹ In Greek characters, as is true of all subsequent salutations by Seferis that translate my nickname "Mike" into the Greek equivalent.



PRINCETON UNIVERSITY
PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY

Department of English
McCosh 22

February 11, 1961

Dear Mr. Seferis:

I know what you mean: I also feel too much involved. The composer is going to try to make a recording of the dress rehearsal, and if he succeeds, I will send you a tape (or whatever he uses) so that you can hear the songs for yourself. As the composition is aggressively contemporary, you may find it difficult to correlate your response to the poetry with the composer's response; the text and the music seem to me to confront each other as armed warriors (at least on occasion), but that is apparently the required strategy in avant-garde music. There are moments when the two confront each other as lovers — and these moments please me, perhaps because I am after all somewhat old-fashioned. I hope to give you a chance to judge for yourself. Incidentally, I am enclosing an announcement of the program.

I will certainly send you copies of any reviews that appear in this country. I assume that you have seen most of the English reviews (The Sunday Times, Aug. 21; The T.L.S., Sept. 2; The Observer, Oct. 2; The Spectator, Nov. 11, The New Statesman, Oct. 8 and Dec. 17 — and less favorably, The Listener, Sept. 15). I may have missed a few myself, but I would be happy to send you copies of any of the above that you may have missed.

We plan to leave for Greece about the 10th of June, just in time to avoid the reviews of my new novel, which will presumably appear about the middle of the month.⁹² We will be staying in Greece until early September, part of the time at Admiral Kyris's (Loukianou 17), part of the time with the Sherrards in Euboea, part of the time

⁹² *The Gold-Hatted Lover* (Boston: Little Brown, 1961).

in Salonika. I will get in touch with you again as the summer approaches.

Best to Mrs. Seferis from both of us.

Sincerely,
Edmund Keeley
alias Michalaki



ROYAL GREEK EMBASSY
51, UPPER BROOK ST., W.1

London, 13th June, 1961

My dear Michalaki,

Little, Brown & Company sent me a copy of the "Gold Hatted Lover". I thank you for thinking of me. I have no doubt that the gold hat is sound as well as the lover.

I am keeping the book to read it in July. This month of June is overburdened with duties. Are you going to Greece this summer?

Yours ever
G. S.

Edmund Keeley, Esq.,
c/o Little, Brown & Company,
34, Beacon Street,
Boston 6,
Mass.



51, Upper Brook St. W.1
[July '61?]

Dear Michalaki (Damaskine)⁹³

I received the 6pp. [*Six Poets of Modern Greece*] from Knopf just after your last note. What a beautiful volume they made; I prefer

⁹³ To the salutation in Greek characters Seferis has added "Damaskine" because he discovered that I was born in Damascus (of American parents).

it to any I have ever been stamped in.⁹⁴ I had also your cheque for \$25.25. Thank you. And thank you for the translations. *Helen* is *Helen* but I wonder about the *Sidonian*⁹⁵: can that sort of jokes be transliterated — I wonder.

Certainly we'll be making a sign as soon as we get to Greece — August*, I hope. My address there is Agras⁹⁶ 20, Stadio,⁹⁷ Athens.

Greetings to Mary

Ever
G S

* I mean beginning. I'd like to see Philip too.



Agras 20 (Pangrati)⁹⁸
phone 76588

17. 8. 61

My dear Michalaki,

Thank you for yr letter which I received at Delphi.⁹⁹ Thanks also to the authors of the 6 (poets) for their extremely kind invitation. Now my position is this: next Monday (21st) we are leaving for Amorgos and intend to stay there until the 6/9, then back to Athens where I hope to stay till the end of Sept. Any hope of seeing you and Philip? —

Cheers
G. S.

Give please my best wishes and love to Ph[ilip] Sh[errard].

⁹⁴ In the Knopf edition of *Six Poets of Modern Greece*, the boards were stamped in gold with the Greek initials of the six poets included.

⁹⁵ The references are to early translations of “Helen” and “Pedlar of Sidon” from the 1955 volume, *Logbook III* (Imerologio Katastromatos G).

⁹⁶ In Greek characters.

⁹⁷ In Greek characters.

⁹⁸ In Greek characters.

⁹⁹ The letter to Seferis is missing from his archive. The invitation mentioned in the sentence that follows was presumably to visit Sherrard and me in Limni, Evia (Euboea), where Sherrard now had a permanent home and where my wife and I normally spent part of each summer, especially during those years when Sherrard and I were at work on one or another of our collaborative translations.



George Seferis and his wife, Maro, in his study at Agras Street, Athens, 1963. Photograph courtesy of Anna Londou and the Cultural Foundation of the National Bank of Greece.



PRINCETON UNIVERSITY
PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY

Department of English
McCosh 22

October 18, 1963¹⁰⁰

Dear Mr. Seferis,

The enclosed may bewilder you because I was unable to get in touch with you during my own last bewildered days in Athens, get in touch with you to explain the circumstances. I asked George Savidis, with whom I was working at the time, to speak to you in my stead, and I hope he found the occasion to do so. In any case, let me explain the circumstances now.

It became apparent to me that with all the translating George Savidis and I were doing for *Poetry*, it was unlikely that I would be able to complete the translation of a new essay by you for the Greek issue of *Poetry* in time to meet the deadline. George suggested that I work on "Letter to a Foreign Friend" instead, since the version that appeared in *T. S. Eliot: A Symposium* was not a full translation of the Greek text. This seemed to me a good idea, especially since I found the new material in the Greek text both lively and illuminating in several ways. I saw Valaorites and got his permission to republish his portion of the translation,¹⁰¹ and I then sounded out *Poetry* on the idea; they accepted it. It is, after all an essay of particular interest to an English-speaking audience, as well as a work full of critical insight on the poetry of our times in general. So I have now finished my translation of the material that was not included in Valaorites' version, and I have altered his version in a few places that I remember you mentioning during our

¹⁰⁰ This letter was written and mailed before news arrived of Seferis's Nobel Prize.

¹⁰¹ Nanos Valaoritis (the preferred spelling), a prolific Greek poet and currently Professor of Comparative Literature at San Francisco State University, was one of the translators (along with Bernard Spencer and Lawrence Durrell) of the first English selection of Seferis's Poetry, *The King of Asini and Other Poems*, published by John Lehmann in London in 1948. The somewhat abridged essay, translated by Valaoritis, first appeared under the title "T. S. Eliot in Greece" in *T. S. Eliot: A Symposium . . .*, compiled by Richard March and Tambimuttu (London: Editions Poetry London Limited, 1948).

conversation in Athens. I am sure that I have missed some of the errors, and in any case, we did not go over the translation in detail at that time. If you have no objection to the republication of this essay — and I desperately hope you don't — would you be good enough to send me any additional comments you may want to make, either regarding Valaorites' text or my translation of the new material? I would be most grateful. Valaorites seemed to me thoroughly cooperative, so I assume he will have no objection to these small alterations, especially since the source is the author himself (incidentally, the few changes that I have made are marked by a pencil line in the margin).¹⁰²

Is Athens really as beautiful now as our nostalgia would have it? Don't tell me if it isn't; I need the torture of thinking so to keep my senses alive in this dull place. Rereading your essay this morning has made both the beauty and the wound deeper.

Regards to Mrs. Seferis.

Best,
Mike Keeley



CABLEGRAM¹⁰³

George Seferis
20 Agras Street
Athens

We rejoice with the honor that has come to you and Greek poetry both so long deserving. Mary and I will drink at noon to Stratis the Mariner Mathios Paskalis Elpenor Helen and the other members of your magnificent family.¹⁰⁴ Long life to them and you.

¹⁰² The corrected and emended essay appeared in the October 1964 issue of *Poetry*, along with translated poems by Seferis, Elytis, Gatsos, and Sinopoulos. It was subsequently included in the English translation of Seferis's selected essays, *On the Greek Style: Selected Essays in Poetry and Hellenism* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1966).

¹⁰³ Sent from Princeton, New Jersey, October 20[?], 1963.

¹⁰⁴ The "family" listed in this congratulatory cablegram, occasioned by Seferis's winning the Nobel Prize, consists of his two pseudonymous personas and two other familiar characters in his poetry.



PRINCETON UNIVERSITY
PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY

Department of English
McCosh 22

October 27, 1963

Dear Mr. Seferis,

It is very difficult for me, Anglo-Saxon though I am, to contain the euphoria that I've been feeling since word of your honor reached me. I keep going back in my mind to that long night more than twelve years ago, when I was experiencing my first "sour taste of death in the London fog," twenty-three years old and impulsive, impulsive enough at least to burden you with my 150 pages of student comment on your poetry — more the product of enthusiasm than insight, I'm afraid — and your generosity to me at that time.¹⁰⁵ I have learned so much from you and from your work over the years since, I have known so much intense pleasure in translating your poetry, that I can't help but think of you as more responsible than any of my other teachers for what literary sensibilities I can claim. So my joy in your award is something like the joy of a proud kin, and if this may strike you as too possessive on my part, you may realize from your own rendering of others that a translator does become possessive in mysterious ways, that his spirit and that of the poet he is translating often merge. There you have it. My sense of identity may be presumptuous, but it is a fact of the way I feel. I will sing about your just triumph silently so that nobody recognizes the illicit pride in me, which is as the gods would want it.

I am sure that in the days to come you will be harassed by foreign publishers regarding your work. Let me start the turmoil by forwarding a request that came to me today through Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., the publisher of *Six Poets of Modern Greece*. As you may know, Knopf is now owned by Random House, the largest and most influential American publisher of literary works; the two to-

¹⁰⁵ The quoted phrase, without the word "London," is from Seferis's essay "Letter to a Foreign Friend" in his collection of essays *On the Greek Style*, in which he speaks of the time when he was making his first "faltering discovery of London."

gether have what is a virtual monopoly of the best foreign writers, and they share a quality paperback line called Vintage Books which issues, among others, Auden, Camus, Forster, Gide, Graves, Huxley, Malraux, Mann, and Sartre, along with the Americans Faulkner, Randal Jarrell, Robert Lowell, Gertrude Stein, and Wallace Stevens. They own, to my mind, the best paperback list in the business, and they have earned the most serious audience. In any case, Vintage Books would like to bring out a volume of Seferis that would consist of the following: an introduction by me, the Keeley-Sherrard selection of poems that appeared in *Six Poets* (with the addition of those few poems that would complete “Mythical Story” and the version of “Helen” that I published in *New World Writing*), and the Greek text of the poems included, probably facing the translation.¹⁰⁶ It is the latter that makes this volume an especially attractive possibility, since I know of no other American publisher who would go to the expense of printing the Greek text as well. Vintage would want to issue the volume in the near future, and they would offer you a contract that insured you a royalty from each book sold (only the top paperback outlets make this arrangement). This contract would not preclude any other that you might care to make; it would merely cover the particular translations that you allowed to appear in *Six Poets* (plus the new material mentioned above, if you are willing).

I am very excited about this possibility as it would gain you the best audience you can get in this country. I also have faith — if I may say so without arrogance — that the Keeley-Sherrard versions of your work are the best that have appeared, as critics in this country and England generally acknowledged (one such acknowledgement which you may not have seen is enclosed).¹⁰⁷ I therefore ardently hope that you will grant permission for the publication of this volume — at least that you will allow Vintage to draw up a contract for your consideration.

These must be full, exciting days for you, so I will not take up any more of your time. Mary joins me in wishing you and Mrs. Seferiades a long and happy journey ahead, a journey with all the

¹⁰⁶ Nothing came of this Vintage Book proposal. Within five months it was superseded by the Princeton University Press proposal for a complete bilingual edition of Seferis’s poems to that date, as is described in my letter of 27 March 1964.

¹⁰⁷ The enclosure was not attached to this letter in Seferis’s archive.

recompense that you deserve for your gift to Greek letters in unsung years.

Yours,
Edmund Keeley

P.S. I called Rex Warner yesterday to wish him well and to share my delight in your good fortune. As you may know, he is in the hospital with an ulcer; but he promised me that he would be out in a week and that he would come to Princeton to raise a glass of retsina with me in your honor.

✂

hurriedly¹⁰⁸

31.10.63

My dear Michalaki,

Thank you for the feeling expressed in your letter of the 27th. I'm sure you realize I don't have a single moment free up to the end of December (after my return from Stockholm). Now about your idea concerning Knopf, the matter depends entirely from Rex Warner and of course I insist on being correct to Seymour Lawrence (the Atlantic Monthly), my American publisher. If these two conditions are fulfilled I have personally no objection.

Note that I shall not be able to answer any letter till end of December

Love to Mary

Yours affectionately
George

¹⁰⁸ A draft of this letter, also without a heading, appears at the bottom and on the reverse of the second page of my letter of 27 October, now in the Seferis archive of the Gennadius Library.



PRINCETON UNIVERSITY
PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY

Department of English
McCosh 22

November 30, 1963

Dear Mr. Seferis,

The enclosed is self-explanatory.¹⁰⁹ I have written Mr. Ehrlich to say that you will be unable to answer any inquiries of this kind until the end of December, but I thought you might want to have his letter on file for possible consideration at a later date. He will presumably be getting in touch with you directly to indicate relevant terms of payment.

I received a very nice letter from Rex Warner regarding the possible Vintage paperback; he does not object to the project in any way — in fact, he says that he is eager as we are to see you get the largest possible audience in this country. The difficulty now is that the head editor at Vintage, an impulsive and opinionated young man to my mind, feels that the paperback edition would not sell sufficient copies to justify the expense, either in the form of a selection of your work or the *Six Poets* volume as a whole.¹¹⁰ I am therefore approaching Little, Brown, my own publishers; they share their paperback series with the Atlantic Monthly Press, so Seymour Lawrence would be involved in the decision (this is for a complete *Six Poets* in paperback).¹¹¹

As you probably know, I am in the process of working out arrangements with Seymour Lawrence regarding the selection of your essays that we outlined last summer. We hope it will become an excellent companion to your *Poems*, “we” meaning Mary and me, since we will work on this together as we did in the case of the Vassilikos trilogy.

Everyone here is still depressed by the events of last weekend; it

¹⁰⁹ The enclosure, a letter to me from Arnold Ehrlich, Senior Editor of *Show* magazine, appears in the Appendix.

¹¹⁰ Robert Gottlieb was head editor of the Vintage series at that time.

¹¹¹ Nothing came of this approach.

has been a mournful, harshly self-critical time for us, and it will be a long winter before the sad mood of these days vanishes.¹¹² I hope yours has been a more cheerful week preparing for the triumphal month ahead.

Our very best to you and Mrs. Seferis,

Ever,
Mike

P.S. I recently finished a long piece on the Poet George Seferis for *Book Week*, the Sunday supplement of the New York Herald Tribune. I will send you a copy when it comes out.



1. 1. 64

Athens

My dear Michalaki,

“Chronia polla / zoi kai prokopi stous dio sas.”¹¹³

On my return from Stockholm I found a letter from Seymour Lawrence (Atlantic Monthly) re a contemplated translation of an anthology of *Dokimes*.¹¹⁴ A plan was included. Let me state my observations.

—I prefer to have in the translation the sequence as in the book.

—Care should be taken in order to avoid overburdening the foreign reader with too many *Greek* details. For this I rely upon you. I shall certainly give you my help if needed. Some supplementary [*sic*] notes might be necessary.

Now:

1) T. S. Eliot, C. P. Cavafy — O. K. (with some editing)

¹¹² The assassination of President John F. Kennedy. At the time, Seferis sent U.S. Ambassador to Greece, Henry R. Labouisse, the following telegram: “President Kennedy fell in the first line of a battle for humanity. Please accept my profound sympathy and my heartfelt sorrow.” For Ambassador Labouisse’s response, see Appendix.

¹¹³ “Happy New Year / long life and success to you both.”

¹¹⁴ The reference is to Seferis’s collection of essays, a selection from which Atlantic Monthly Press proposed to publish in a translation by me and my wife, Mary. I submitted a plan in this connection but asked for more time to complete the project than the Press was willing to grant, as is explained in the letter that follows and above in the introductory essay, which also explores some of the implications of Seferis’s stated preferences in this letter.

- 2) Letter to a Foreign Friend on T.S.E. — O. K.
 - 3) More on the Alexandrian — I wonder: all of it or partly? and what parts. I am afraid it contains too many discussions on texts, tiresome for readers ignoring Greek.
 - 4) Our seafaring friend. O. K.
 - 5) Angelos Sikelianos O. K.
*But why not essays on
Palamas
Theophilos
and certain parts on Erotocritos*
 - 6) Letter on the *Thrush*: if in the form contained in the “*Dokimes*”¹¹⁵ O. K. but if the whole of it — I object. Indeed it will be awkward to have different texts in my book and in the translation
- III. — Art and the Times — O. K.
— on Pirandello no objection if you think it worth
but for
Dialogue, Monologue on Poetry and the end of a dialogue, I wonder if they can be understandable to a reader who does not know the replies of Tsatsos and is ignorant of the situation in Greece.

I suggest that Makriyannis was written for a public totally uninterested about the man.

Have a look at the Diary of a Poem (Poros 1946); it might be more palatable for your readers, and finally parts at least of the Preface to Kalvos might perhaps go down well.

On the other hand I am asking Savidis to send you cutting from Tachydromos¹¹⁶ containing my Nobel lecture, in case it interests you (the rights for it belong to the Nobel foundation but I think permission can be obtained from them)

Do you have in mind my short essay on *Pound*, translated by Ph. Sherrard?

I'm writing in hurry in order to save time. But now the situation gets easier for me

George

¹¹⁵ Word in Greek characters.

¹¹⁶ An Athenian weekly magazine.



Aérogramme

Department of English / Princeton University / Princeton, N. J.,
U.S.A.¹¹⁷

January 11, 1964

Dear Mr. Seferis,

Chronia Polla to you and Mrs. Seferis, and a prosperous new year for you both.

I too have heard from Seymour Lawrence. He writes that he cannot give me the time that I need to do a scholarly translation and edition of the essays (I had asked for *two summers* so that I could consult fully with you) and so he is approaching another translator — who I do not know, though you probably do by now.¹¹⁸ Both Mary and I are sorry about this, as we had already begun work; and I am a little dismayed because I do not think that Seymour Lawrence understands how much cutting, editing, annotating, and sensitive translating are involved in this project. If he has found someone competent to do the job in a hurry,¹¹⁹ more power to him; my object is to see the essays appear in the best form possible at an early date.¹²⁰ I merely wanted to be perfectly honest with him about how long I thought it would take Mary and me to do the job; I am, after all, a full-time professor and she is a full-time housewife. In any case, I have written him to say that I would be happy to help in any way I can once the translation is in: editing, annotating, writing a critical introduction, whatever may prove useful to him at that time. It is possible that none of these will be necessary or desirable, but I want to offer whatever assistance I can, especially since I suggested the idea in the first place.¹²¹

Now to new projects. Philip Sherrard and I want very much to do a more or less complete translation of your poems into English for publication in this country and England. We have in mind the following: *Strophe*, “*Erotikos Logos*”, *Sterna*, *Mythistorema*, and a full

¹¹⁷ Written on the aérogramme in Seferis’s English script: “Summer 64 and 65.”

¹¹⁸ The issue of the translation of Seferis’s selected essays discussed here and in the letter from Seferis that follows is clarified in the introductory essay.

¹¹⁹ Preceding three words underlined by Seferis.

¹²⁰ Preceding two words underlined by Seferis and followed by a question mark.

¹²¹ In the left-hand margin below, Seferis has written in English script: “projects / that / failed / difficult / to translate.”

selection from each of the remaining volumes (including, of course, a complete *Thrush*). We both feel that the English reader will now want to see the poetic career of George Seferis in its entirety, that he should so see it, and we feel that we can do justice to your early work since both of us have studied it in connection with our critical studies. We also work together congenially, effectively, I think. Can you give us permission to go ahead and explore¹²² this possibility? I imagine that Knopf would want to do the volume — and if they do, it would be, hopefully [*sic*], as beautiful as the *Six Poets* edition — but if they are not interested, others will be, including the Princeton University Press. Philip and I will not do anything about this until we hear from you; if you approve of the possibility, we will work together in Limni or Athens this summer, and since we have the basic versions of much of the poetry already prepared, it should not take us long to complete the volume after we get together.¹²³

Now that the essays have been taken out of my hands, I think of turning to a book-length critical study of your poetry, a project that has been on my mind for several years. Twayne Publications requested such a study from me a few weeks ago, but I expect that I would try several of the better university presses before committing myself to their series (a new series on world authors).¹²⁴

Did Philip tell you that *Poetry* is planning to include the three new poems that he and I translated (“Santorini”, “Salamis in Cyprus”, and “Three Mules”) for their Greek issue? I asked him to check with you, but he may well not have had time to do so yet. The poems will accompany your Eliot essay, so that the section devoted to you is equal at least to that given over to Gatsos and Elytis. The issue should prove to be the best thing of its kind to have appeared in this country.¹²⁵

Incidentally, you included a carbon of the second page of your comments on my outline relating to the essays; I can’t enclose it here, so I am returning it to you under separate cover. Mary and I

¹²² Preceding six words underlined by Seferis.

¹²³ The negotiations regarding a collected edition of Seferis’s poetry are outlined in some detail in the introductory essay.

¹²⁴ This project never progressed beyond the gathering of essays that appeared in *Modern Greek Poetry: Voice and Myth* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), and in Greek translation (Athens: Stigma, 1987).

¹²⁵ The issue appeared in October 1964.

had come to much the same revised table of contents that your comments would suggest (an abridged “More on the Alexandrian”, a fully edited version of the poetry essays — Dialogue, Monologue, End of Dialogue — with full references to Tsatsos, or even the text of his replies if that proved feasible). It is exactly these editorial problems, along with the many allusions that need explanation and the many classical and modern quotations that need sensitive translation, which make the essay volume a demanding one.

Do let me know about the complete Seferis, and if there should be any way that I can be of further use to you in connection with the essays, do not hesitate to call on me.

Our best to you both,
Mike

Did you receive the *Book Week* piece I did?

✂

Agras 20
Athens (502)
14/1/64

My dear Michalaki,

Had today your letter of the 11th. I’m sorry I had forgotten the last page of my last letter. I include it herein.

I must confess that I’m somehow getting tired with publishers and publications. All of them are in a hurry, now. On the other hand last 3 months have been trying and tiring for me and I need very badly some rest.

Now about the book of *Essays* Mr. Lawrence wrote to me to say that it was impossible for you to deliver the mss in less than two years and since he feels it is important to publish as soon as possible, you have graciously stepped aside. He asked Rex. I must say that I got rather confused with this affair; but why didn’t you say to Lawrence from the very beginning that you needed two years; that would have spared me a great deal of useless correspondence in a time I need to save every minute.¹²⁶

¹²⁶ The source of Seferis’s “confusion” is discussed in the introductory essay.

On the other projects. I can give permission for poems upon which I still control the rights.

The rights on poems contained in the Bodley Head edition (in America Atlantic etc) have been given already, with the exception of poems in your translation belonging to *Six Poets*, an earlier publication. I want to be fair in that sort of matters and I suppose that permission for any other use of the Bodley Head poems should be asked from the above publishers.¹²⁷ As you know poems from *Strophai* and *The Cistern* have not yet been translated because the matter was too difficult and there was always a problem if these poems stripped from their original form could convey any meaning to the foreign reader.¹²⁸ For the rest of them I wonder in what frame they can fit.

These are my problems, dear Michalaki.¹²⁹ I thank you for the care you have always given to my work but I thought I had to state my views in an objective way.

Best wishes again
G. S.

P.S. *Please correct:*

p. 5 (Letter to a foreign friend) “You see, we are a people who have had Great Fathers of the Church, but *now* without mystics.

P.T.O.¹³⁰

cf Greek text: “eimaste enas laos me megalous pateras tis ecclesias (afto den nomizo oti apodidetai anglika me to “great churchmen”) alla simera choris mystikous” — To simera eitan apo typograpofiko lathos pou paraliftike.¹³¹

¹²⁷ For further comment on this issue, see the introductory essay.

¹²⁸ The issue of what to do about the rendering of rhymed poems included in these two volumes is first taken up in the introductory essay, and continues in the 1965 correspondence.

¹²⁹ Name written in Greek characters.

¹³⁰ “Please turn over.”

¹³¹ The translation in question was of the essay “Letter to a Foreign Friend,” translated by Nanos Valaorites and emended by me for publication in the October 1964 issue of *Poetry*. Seferis’s commentary in Greek objects to the phrase “great churchmen” in this translation and points to what he calls a “typographical” error in the Greek text, which omitted the crucial word “now.” The error was in fact more complicated: see the discussion in the introductory essay.



PRINCETON UNIVERSITY
PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY

Department of English
McCosh 22

March 21, 1964

Dear Mr. Seferis,

Please excuse my long delay in answering your letter of January 14. I didn't want to bother you with further correspondence before having something precise to offer regarding the project that I outlined in my last letter to you. I now have a proposal that requires your confirmation.¹³² The Editorial Board of the Princeton University Press, after soliciting opinions from a number of Modern Greek specialists in this country and England, has voted to propose the publication of a volume of your poems, translated by Philip Sherrard and me. The proposal has to be approved by the Board of Trustees, who meet on April 11, but this is essentially a formality since they have never rejected a recommendation of the Editorial Board. The proposed volume would also be offered to the Oxford University Press, which normally issues Princeton University Press books in England and the Commonwealth. The Oxford University Press would presumably distribute the volume under its name and its auspices in all English-speaking countries outside the U. S., in keeping with a standing agreement between the presses.

The Director of the Press¹³³ called me into his office yesterday to explain the details of the Board's recommendation and to outline the terms that he wants me to offer for your approval. The Press has the following in mind:¹³⁴

1. A hardback edition of your poems in English translation, with introduction and notes, and with the full Greek text. The edition would be as complete as you would allow it to be, ideally every-

¹³² This proposal and its subsequent history — the principal subject of a number of letters that follow — is discussed at some length in the introductory essay.

¹³³ Herbert S. Bailey, Jr.

¹³⁴ In the left margin, Seferis has written: "Royalties / Bod Head. / Contents."

thing that is included in the 3rd edition of your *Poemata* (Ikaros, 1961). The Press would hope to photograph the Ikaros text and include it as the second half of the volume. With the introduction and notes, this would mean a volume of 450 to 500 pages (given their proposed format, which would be somewhat less generous than that of the Ikaros edition). The book would be priced at about \$8.00, the price depending of course on the final number of pages (I expect that \$10.00 is more likely, since they estimate the price at \$2.00 [*sic*] per page).¹³⁵ The poet and translators would share a 10% royalty on all copies sold¹³⁶; the book would be kept continually in stock (as is normally true of the Princeton-Oxford Press books); and there could be revised future editions as deemed advisable.

2. A possible paperback college edition of either the full volume or merely the English translations, this to be decided at a later date. The shared royalty on the paperback edition would be 5% on the first 10,000 copies and 7½% on all additional copies.

3. The Press would want you to give the translators a letter granting them world rights to the translations included in the volume (that is, rights to our particular versions, *not* exclusive translation rights, nor rights to the poems themselves; this is essentially the arrangement we made in the case of¹³⁷ *Six Poets*).

4. The Press would want your permission to photograph the Ikaros text.

5. If you should suggest a selected edition of your work rather than a complete edition, the Press would be willing to consider a shorter volume, as long as it remained a substantial one. Their advisers were unanimous in recommending a more or less complete edition, with ample notes.¹³⁸

Let me say that the Princeton Press is recognized as one of the leading scholarly presses in this country (the only others of like standing are Harvard and Yale), with a reputation for design and format unmatched by any other university press. The Oxford Press speaks for itself. Your work would thus be served by two of the best houses in the publishing world; you would be assured of the

¹³⁵ Read \$2.00 per 100 pages.

¹³⁶ Preceding eight words underlined by Seferis.

¹³⁷ Preceding three words underlined by Seferis.

¹³⁸ Preceding three words underlined by Seferis.

highest quality in printing as well as the most reputable representation in all other pertinent ways.

Philip and I are ready to undertake this project if it complies with your wishes. I have spoken to Rex Warner about it (he visited me here last weekend), and he is in full sympathy with the proposal since it involves a more or less complete edition of your work to be presented by two distinguished scholarly presses. He told me that he would be happy to write Seymour Lawrence to encourage him to grant Philip and me whatever permission might be necessary, though he was not sure that Atlantic Monthly permission was required by contract (he couldn't remember the terms of the contract he signed). Before I approach either the Atlantic Monthly Press or the Bodley Head, I want to know your own feelings regarding the terms of the Princeton Press proposal. If you find them acceptable, and if you want Philip and me to proceed, would you be good enough to let me know exactly what rights the Bodley Head and the Atlantic Monthly presses possess, and what sort of permission I need to request? I will write them in keeping with your specific wishes. There is no point in our moving further until that matter is settled to everyone's satisfaction.

I'm sorry to burden you with further correspondence, but in this instance I hope the effort will bring you a just return. I don't have to tell you that I'm personally very excited about the possibility of seeing Seferis appear under these particular auspices (after all, Princeton and Oxford are the two universities I call my own).

My very best wishes,
Michalak¹³⁹

✂

Agras 20, Athens 502 — 30. 3. 64¹⁴⁰

My dear Michalaki,

I think the best way of dealing with the copyright question is to send you a copy of the agreement with the Bodley Head signed by

¹³⁹ Signature in Greek characters, as is true of all subsequent signatures that offer this diminutive Greek version of my nickname "Mike." As is customary, the signature adds the final "s" of the nominative case; salutations are in the vocative case, without the final "s."

¹⁴⁰ Seferis has added "Delayed."

me and Rex Warner. I enclose it. I have not signed a special agreement with the *Atlantic 1961 Monthly, Little Brown*¹⁴¹ Press. The question of the American book was dealt with by the Bodley Head. I have the feeling that legally I am bound with the Bodley Head only for Rex Warner's translation, but morally I don't want to give rights to another translator without the approval of Rex Warner. I should add that I have been recently informed by S. Lawrence that a paperback edition of my Rex Warner poems will be published next October.¹⁴² In any case, with the agreement in your hands you might seek the advice of somebody more competent than myself on the legal question, and let me know.

Now on the conditions of Princeton Press.

1) *Royalties*: they are the lowest I *ever* had.

2) *Rights*: I prefer to sign an agreement between the Press on the one hand and, jointly with the translators, on the other.¹⁴³ The agreement should specify that I am granting the rights for your particular versions and *not* exclusive translation rights. Needless to add that I'll sign such an agreement only if the Agreement with the Bodley Head allows me to do so.

3) *Greek text*. The Press will have the permission to photograph the Ikaros text. I have not yet spoken about the matter with Ikaros and I do not know their conditions, but I *object* to the idea of having the Greek text in a second part of the book (this text is after all the original); this text should face the English text on each page. The Italians (Mondadori) did so.

4) *Contents*. Agree to have a book as substantial as possible; everything will depend on the possibilities of translation.

Ever,
George

¹⁴¹ The date and the three previous words were inserted in the poet's carbon copy.

¹⁴² Seferis is referring, of course, to Rex Warner's selected translation of Seferis's poems, published by Atlantic Monthly Press in 1961.

¹⁴³ The final contract, a "Memorandum of Agreement," was actually signed by the poet, the two translators, and the Director of the Press.



PRINCETON UNIVERSITY¹⁴⁴
PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY¹⁴⁵

Department of English
McCosh 22

April 17, 1964¹⁴⁶

Dear Mr. Seferis,

The Board of Trustees of the Princeton University Press has now approved the proposal that I discussed in my last letter to you, and the Press is prepared to offer a contract. I have seen the Director, Herbert Bailey, regarding the questions raised in your answer to me; he will be writing you shortly in this connection.¹⁴⁷ Let me give you a brief account of what emerged from our conversation.

1. *The Bodley Head Contract*: Mr. Bailey agrees with my reading, namely, that the Bodley Head holds the rights *only* to the particular volume of translations entitled *The Poems of George Seferis*, translated by Rex Warner. I assume that the Atlantic Monthly Press holds the American rights to this volume.¹⁴⁸ In any case, there is nothing in the contract that restricts the publication of another translation of the same poems; and you hold the rights to the Greek text. The Princeton University Press is therefore satisfied that no request for permission from either of these publishers is necessary.

2. *Rex Warner's permission*: I have already obtained this verbally. As I said in my last letter, Rex Warner was in full sympathy with the project when I spoke to him. If you want me to get his permission in writing, I will be happy to ask him for a letter granting his approval — or perhaps you would prefer to write him yourself.¹⁴⁹

3. *Greek text*: The Press is now prepared to publish the Greek text *en face* (my original recommendation). Though this may increase

¹⁴⁴ Seferis has added "Edmund Keeley" here in his English script.

¹⁴⁵ Seferis adds the zip code, "08540."

¹⁴⁶ In the right margin beside the date, Seferis has written: "C. P. 15.5.64," referring to his postcard to me of that date. And below, in Greek: "I wrote Warner / I didn't receive message Bailey," items mentioned in the same postcard.

¹⁴⁷ This sentence underlined by Seferis.

¹⁴⁸ This sentence underlined by Seferis.

¹⁴⁹ The concluding phrase underlined by Seferis.

the price of the hardback volume (possibly as high as \$10.00 a copy), Mr. Bailey now agrees that it is a preferable procedure. I am delighted that he has changed his mind; I expect to see a volume more handsome even than I anticipated.

4. *Royalties*: what can I say? Apparently no university press in this country ever offers more than a 10% royalty.¹⁵⁰ In place of a higher royalty, they guarantee to keep the book perpetually in stock and to issue future editions as the author deems advisable; Mr. Bailey intends to write you about these advantages, as well as the history of the Press, which includes the publication of many of our most distinguished thinkers (among these, Albert Einstein and George F. Kennan). I myself would be pleased if the royalty were larger; none of us, alas, has a reasonable income these days. If we divide the royalty in half (5% to you and 2½% to each of the translators), your share would be 2½% less than what you receive from the Bodley Head, but your income from the projected book should ultimately be more substantial since the hardback edition will sell for close to \$10.00 a copy. And with luck, the paperback edition at some later date will add measurably to this return. So what can I say? Nothing very persuasive. I bargained as best I could with Mr. Bailey — bargained like a true Levantine¹⁵¹ — and got no more out of him than a tolerant smile.

5. *Rights*: Mr. Bailey hopes to construct a single contract that will satisfy everyone concerned on the matter of rights. Both you and the translators would be asked to sign it. The contract will specify that the Press has world rights *only* to the particular versions that it will publish. He will be sending you a copy for your perusal in the near future.

I imagine you have heard from Philip regarding the proposed Penguin paperback of three Greek poets — a cheerful prospect.¹⁵² Have you also heard that Sam Lawrence is leaving the Atlantic Monthly Press to join Knopf (according to my editor at Knopf)?

¹⁵⁰ Perhaps true at that time, though not confirmed by sources other than Princeton University Press, which, in any case, offered a 15 percent royalty for *C. P. Cavafy: Collected Poems* a decade later.

¹⁵¹ Preceding seven words underlined by Seferis.

¹⁵² This Penguin abridgement of *Six Poets of Modern Greece* ended up including four poets only (Cavafy, Seferis, Elytis, Gatsos), all that the publishers would allow, and the exclusion of Sikelianos from the abridgement rightfully upset Seferis, who commented on it in conversation — “Had I known you would exclude Sikelianos, I would have excluded myself” — part of the evidence pointing to his abiding admiration for Sikelianos and his poetry.

Perhaps some day we will come together under the same Publisher — as under a single God — and our lives cease to be so complicated in that respect at least.¹⁵³

All the best,
Michalakis



Seferis / Agras, 20 / Athens, 502 / Greece¹⁵⁴

15. 5. 64

Dear Michalaki,
Leaving for a trip to Volos. — I have not heard yet from Mr. Herbert Bailey. In the meantime wrote to Rex [Warner] and had his answer. Full of understanding as always.

Yeia Chara¹⁵⁵
G S



Aérogramme

Department of English / Princeton University / Princeton, N. J.,
U. S. A.

Department of English
Princeton University
Princeton, New Jersey
September 26, 1964

Dear Mr. Seferis,

I imagine that by now you have the opinion of Greenbaum, Wolff and Ernst as solicited by Princeton University Press. Except for the spelling of Rex Warner's name, the statement seems to me fully authoritative and exhaustive, and there should be no further question regarding the rights. I hope you agree. If so, we (the author and the translators) should now be perfectly free to sign the Princeton Press contract. Since I am now in direct communication

¹⁵³ A naive hope, given the fragmentation in the world of publishing that soon followed these relatively stable years.

¹⁵⁴ This is a postcard.

¹⁵⁵ "Health and Joy," written in Greek characters.

with the Press, don't hesitate to write me if you have any further questions regarding the contract. I myself am satisfied.

Several days ago I mailed you a copy of the Hemingway book that I promised to send you, along with my own copy of the book that came out of Faulkner's visit to Japan. Let me say a word about the latter. Faulkner has said that the book was published without his permission or perusal and that he would not want to be held responsible for all of the statements attributed to him; there is, nevertheless, some truth in it to my mind because much of what he is reported to have said appears in other documents that he has not repudiated, and it should in any case be helpful to you in judging the kinds of questions that may confront you during your trip. Incidentally, I am trying to get a second copy of the book so that you can keep the one I sent you, but I don't yet know whether or not I will succeed; I have a suspicion that the book is out of print. It is also missing from the Princeton library, which means that some enterprising undergraduate or the like stole the only copy in our neighborhood. Anyway, even if I should fail to get a second copy, I want you to keep the book as long as it is of any use to you.

I'm sorry that we missed seeing you again during the rush and confusion of our leaving Athens — always a painful business for us. At least this year we can look forward to welcoming you here not too far hence. Please get in touch with me whenever I can be of help to you in connection with your pending trip.

Our best to Mrs. Seferis.

Yours,
Michalakis



PRINCETON UNIVERSITY
PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY

Department of English
McCosh 22

November 4, 1964

Dear Mr. Seferis,

The Princeton Press called me several days ago to ask if I had heard from you regarding the legal opinion they sent you last month and whether or not you had yet signed the contracts in your hands. Philip Sherrard also wrote me with a similar inquiry. Neither of us wants to begin work on the edition until we are sure that you are fully satisfied with the terms of the project. I know that you are harassed by correspondence of this kind, but we would be grateful for your final views on this matter as soon as you are free to give them to us, so that we can proceed accordingly.

I have put in your name for one of our three University Lectures in the spring; I hope this still fits in with your plans.

Best to you and Mrs. Seferis.

Yours,
Michalakis



8. 11. 64¹⁵⁶

Dear Michalaki,

I came back from Spain last month and as you can imagine many things to be done have accumulated during my absence: this is the reason of my delay. Yes, I think the legal opinion which Princeton Press forwarded to me should satisfy everybody concerned and I am ready to sign the contract and send it to Philip. The only reason I didn't do so is that last summer I gave you the last letter I had from Mr. Bailey Jr in which he agrees on some small alter-

¹⁵⁶ Written on the envelope: "From. Seferis, Agras 20 Athens 502 — Greece Thanks for the royalties of Poetry. —"

ations of the contract. As soon as you send it back to me I'll send the contract back. — So, I suppose you may start working at once.

I received the two books — lots of thanks.¹⁵⁷ Shall I send Faulkner's book back? I've sent you Discours [*sic*] on Stockholm as I promised.¹⁵⁸

Best wishes to you both
George Seferis



PRINCETON UNIVERSITY
PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY

Department of English
McCosh 22

November 16, 1964

Dear Mr. Seferis,

I was pleased to hear from you; I'm glad that all is well.

I enclose the Princeton Press letter. When you have made the necessary change in wording, the signed contracts should go to Philip for his signature, and then, presumably, we are finished with all this contract business and can get to work.

You may keep the Faulkner book; I have managed to get ahold of another copy.

I hope you will be able to accept the invitation to lecture in Princeton. I received a call from the American Academy of Poets [*sic*] in New York; they too are eager to have you read from your work (in Greek), with accompanying English translations. The lecture topic that you mentioned to me last summer would do beautifully for Princeton, I think.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁷ As I indicated in my letter of 26 September, the first book is a "Hemingway book," otherwise unidentified. I believe the second book was *Faulkner at Nagano* (Tokyo: Kenkyusha Ltd., 1956), apparently published without Faulkner's permission; it had to do with a visit by him to Japan.

¹⁵⁸ The reference is to Seferis's Nobel Prize lecture.

¹⁵⁹ I have no record of what the suggested topic was, and the lecture was never given, though Seferis did read from his poems in Greek — followed by my reading of the poems in translation — at the Academy of American Poets in June of 1965, a prospect discussed in several letters below.

Many thanks for the Stockholm lecture. I am brushing up on my French.

Best,
Michalakis



GEORGE SEFERIS, AGRAS 20, ATHENS 502, GREECE

12. 12. 64

Dear Michalaki,

Thank you for yr letter of the 16th and enclosed letter. Contracts are gone to Limni¹⁶⁰ for signature. I'd have sent them earlier, if I had not noticed that there is a 4th copy of the agreement missing. This morning I remembered suddenly (after a week's researches) that I gave it to you last summer with Mr. Bailey's letter. If you find it please send it to Philip for signature and ask him to forward it to me. I shall return it to Princeton for you. If not ask them to make another copy.

In any case as soon as I have the remaining two copies from Limni,¹⁶¹ I shall post the one to Princeton keeping the other for me.

Best wishes from both to both.

Ever
George

Thank you for Faulkner¹⁶²

¹⁶⁰ Word written in Greek characters. "Limni" is the town in Evia (Euboea), Greece, near Philip Sherrard's home in the small community called "Katounia."

¹⁶¹ Word written in Greek characters.

¹⁶² See footnote 157 to Seferis's letter of 8 November 1964.



Aérogramme

Department of English / Princeton University / Princeton, N. J.,
U.S.A.

Dept. of English
Princeton University
Princeton, N.J.
January 18, 1965

Dear Mr. Seferis,

Alexander Leitch, Secretary to the University, called me several days ago to say that the Board of Trustees were extending you an invitation to attend our graduation exercises and receive an honorary doctorate of letters. I am very pleased that they have done so, and I earnestly hope that you will be able to accept. Let me say that the last poet so honored by Princeton was T. S. Eliot, in 1947 I believe, and you are the first foreign poet to be so honored in the recent history of the University.¹⁶³ Those of us here who are particularly interested in poetry are especially eager to have you accept the invitation because awards of this kind in our field have been too few, and I expect it will be some time before the Trustees find another poet so deserving. I have heard — confidentially (as these matter must remain private) — that Princeton hopes to honor a painter and a composer at the same time; it is apparently our year to celebrate the arts, and it would be a source of pleasure and pride for me if you were to represent poetry in this celebration — as it should be a source of pride for all Philhellenes. I gather from Mr. Miller at the Institute for Contemporary Arts that your arrival here has been delayed until April 20.¹⁶⁴ I hope this means that you can now extend your visit into June, hopefully [*sic*] as late as June 15. Even if your lecture tour should be finished before that date, you will certainly want some time to visit this country under casual circumstances, without deadlines and the like. If you could save the first two weeks of June for this purpose — even, perhaps, for a

¹⁶³ This clause underlined by Seferis.

¹⁶⁴ Seferis was then in the process of arranging a lecture tour in America under these auspices, but by the end of the month his plans had changed, as we see from the letter that follows.

period of rest — it might not be a burden to stay in this country until mid-June; it is in any case one of our best months, not too far from spring and not yet too hot. Now that Mary and I have bought a house, we plan to take advantage of our three-acre grounds and garden patio throughout most of June and so delay our departure for Greece until June 24,¹⁶⁵ when we sail on the SS France.

A friend of mine at Miami, Prof. John Hall (formerly chairman of the English Dept. at Athens College) wants very much to arrange a tour for you and Mrs. Seferis at Miami University. Your name has been approved for the University's principal lecture in the spring term (which pays more than Princeton pays, alas), and the local Greek community wants to honor you with a banquet — again, with a reasonable fee as well. I have put Prof. Hall in touch with Mr. Miller, who is in sympathy with the idea, especially since the return is larger than what he can expect to get from most other possibilities. And Miami is among the cities on the eastern coast that one ought to see if one wants a full image of America — much as one should see Hollywood. In any case, it would be a nice place to relax in late May, so I hope you can fit it into your schedule (as I hope to fit it into mine if I can somehow find the funds to pay for my transportation).¹⁶⁶

Princeton also hopes that you will make this your headquarters during the week that you will be lecturing here and in New York (Mr. Miller is still in the process of setting the exact dates), and will offer to put you and Mrs. Seferis up at the University guest house, a lovely mansion with broad, beautifully-kept grounds in the center of town. It will of course be a delight for Mary and me to have you near us as much as possible, so I hope this arrangement will work out as well. Princeton is only an hour outside New York; it should not be too much of a strain to go into New York from here on the one or two occasions when you will be lecturing in the City (as local New Yorkers call it). Philip and I are at work on the Collected Seferis. I have 12 poems still to translate before my half of the volume is complete. Hopefully [*sic*] these will be ready in rough draft form by the time of your visit here.

Our best wishes to you both.
Michalakis

¹⁶⁵ The date is underlined by Seferis.

¹⁶⁶ In the end, neither Miami nor Hollywood made it into Seferis's U.S. itinerary.



GEORGE SEFERIS, AGRAS 20, ATHENS 502, GREECE

1/2/65

My dear Michalaki,¹⁶⁷

Starting with “Michalaki” I say why don’t you write in Greek, too; you know it much better than I know your language. Also, it will give you the opportunity (if you miss something) to consult your wife more often. Please forgive me for being such a bad correspondent. I have very little room for this art, which now seems to me outmoded. I also ask you to forgive me for maybe making you unhappy: this past Monday I wrote the I.C.A. that *unexpected circumstances*¹⁶⁸ prevent me from going through with my trip to America (and Japan).¹⁶⁹ I’m sorry about that. So much work has piled up here so unexpectedly that I figure this, along with the time I will need to prepare for the trip, will make me subject to such pressure that I will get no joy out of my tour of the U.S. and I think at my age, I have the right to do things with good heart.¹⁷⁰ There are also personal reasons that require my presence here. I thought a great deal about all this, and I didn’t make up my mind in a moment of irritation — especially since it would mean that I would lose the opportunity to see two friends: you in your home and Rex Warner; and also that I would be unable to accept the most courteous invitation that your University extended to me. Mr. Robert Goheen¹⁷¹ wrote me a very nice letter (I answered him); I will now write again to say that, for the above reasons, I definitely will not be able to be in Princeton in June.

I thank you, Michalaki, for the love you showed me on this occasion. We will see each other here in the summer and talk about it more easily. I am pleased that you are working on the bilingual edition of the poems. I sent Princeton the signed contract. Yours is the one left; a few days ago Philip sent me another copy. I assume

¹⁶⁷ The original letter is in Seferis’s Greek script, here translated by Edmund and Mary Keeley.

¹⁶⁸ The preceding two words are in English, and underlined.

¹⁶⁹ For the circumstances that led to a further change of plans, see the introductory essay.

¹⁷⁰ “Kefi” is the poet’s word for “good heart.”

¹⁷¹ Mr. Goheen was president of Princeton University at the time.

it comes from you; that too is signed and ready. I will give it to you this summer or do you want me to mail it. Write.

I embrace both of you,
George S.



Aérogramme

Department of English / Princeton University / Princeton, N. J.,
U.S.A.

February 13, 1965

Dear Mr. Seferis,

Naturally I was distressed to hear that you will not be coming to this country in the Spring. I can understand that the prospect must have seemed fatiguing from your perspective, but I do not think it would have been unbearably so in fact. In any case, as you say, you have earned the right to avoid all occasions that you can't enter with enthusiasm. I hope that we can work out something more to your taste for next year or the year after.

The Secretary to the Trustees, Alexander Leitch, asked me if it was conceivable that you might fly over merely to receive the honorary degree, without other obligation, with a return date arranged at your convenience — the day following, if your commitments in Athens are pressing. I told him that it was conceivable, but that the only way of finding out how actual it might be would be through an offer to you. He is hoping to find some way of arranging your transportation expenses. I would of course be overjoyed if this plan should prove feasible, for the reasons outlined in an earlier letter, but I did not press the matter with Mr. Leitch — nor do I want to press it with you.

I had a nice conversation with Rex [Warner] by telephone the other day. He is having his troubles with the translating of the essays,¹⁷² and I want to be of whatever help to him that I can be. I hope to get together with him to celebrate the 25th of March¹⁷³ or some other such likely occasion.

¹⁷² The selection from Seferis's *Dokimes*, published in English as *On the Greek Style: Selected Essays in Poetry and Hellenism*, trans. Rex Warner and Th. D. Frangopoulos (Boston: Atlantic-Little Brown, 1966).

¹⁷³ Greek Independence Day.

It has been a sad week for me generally: my good friend and intellectual counselor, R. P. Blackmur,¹⁷⁴ died at his home at the start of the past week,* and I found myself having to [help] arrange his funeral and all other personal matters because there was no one else to do so, except one or two other bewildered friends and two distant sisters who knew him hardly at all (as his closest friends did not know of them). I feel that the most exciting dimension of my life here has gone with Blackmur, and that compels me, even more than usual, to look forward to our return to Greece for a long stay.

I continue to work on the Collected Poems. We will have, hopefully, a thick manuscript to consider when I see you in June. Incidentally, you might as well keep my copy of the contract; I would merely bring it back with me if you were to forward it to me now.

Take care of yourself. And our best to Mrs. Seferis.

Michalakis

*George Savidis may be interested in this news as he met Blackmur in Athens and is, I believe, an admirer of his criticism.¹⁷⁵



Aérogramme

Department of English / Princeton University / Princeton, N. J.,
U.S.A.¹⁷⁶

Department of English
Princeton University
Princeton, N.J.
March 22, 1965

Dear Mr. Seferis:

I was very pleased to learn from Alexander Leitch¹⁷⁷ that you have accepted the University's invitation¹⁷⁸ in principle. I hope Mr.

¹⁷⁴ Richard Palmer Blackmur, poet and critic, one of the principal founders and practioners of the New Criticism, was Professor of English at Princeton at the time of his death.

¹⁷⁵ This was added in script at the end of the typewritten letter.

¹⁷⁶ In Seferis's Greek script: "Ekdromi 10 — 146/, 30 dio prosopa," apparently a note on the roundtrip excursion air fare for two.

¹⁷⁷ The name is underlined by Seferis.

¹⁷⁸ To travel to Princeton to accept an honorary degree.

Leitch's follow-up letter, mailed today, will convince you to accept without qualification. In anticipation of this possibility, I have reserved a double room for you at the University's guest house from Friday, June 11, through Wednesday, June 16. It is our hope that you will be able to spend most or all of these days in Princeton, so that you have a chance to see the University in unhurried circumstances and perhaps meet some of the faculty informally. The only official obligations that you will have are a dinner at the President's house on Monday night, attendance at the graduation exercises on Tuesday morning, and a luncheon with the Trustees Tuesday noon. The rest of the time is yours to spend as you wish, and if you do not wish to be away from Athens more than a few days, you can make your travel arrangements accordingly. Mary and I hope that you will not be so pressed, as we would enjoy showing you the local sights and entertaining you in whatever ways may suit your fancy. We would also be very happy to put you up in our home if you should find the prospect of staying in a university guest house at all unpalatable.

I called the local travel agent this morning and learned that there is a daily TWA flight from Athens to New York (Kennedy Airport). It leaves Athens at 11:30 a.m. and arrives in N.Y. at 5:30 p.m., with a single stop-over in Rome. You gain 5 hours in this direction. The return is overnight, leaving N.Y. at 10:00 p.m. and arriving in Athens at 2:25 p.m., again with a single stop-over in Rome. The first-class roundtrip fare, which the University will offer you, is \$1,087.80. The tourist class fare is about \$735.00. Should you choose to travel no later than June 3 with a return between June 17 and June 24, the single tourist fare is only \$591.90 (that is, 2 persons can travel roundtrip for very close to the single first class fare). This latter arrangement is what is known as the 21 day excursion rate; it is not available after June 3 (when the high season begins), and you must stay in this country at least 2 weeks to take advantage of it. As I have suggested previously, you could very profitably spend two weeks in this country, perhaps in the company of Mrs. Seferis, without being out of pocket too much — and during those two weeks you could find ample opportunity to meet your expenses by reading or lecturing should you so choose. In any case, we hope that you will give us as much time as you feel you can spare, and I assure you that you will have nothing more taxing to do than to

accept the honorary degree (which doesn't involve more effort than a whispered "thank you") should you so desire.

Incidentally, I recommend a Mr. Stamelos at the Athens American Express for your travel arrangements at that end. If I can be of any help at this end, please let me know.

We look forward to your visit very much, both for personal reasons and because your accepting a degree here will honor Greek poetry in a way that it has never before been honored in this country. That is not simply rhetoric: it is a fact.

All best wishes,
Michalakis

P.S. Please let me know your plans — if only in a few words on an air mail postcard.¹⁷⁹



GEORGE SEFERIS, AGRAS 20, ATHENS 502, GREECE

29. 3. 65

My dear Michalaki,¹⁸⁰

I hasten to answer your good letter of 22/3. You are dear to go to such trouble on my behalf. I am pleased that things have taken this turn. Deep down that which bothered me most (when my trip was canceled) was that I wouldn't see you in your home in America, you and Rex Warner, and the Princeton business. When I received the telegram from Mr. Goheen (Robert F. Goheen — he is the one who signs the letters — who is he? and Alexander Leitch, whom you mention, is who?) I felt that Princeton's kindness was so great that I couldn't bring myself to refuse. I won't be in a great hurry in June, and I'm in good spirits.¹⁸¹ I may take advantage of the occasion to see Rex Warner for a day or two in Storrs (which I can't find on the map).¹⁸² The dates you reserved a room at the

¹⁷⁹ The postscript was added in script at the end of the typewritten letter.

¹⁸⁰ This letter is in Seferis's Greek script, translated by Edmund and Mary Keeley.

¹⁸¹ "Echo kefi."

¹⁸² In my archive I found an undated note on a loose-leaf slip that appears to be an order in Seferis's hand for Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis*, published by Princeton University Press ("the last edition" and "No paperback" are added in parentheses). As a footnote, I have added Rex Warner's address: 10 Westwood Road, Storrs, Conn. I assume that the address

Guest House¹⁸³ are fine. If it doesn't create difficulties, I *may* come on Thursday, June 10. I will confirm this with you in good time. How long does it take to go from Princeton to New York? Can I come to Princeton the evening I arrive in N. York?¹⁸⁴ The issue of my wife remains. When I received the telegram I thought I would come alone. There are several matters to be settled that keep her here. If we can manage it, she may accompany me. I'll write you about this too in good time. If she comes we will most likely spend a few days in New York. Do you know a reasonable hotel there? I've been told about the Hotel Blackstone, 50 east [*sic*] 58th Street. What is it? Lectures I do not want to give, about readings of poems we'll see.¹⁸⁵ When do you leave for Greece? I'm writing Mr. Goheen not to send me money (the \$1,087) here.¹⁸⁶ I'll need it in America. I also write him to ask that he leave the rest of the details for me to arrange with you. Thanks for everything.

I embrace both of you
Seferis

*not for maharajahs



*Aérogramme*¹⁸⁷

Department of English / Princeton University / Princeton, N. J.,
U.S.A.

140 Littlebrook Road
Princeton, N.J.
[April 7, 1965]

Dear Mr. Seferis,

I was delighted to get your letter — as was, I'm sure, President Goheen (Alex. Leitch is Secretary, i.e., protocol officer, to the University; Robert F. Goheen is the head man). We look forward to

was to be passed on to Seferis at some point in this period of our correspondence in anticipation of his visit to the United States to receive his honorary degree from Princeton.

¹⁸³ Previous two words in English.

¹⁸⁴ My marginal note: "Kate Simon guide to N.Y."

¹⁸⁵ The previous sentence is in English.

¹⁸⁶ The figure in parentheses is the first-class roundtrip fare mentioned in my 22 March letter.

¹⁸⁷ Written by hand, the date below determined by the postmark.

receiving you here with the same enthusiasm that you have greeted us so often in London and Athens, and I will do what I can to make your visit as relaxed as it should be at that time of year.

Let me answer as many of your questions as I can, and fill in certain details.

1. I have reserved Thursday¹⁸⁸ night in addition to the others I indicated in my last letter. The first three nights you will be staying at the Theobald Smith Guest House (double room with bath). The Lowry House is occupied over the weekend by ancient men returning to the University for their annual reunion (this by designation of Mr. Lowry's will), so it is unfortunately not open to other University guests until Sunday. It would be noisy during reunions in any case.¹⁸⁹

2. I can't find Storrs on my Atlas or road maps, but I'm told it is in the Willimantic area, i.e., east-central Connecticut. In any case, it is not far north of New York, no more than three hours by car, I should think. Rex [Warner] would be delighted to have you visit him there, I'm sure. We will try to get him down here during your stay in Princeton for our pleasure as well.

3. Princeton is 50 miles south of New York, that is, a little over an hour by car. You should certainly plan to come here the night you arrive; in fact, I plan to meet you at Kennedy airport and bring you here in my car. (You will, of course, let me know your exact time of arrival in due time, I hope).

4. I do not know the Blackstone¹⁹⁰ Hotel but I will do some research on it and let you know. There are any number of reasonable hotels in N.Y.: the Barclay, in the East 50's, or the Park-Sheraton (where Elytis stayed while in this country). When the time approaches I can perhaps be more specific, especially if you give me a precise idea of what you would like. Both of the above are "reasonable," at least as New York prices go.

5. Do let me know if you would want / be willing to give a reading in N.Y. while you are here. I am sure either the Academy of American Poets or the YMHA Poetry Center would be interested

¹⁸⁸ Word underlined by Seferis.

¹⁸⁹ "Reunions" is the Princeton University term for the three- to four-day annual visit to the Princeton campus by graduates of the University, an event that attracts an unusually large number of alumni.

¹⁹⁰ Word underlined by Seferis.

in having you, though they may feel that it will be late in the season (since many academics and poetry-lovers leave for Europe by mid-June). If you don't have "kefi"¹⁹¹ for this kind of thing, best forget it; if you do have kefi, I will do what I can to arrange it, in keeping with your wishes.

5. [*sic*] We sail on the SS France for Le Havre on June 24, then quickly to Athens, where we will be spending most of my year's leave of absence. We have never had a winter in Athens, so we look forward to what is ahead almost as neophytes — or tourists — would. 14 months of Greece! What more could one want for joy?

Our best to you both,
Mike

P.S. Do bring Mrs. Seferis



GEORGE SEFERIS, AGRAS 20, ATHENS 502, GREECE

21. 4. 65

Dear Michalaki,

I thank you for everything. Responding to your advice Mrs. Seferis is coming with me; she did her best to get free. After all she never visited the States and its better to take advantage of the present opportunity. We are leaving tomorrow to spend Easter week at Spetsai,¹⁹² and I hasten to write this to you. I'll write again after my return to Athens.

After my wife's decision, the plan of my trip seems to take shape. To begin from the end we'll take the Queen Frederica, which sails from New York on the 22nd June. Given this date limit, and in order to give Maro¹⁹³ the opportunity of seeing something in America, I think we must advance our arrival, say on the 30 or 31st May, come to Princeton from 12–15 June and return to New York up to 22 date of departure. — If it is feasible I'd like very much to go and

¹⁹¹ The Greek word for being in a good mood.

¹⁹² An island off the northeastern Peloponnese.

¹⁹³ This is the name of Seferis's wife.

spend a week-end with Rex [Warner] at his place — perhaps on the 5th and it will be a great pleasure for me to go another day to shake hands with Archibald McLeish [*sic*]¹⁹⁴ for whom I feel a deep friendship. — Provided of course he's there at Conway, Mass. —

This is my plan — as I make it now. I'll have to confirm everything in my next letter. The main matter which must be fixed at your end is the problem of the hotel at New York. I'm writing today to a colleague at New York (diplomatic) and I'll ask him to help. But do write your suggestion; I'll have to make a booking, I suppose, I need a double-bed (two beds) room and a bath room. —

Reading of poems. Provided I read in Greek and you in English — I have no objection (kefi to order). If you suggest it to somebody some sort of hint shd be made *first* to the Academy of American Poets and b) to YMHA. — if too late forget it.

Certainly I'll keep you informed about everything including my plane trip.

Love to you both,
George Seferis



Aérogramme

Department of English / Princeton University / Princeton, N. J.,
U.S.A.

Dept. of English
Princeton University
Princeton, N.J.
April 28, 1965

Dear Mr. Seferis,

How nice that Mrs. Seferis will be coming with you. I am very pleased that you have decided to advance your arrival to the end of May as this will give you a chance to see at least New York City with some leisure, and that is one city worth time (I am no patriot, as you know, but New York City is one place that I am not at all embarrassed to sell: under the proper circumstances, it can be as exciting as any city in the world, and it does have a rather startling

¹⁹⁴ Archibald MacLeish, the American poet and playwright, received an honorary degree from Princeton at the same ceremony that Seferis received his.

— sometimes frightening — identity). And there is the N.Y. Worlds Fair, which neither Mary nor I has yet visited but which we would be happy to share with you for a day or two if you are interested. Most who have seen it think it worth some time at least. And the shops in the city itself, the restaurants, and the museums, the theatre and the opera. Your days should be as full as you could want them to be; yet New York is also a place for escape, for privacy, for becoming as faceless as one can become only in the heart of a faceless crowd. All you have to do to be alone is let the hotel desk know that you are no longer receiving messages and then disappear into the city to your hearts' content.

I have confirmed your reservations here for the 12th to the 16th of June, the first night at the Theobald Smith Guest House, and the next four nights at the Lowry Guest House, in both instances a double room with twin beds and bath. If you are agreeable, Mary and I would like to invite some people to our place to meet you on Saturday evening at cocktail time: local literati and colleagues interested in your work, Rex Warner, Robert Fitzgerald, and others in the neighborhood who would want to meet you. Is this all right? You will have no other duties while in Princeton, social or otherwise, except those having to do with the honorary degree.

I spoke to Elizabeth Kray at the Academy of Poets.¹⁹⁵ She is very eager to have you read and has no doubt been in touch with you already in this regard. You would conclude the readings at the Guggenheim Museum, your reading immediately following that of Jorge Guillen, the distinguished Spanish poet who is presumably a leading candidate for the Nobel Prize (his son is a colleague of mine, and he tells me that his father has long been an admirer of your work — in English translation). I hope to invite Mr. Guillen to our cocktail in your honor. The program Elizabeth Kray has in mind would involve you reading in Greek and me in English — nothing else. This should not be a great deal of work, but the pay is also no great sum (both the Academy and the YMHA are non-profit organizations that count on prestige rather than high fees,

¹⁹⁵ Elizabeth Kray was executive director of the Academy of American Poets, which offered a poetry reading series at the Guggenheim Museum. She had sent Seferis an invitation to read there some time earlier, and had approached him again in November 1964, when he was planning a lecture tour — later canceled — under the auspices of the Institute for Contemporary Arts (see Appendix, Elizabeth Kray to George Seferis, 18 November 1964).

and both seem to succeed, since any poet who is a poet in this country has read for either one or the other at some point).^{*} It would in any case be an appropriate occasion for introducing you to the most serious audience for poetry that we have in this country — the New York City audience.¹⁹⁶

Elizabeth Kray was also helpful about N.Y. hotels. She suggests three possibilities: the Algonquin, 59 W 44 Street; the Westbury, Madison Ave. and 60 Street; and the Gramercy Park Hotel, 52 Gramercy St. Of these I know only the Algonquin, which is a rather old-fashioned but comfortable hotel with excellent service, the home of a number of literary and theatre people, one of the places in N.Y. that would do special honor for a poet of your standing; the rates are \$16.50–\$24.00 for a double room. Most of the well-known British actors, e.g., Sir John Gielgud, stay at the Algonquin. The Westbury is the Hotel that Robert Frost preferred, but I know nothing else about it; the rates there are \$18–\$25 for a double room. The Gramercy Park has a nice garden and somewhat lower rates. Of the hotels with international standing, I would recommend the Savoy Hilton at 5th Ave. and 58th Street, again the home of established literary and theatre people, with a famous restaurant and much old-world charm. The prices reflect the hotel's reputation: \$22–30. For entirely modern comfort at relatively reasonable rates, many people recommend the new N.Y. Hilton at 6th Ave. and 53 Street. Many of the faculty here use the N.Y. Hilton because they have a special faculty rate of \$12.00 for a double room, and that is a great bargain for modern comfort — if impersonal comfort. I imagine their regular rates are roughly the same as the Savoy Hilton. All of these hotels (except possibly the Gramercy Park) are centrally located. Let me add one point: it is unlikely that you could get a double room at any decent hotel in New York for under \$15.00, unless you are given a special rate, and \$18.00 a night is about average for a good, though not deluxe, hotel.

Do let me know if I can be of further specific help. I would be happy to make a reservation for you as soon as you have specific dates, and if you wish literature (a brochure) on any one of the above, I will do my best to send it to you.

¹⁹⁶ Seferis has written in a squiggly line beside the end of this paragraph.

Spring has not yet arrived here, which may bode well for a cool summer. You will, in any case, be here at a good time; June is usually reasonable, and with our delayed spring, it may be beautiful as well. We look forward very much to seeing you.

Best to you both,
Michalakis

*The normal fee for reading is \$100, but I gather Eliz. Kray hopes to offer you more than the normal fee. I am encouraging her to do just that.

P.S. Elizabeth Kray just called to say that you had approved June 3rd for the reading. Fine. It is the better of the alternatives. She also suggests that you settle the hotel matter quickly as N.Y. may be crowded in early June.



PRINCETON UNIVERSITY
PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY

Department of English
McCosh 22

May 1, 1965

Dear Mr. Seferis,

Kalo Mina!¹⁹⁷

Several matters have come up since my letter of several days ago. First of all, Alexander Leitch has asked me to forward to you the attached Memorandum for Recipients of Honorary Degrees, and a copy of the note that will appear on the Commencement program (if there is anything incorrect in this, please let me know immediately). I have only one question regarding these documents: how do you wish your name to be recorded — as George Seferis, as George Seferiadis, or in some more complete form, i.e., with a middle name?

¹⁹⁷ "Good month," equivalent to "Have a good month" — the standard Greek expression of good will on the first of any month.

Mr. Leitch also asked me to clear up a few other minor details. I will take these up in order:

1. Do you have an academic cap and gown, and if so, do you intend to bring these with you? If you do not, the University will provide you with them, but for this purpose they would like to know your height, weight, and hat size.

2. How many seats would you like the University to reserve at the Commencement Exercises for friends you may wish to invite to the ceremony? A seat will of course be reserved for Mrs. Seferis, but if there are others in New York or elsewhere in the vicinity to whom you would like to extend an invitation, I can make the necessary arrangements. The same applies to the informal luncheon for honorary degree recipients after the Commencement Exercises: seats can be reserved for others besides Mrs. Seferis who may be in your party. Mary and I will of course be there as your official escorts.

So much for University business. There is a literary matter of no great urgency that I want to mention to you: the Virginia Quarterly Review, one of our oldest and most distinguished literary journals, would like to publish my translation of the “*Erotikos Logos*” before it appears in book form. The attached version is a revision of the poem I showed Philip last summer; you remember I told you that he thought it good enough to be convinced that we should publish it in this form rather than in a prose rendering. The revision has made it a better poem in English, I think, though of course I have had to sacrifice the beautiful rhyming of the original. In any case, the Virginia Quarterly chose this poem over others from later volumes, so it must have some appeal for them. May I go ahead and publish it? And would you be good enough to look it over and make any suggestions that may occur to you?

I am now working on poems from Log Book III, which means that I will have my half of the Complete Poems ready in draft by the time you reach this country. It might be a nice idea to include one or two poems that have not been previously translated into English in our reading — that is, if you find any of this new material particularly to your liking. We can think about this after you get here.

Yes, spring has in fact arrived — about a month late. We are trying to save some flowers for you, asphodels, agapanthi,¹⁹⁸ what-

¹⁹⁸ These are among the flowers that appear in Seferis’s poem “Stratis Thalassinios Among

ever happens to come up in our garden, but I'm afraid they will be gone if you don't hurry.

Best,
Michalakis

P.S. I forgot a very important matter: Mr. Leitch would like to know when and how you would like the University to transmit the funds they are providing towards your travel expenses. Do you have an account in this country in which a cheque could be deposited or would you prefer to receive the cheque in person when you arrive in this country?¹⁹⁹



GEORGE SEFERIS, AGRAS 20, ATHENS 502, GREECE

3. 5. 65

Dearest Michalaki, — Many thanks for your letter of the 28/4. I regret I gave you that bother about hotels. The Consul General from New York suggested the Plaza, where I was in 56–57 and I accepted his suggestion and terms. If you have the opportunity please thank Mrs Kray for her kind help. We should talk sometime about the impersonality of towns, as you put it. I decided to extend my stay in N. York for Maro's sake. For I'd have arranged the trip in a different way. Is there anything on in N. York worth seeing or hearing (music or theatre). Mark please to invite the Consul G/ (Mr G. Gavas — 69 East 79th St, New York 21) at the reading of the Academy or other manifestation (if any). — Do you know who are the other "honorary graduands"?²⁰⁰ — As I remember, at the ceremony the orator makes a speech of praise for each graduand²⁰¹ — at Oxford it was in Latin, at Cambridge in Latin also, but for my ease, Professor Wilkinson made his speech in classical Greek. What is the tradition at Princeton? English?²⁰² — I've heard about

the Agapanthi." Agapanthi, literally "love flowers," are African lilies. Asphodels are discussed above in my letter of 10 August 1959 and Seferis's of 29 September 1959.

¹⁹⁹ The postscript is written in script.

²⁰⁰ These are identified in my letter of 12 May below.

²⁰¹ A marginal note in my hand says "citation Univ. orator Mr. Oates."

²⁰² A marginal note in my hand says "H[onorary] degree conferred in Latin."

Jorge Guillen (don't know enough his poetry — translation always where is he permanently living?)

Thankful to Mary and you for your invitation at your place which we gladly accept. At Princeton you are going to be the master; how can we refuse? But tell me frankly if there is the least trouble for our coming on Saturday to Princeton. It will be easy for us to come on Sunday.

I have booked for the Lufthansa plane (Flight No 404) from Frankfurt arriving at New York on the 30th May at 1700. But please don't spoil your Sunday: don't bother to come at the aerodrome; the Consul Ge[neral] tells me that he's intending to come. As I already wrote we are taking the Queen Frederica sailing from New York on 22nd June to Piraeus.

The trip gives me a great excitement. I'm feeling already la fièvre du départ.

Love to you both from both of us
George S.

P.S. Should one take *only summer* clothes? Black tie is needed? G.



Agras, 20 — 6. 5. 65

Michalaki — Your letter of 1/5. — Kalo Mina kai kali andamosi.²⁰³ Answers: 1/ Biographical note; SEFERIADES, Greek poet etc. . . . b/ various capitals of Europe, Near East, and Africa . . . c/ Why single out *Erotocritos*?²⁰⁴ Other essays of mine have also been published in separate volumes. Perhaps better say: “various critical essays and studies”. As for my name (I suppose my correction is clear enough). The Degree is conferred to Seferis and not the diplomat. Seferis should be mentioned always at the ceremony (the same happened in Cambridge, Stockholm, Oxford and Thessaloniki.) But in a biographical note I feel bound to mention my passport name. — 2/ I never possessed an academic gown. Height 1,78 meters, weight 200 pounds, hat no 7 (England). — 3/ Seats: I am

²⁰³ “Good month and happy reunion” — standard Greek expressions of greeting. The salutation is written in Greek characters.

²⁰⁴ The reference is to Seferis's essay on this seventeenth-century Cretan epic-romance.

not quite certain from your letter if the University is sending the invitations or myself when I arrive at New York. In any case except Michalaki and Mary, my wife and Rex (where is he by the way — I've got no answer from him to my last two letters), I don't see any friend, at this moment, whom I'd invite. I might add my sister (Jeanne Tsatsos, c/o C. Mylonas — 6 Cooke St. Providence, R.I.) — but I don't know if she will be in the States on the 15th. My good friend Arch. McLeish [*sic*] wrote that he'll be at Princeton on the 15th. Anyway if the University is kind enough to reserve five seats till the day of my coming to America, this will solve the question for the time being. — 5/ I have no bank account in America, but I'll have one when I'm in N. York; better keep the cheque till my arrival.

Ever
George S

P.S. on *Erotikos Logos*.²⁰⁵ — I read very carefully your translation. It represents certainly a great deal of work and shows a great deal of skill and understanding. But the problem remains in its entirety. I faced it also when I had the idea of translating Racine, Baudelaire, or Valéry etc. Some attempts have been done like C. D. Lewis' *Cimetière Marin* (sucessfull) [*sic*] or R. Lowell's *Phaedra* (bad as a translation). The answer to this riddle was given to me by Dante "Let everyone know" he says in the *Convivio* (1st treatise, chap VII), "that nothing which hath the harmony of musical connection can be transferred from its own tongue into another without shattering all its sweetness and harmony" — One does not sacrifice, in such cases, only the rhyming, but at least half of the poem; and it is better, if a translation must be done at all costs, to make frankly a translation in good prose — and explain to the reader. This was my view when last year we discussed about that category of poems.²⁰⁶ — Now, talking on the details, of the translation as it is, I think I have some observations to make on the details. Shall we discuss them when we meet? It'll be difficult for me to explain everything by correspondence — You said the matter is not of great urgency — Let it wait 25 days more. G.S.

²⁰⁵ Previous two words written in Greek characters.

²⁰⁶ For further discussion of this subject, see the introductory essay.



Aérogramme

Department of English / Princeton University / Princeton, N. J.,
U.S.A.

140 Littlebrook Road
Princeton, N. J.
May 12, 1965

Dear Mr. Seferis:

I waited for a second letter and was rewarded. Let me now try to answer your questions in order.

1. There will be things worth seeing or hearing in New York (e.g., the Lincoln Center program), but it would probably be best for you to decide what you would like to book after you have arrived and know your full schedule. There is nothing sensational in the New York theatre that deserves advance booking at this time — at least nothing that I have heard of; and the music possibilities are so much a matter of taste that I would rather let you decide what would most suit your pleasure.

2. The Consul General will be at the reading; in fact, he is planning to hold a reception in your honor after the reading.

3. Though, as you know, the honorary graduands remain confidential even from each other until the list is privately distributed the day before the ceremony, Mr. Leitch has given me permission to let you know the names of three who will be of particular interest to you (the total number given will be ten, and though I don't know who the remaining six are, I doubt that their names would mean much to you). The three he mentioned are: Archibald MacLeish (you may have had a hint of this already) and Henry Labouisse, our current Ambassador in Athens. (Mr. Leitch is going to let Mr. Labouisse know that you are also receiving an honorary degree, so if the two of you should happen to run into each other there is no need for you to be discreet among yourselves), and finally, Andrew Wyeth, the well-known American painter. I am pleased that Princeton will be honoring three artists this year; and I am also pleased that two of the above four have such a close connection with Greece. The fact that Mr. MacLeish will be taking

part in the ceremonies gives you a chance to share the experience with a friend.

4. The degree will be conferred in Latin (as you will have gathered from the documents I sent you), but the citation will be read by the University orator in English.

5. Jorge Guillen²⁰⁷ lives in this country — in Cambridge, at the moment, I believe. You will meet his son, and perhaps the poet as well.

6. It is no trouble for you to be here on Saturday. We are in fact counting on it. The only slight inconvenience will be to you, since you will be moving to a new guest house on Sunday, but that should be no great burden as we will do the moving with you. Mary and I are planning to have a cocktail party in your honor in our garden on Saturday afternoon.

7. Yes, do bring only summer clothes (it has been quite hot already) and possibly a sweater and raincoat for what we hope will be cool evenings.

8. Black tie is needed for the President's affair, as you will see from the materials I sent you.

9. The corrections you suggest have been made in the Biographical note that will appear on the program.

10. Mr. Leitch will take care of the academic gown. I am getting mine out of mothballs (the only time I have worn it in recent years was at a masquerade).

11. Invitations and seats: see below.

12. I just received a letter from Rex Warner this morning. He says: "As for Seferis' visit, he tells me he's hoping to come up here for a few days and I'm expecting to hear from him about dates . . . If he can come here, I'd rather come and see you in Princeton later in the year, as about the 12th I'll be moving out of this house and preparing to set off to Maine for the summer." Rex doesn't know (or has forgotten) that I'll be in Europe next year. In any case, he is expecting you, and perhaps when you see him you can convince him to attend the commencement ceremonies here. I would very much like to see him myself.

13. The cheque will be here for your arrival. If you are in fact going to be met at the airport, we will not make the trip, but if

²⁰⁷ See my letter of 28 April.

there is any doubt about this, please let me know; I want to be sure that someone — either the Consul General or myself — will be there to receive you.

14. We will save the Erotikos Logos for June.²⁰⁸

Mr. Leitch says that the graduand normally sends out his own invitations, though the University would certainly do it for him if he so requested. In any case, the University is holding the five seats you requested, and their disposition can await your arrival in New York.

I think this takes care of everything. Don't hesitate to write if other questions occur to you.

We will be seeing you in just over two weeks — a delightful prospect.

Best to you both,
Michalakis



GEORGE SEFERIS, AGRAS 20, ATHENS 502, GREECE

18/5/65

Dearest Michalaki,

Today your letter of 12/5. The risk of running into Labouisse does not exist. He's left already. I'm exceedingly pleased for MacLeish. I'm not acquainted with Wyeth—. Don't bother about the aerodrome — the Consul will come, but we must meet before the reading in order to make our plans; I must know what I'm expected to do. Especially could you let me know how long (time) I'll have to read. If you answer at once your letter may reach me before living [*sic*]. I'll stay at the Plaza. Telephone me Monday morning or send a note there (with your phone number) for an appointment.

Kali antamosi²⁰⁹

[scribble]

can you mark also Rex's phone number
GS

²⁰⁸ As Seferis suggested in his letter of 6 May.

²⁰⁹ "Happy reunion," written in Greek characters.



Aérogramme

140 Littlebrook Road / Princeton, N.J., U.S.A.

140 Littlebrook Road

Princeton, N. J.

May 23²¹⁰

(Phone: 921-9290, Area Code 609)

Dear Mr. Seferis,

Since receiving your letter yesterday, I've been trying to get ahold of Elizabeth Kray to find out exactly how long she would like us to read; I guess she is away for the weekend, because I get no answer. Rather than wait for her to return, let me give you my sentiments on the matter. I imagine the reading will be between an hour and an hour and a half, depending on your pleasure. I think less than an hour would be too little as we have to offer the poems in both English and Greek (what this means is only half the selection of works that a normal reading would offer); more than an hour and a half would be too much, to my mind (an audience can concentrate on poetry only so long). I would expect Elizabeth Kray to go along with whatever your wishes in this regard might be. I will in any case speak to her tomorrow, and if there is any radical change from my estimate, I'll let you know by tomorrow's mail.

My phone number is given above. Rex Warner's phone number is: Area Code 203, then 429-4544. I will call the Plaza on Monday morning to arrange our getting together so that we can choose the poems we are going to read. I assume we would use the *Six Poets* selection as a basis; I would be happy to add to this any of the poems that Philip and I have translated since, but we can decide on these new possibilities on Monday.

I found out that Labouisse would be leaving Athens shortly after I mailed my last letter; I'm sorry the two of you will not be meeting in advance. Andrew Wyeth is interviewed and displayed at length in the May 11th issue of *Life* magazine. I'll try to find a copy to show you after you arrive, so that you have some idea of the kind of work he does.

²¹⁰ The postmark gives the date as 23 May 1965.

I understand that the other two members of the Big Three (as we call Harvard, Yale, and Princeton in this country) are eager to have you appear on their campuses to read during your visit to this country. I gather that they have been after me in this connection recently (I was away for a week lecturing in Iowa), but they have not yet made contact. If they do, I will be vague. Should you decide that you do want to read at Yale or Harvard or both, you can make the arrangements after you reach New York. If you are going to visit Rex in Connecticut, Yale would be more or less on your way (it is in New Haven, Connecticut). Harvard is in Cambridge, just outside Boston; I believe that is not far from Archibald MacLeish's home — but this is only a hunch.

One week and we'll be seeing you. Have the best of possible journeys.

Yours,
Michalakis

P.S. Our Princeton party is now set for Sunday, June 13, 5:30–7:30. This will allow us to have a restful visit on Saturday, without obligation to confront others and with the opportunity to look over Princeton at our leisure.



Aérogramme

140 Littlebrook Road / Princeton, N.J., U.S.A.

Monday²¹¹

Dear Mr. Seferis:

A quick note to say that I spoke to Elizabeth Kray about the timing of the reading; she agrees to an hour as the best alternative; if more than an hour, she would suggest an intermission, but she thinks an hour adequate. She also agrees that the selection should be what you wish, with *Six Poets* as the basic source. I suggested that we include some previously untranslated material (if you are agreeable) and at least one of Rex Warner's translations. Miss Kray approves of this as well. I'll be happy to follow your pleasure in

²¹¹ The postmark gives the date as 25 May 1965.

this matter, so you can make the selection with an hour in mind (half for me, half for you), and we can work out the program precisely after you arrive.

I'll call Monday.

Kalo taxidi — kali antamosi,²¹²
Michalakis

Myth/ma²¹³

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. The Angel | |
| — 3. I woke with this marble head | |
| 4. Argonauts | — King of A |
| 5. We didn't know them | — S Th Agapanthi |
| — 8. What are they after, our souls | — Old man riverbank |
| 9. The harbor is old | — S Th on dead sea |
| 10. Our country is closed in | — 11. Last Stop |
| 12. Three rocks | — Thrush ²¹⁴ |
| —15. Sleep wrapped you | — Ayianapa I |
| 22. So very much having passed | — Engomi ²¹⁵ |
| 24. Here end | |



22 June 1966
Abras 20 —

Dear Michalaki,²¹⁶

I recognize that the Greek summer comes ahead of everything — it is sacred and that's why I write you.

I don't know what the schedule is for the Princeton book.²¹⁷ I don't know how much more time you need. I must in any case say

²¹² "Good trip — happy reunion," written in Greek characters, as is the signature, below.

²¹³ The abbreviation refers to *Mythistorema*. The material below is written in Seferis's Greek script, here translated. The poet has listed poems that he has considered for the above-mentioned reading, with preferences among these apparently indicated by a dash. Inside the second column, there is a third list that appears to designate the time it takes to read some of the poems in the second column, and Seferis here includes additional titles: "Details on Cyprus," "Memory I," "Helen," "Euripides."

²¹⁴ Crossed out.

²¹⁵ Crossed out.

²¹⁶ The letter is in Greek script, translated by Edmund and Mary Keeley.

²¹⁷ *George Seferis: Collected Poems, 1924–1955*, near completion and published by Princeton University Press in 1967.

that from July 20 on I will be gone from Athens and I will have disappeared during August and September.

If thereafter you return to the rich soil of the U.S.A. we will have to start corresponding again and I am, as you know, a terrible correspondent.

Health and joy,
[scribble]



PRINCETON UNIVERSITY
PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY

Department of English
McCosh 22

At sea, off Halifax, Nova Scotia
September 12, 1966

Dear Mr. Seferis,

A quick note to ask you if you will be good enough to sign the attached letter (or your own variation on it) as I would like Penguin Ltd. to feel they are bound, through Philip and me, to the payment of a continuing royalty to you and Mr. Singopoulos²¹⁸ (Gatsos and Elytis have told us that they are not interested in receiving a royalty from the Penguin edition; I guess they feel pleased that they were included at all in such distinguished company).²¹⁹ We have had so much trouble getting any money at all out of Penguin (Philip and I have yet to receive a penny) that I think this kind of formal agreement is a good — if subtle — way of insuring that at least you and Mr. Singopoulos receive your just deserts. I will pass a copy of the letter on to Penguin in the hope that they will also undertake the necessary bookkeeping; in any case, it will be on record that Philip and I owe you and Mr. Singopoulos a standard proportion of any monies we receive after the advance has been matched by initial royalty income.

²¹⁸ Alekos Singopoulos, the Cavafy heir.

²¹⁹ The reference is to *Four Greek Poets: C. P. Cavafy, George Seferis, Odysseus Elytis, Nikos Gatsos*, trans. Edmund Keeley and Philip Sherrard (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Modern European Poets, 1966).

I am also enclosing the current (September) issue of *Encounter*, which includes three translations from the Princeton Press edition.²²⁰ There should be some income from this as well, but I have yet to receive a cheque. Also enclosed is a review of *Encounter* in last week's Time magazine — that is, a review of the issue in which your poems appear, though sadly no mention is made of them.

I am depressed about the prospect of having to give up my freedom to teach again; one more month on my own and I would finish the novel I'm working on. I will not burden you, however, with dull matters of this kind. The only cheering news I have had recently came from Nikos Gatsos, who told me as I was leaving Athens that he had just seen three new and very satisfying poems by George Seferis.²²¹ I am delighted. I hope it won't be long before they become public enough for your humble translators to enjoy them as well.

Mary joins me in sending our best regards to Mrs. Seferis.

Yours,
Michalakis

On second thought, I am mailing the *Encounter* issue under separate cover.



GEORGE SEFERIS, AGRAS 20, ATHENS 502, GREECE

18. 9. '66

Dear Michalaki. — Glad to receive your letter of 12. Thank you for *Encounter*. I have signed the letter for Penguin Ltd as request and enclose it. I have recently received 32 pounds. I keep on not feeling quite happy about this Penguin venture. I'll never pardon myself for collaborating in a book from which Sikelianos is excluded.²²² I hope to have a compensation with the Princeton edition of the poems.²²³ Although Savides [*sic*], whom I've seen before his trip to London, didn't seem to be quite happy about the intro-

²²⁰ "Narration," "Memory II," "Our Sun."

²²¹ Presumably *Three Secret Poems*, published in Athens in 1966.

²²² Further commentary on this issue is offered in the introductory essay.

²²³ The poet is referring to *George Seferis: Collected Poems, 1924-1955*, then in its final stages.

ductory pieces of the book. I hope you realize, for your own sake, that this edition must be an exemplary one for such works and set a standard. I told you my views on our last meeting. I believe that appreciations of the poet in this book are redundant. There you must limit yourselves to your role of translators (and not of judges) and speak if you like about your own difficulties and, if possible, about the problems created by this Greek language. I feel I must repeat all that in order to avoid the impression that I am criticizing after the publication of the book.²²⁴

Upon the resumption of your professorial duties I wish you the best of luck. Greetings from both of us to you both
Seferis



PRINCETON UNIVERSITY
PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY²²⁵

Department of English
McCosh 22

Area Code: 609
Telephone: 452-4060
October 6, 1966

Dear Mr. Seferis,

Though I am grateful for the good wishes that you expressed in your recent letter, I must say that some of your comments distressed me, and I have been gathering my thoughts on the question of the introductory material to the Princeton Press edition so that my answer to you is not hasty, even if the edition is now in the hands of the printer.

First of all, let me say that in August I spent ten days in Limni with Philip working on the introduction, this the result of my conference with you in Athens regarding this section of the edition. At that time Philip felt as strongly as I did that some sort of introduction would still be necessary in an edition of your work to be distributed in America, and despite your reservations, he also felt that our approach was essentially appropriate, if questionable in some

²²⁴ The issue of the "introductory pieces" for the *Collected Poems* is discussed at some length in the introductory essay and in the letter that follows.

²²⁵ A marginal note in Seferis's hand: "Edmund Keeley."

of its details. It was your specific objections that led us to re-write the introduction from beginning to end, both abridging it and altering it in keeping with your comments. Instead of both a Preface and an Introduction, we decided to have only a short Foreword; the material originally included in the Preface (that relating to acknowledgements and problems of translation) is now included in an Acknowledgement and in a note to the “Rhymed Poems” section (though some of our remarks on language and style have come into the current Foreword). This arrangement seemed to us to diminish the importance of the introductory section, in keeping with your views, while still providing the reader with the background to, and description of, your work that the Press (and their advisors) had called on us to provide.²²⁶ By the time we were finished with our revision, both Philip and I were convinced that there was nothing in the Foreword that you would find offensive,²²⁷ especially since our revision took note of each of your specific objections.

Some of my distress on receiving your letter resulted from your comment about George Savidis’ reaction. When I spoke to him just before leaving Athens, my impression of his response was somewhat different from yours. He told me that he was “neutral” regarding the Foreword,²²⁸ neither for nor against it. The only specific objection that he mentioned was to our view of Kalvos’ classicism,²²⁹ though his objection seemed to me to misquote exactly what the Foreword says about Kalvos (neither of us had the text before us); his one general objection, if I remember correctly, was that we had not given enough attention to specific critical commentary on the poetry — an objection with which I sympathize, though I do not think you or Philip would. I asked George at the time if he would be good enough to send me, as soon as he possibly could, any other general or specific objections that he might have, because I respect his understanding just as you do and would therefore want to take his views into account in any final revision of the introductory material (now reserved for the galley proofs). My interpretation of George’s response was that he too did not think

²²⁶ See Appendix, Herbert S. Bailey, Jr., to George Seferis, 5 October 1966.

²²⁷ The preceding nine-word phrase was underlined by Seferis, with a question mark pointing to the word “offensive.”

²²⁸ Preceding four-word phrase underlined by Seferis.

²²⁹ Word underlined by Seferis.

there was anything in the Foreword that would offend²³⁰ you or serve to misrepresent you,²³¹ and since I could not really satisfy his one general objection without at the same time incurring a possible further objection from you, I decided to keep the Foreword in essence as it was, while waiting for any specific revisions that he might suggest by mail. I would hope that you too might now read the revised version of the introductory material that George still holds (he has my only copy, though I might be able to send you another through Philip if George is not in Athens; in fact, I will write Philip in this connection). I would also hope that your reservations might diminish once you have a chance to consider the revised text.

In your letter you say that you regard appreciations of the poet “redundant” in an edition of this kind. With all due respect, I would call an appreciation traditional rather than redundant, a view that the Princeton Press fully supports.²³²

It may be pedantic of me to justify my opinion by offering bibliographical evidence (see the attached list), but I thought it might put you more at ease to know that in the case of two recent Nobel Prize poets, Boris Pasternak and St. John Perse, each edition or selection of their works in English translation that I have found in our library in fact offers a critical introduction (usually by the translator) of a kind and length close to what Philip and I offer: an essay that places the poet in the context of his immediate tradition or literary situation and that offers an appreciation of his work (the latter sometimes, alas, simply a eulogy). I have studied these introductions, and my conclusion, in all humility, is that ours could well be regarded as “exemplary”, to use your term.²³³ I say this without pretending to compete with the items on my list by Archibald MacLeish and T. S. Eliot, whose work is of course very special — though also, to my mind, in the category of appreciations, each offering an unambiguous estimate of Perse. T. S. Eliot seems to me to suggest a reasonable answer to our dilemma (that is, between redundancy and relevance) when he says, in his preface to *Anabase*:

²³⁰ Word underlined by Seferis, with two question marks in the margin.

²³¹ Previous four words underlined by Seferis.

²³² See Appendix, Herbert S. Bailey, Jr., to George Seferis, 5 October 1966.

²³³ See Seferis’s letter of 18 September.

I am by no means convinced that a poem like *Anabase* requires a preface at all. It is better to read a poem six times, and dispense with a preface. But when a poem is presented in the form of a translation, people who have never heard of it are naturally inclined to demand some testimonial. So I give mine hereunder.

May I conclude by sharing T. S. Eliot's reluctant acknowledgement that some testimonial is relevant? May I also hope that you will find our revised Foreword at least neutral enough not to dampen your enthusiasm for an edition that is the culmination of a long-standing love for, and involvement with, your work on the part of both Philip and me? Let me add that the response I have received to the translations published in *Encounter* suggests that at least regarding the translations, we can expect something warmer than neutrality from our English-speaking readers.

My very best wishes to you and Mrs. Seferis.

Yours,²³⁴

Encl.

English translations of Pasternak and Perse

1. *The Poetry of Boris Pasternak, 1917–1959*, selected, edited, and translated by George Reavey (G.P. Putnam's Sons, New York 1959). A 69-page "Introductory Essay" by the translator, with biographical, critical, and "appreciative" material including a description of Pasternak as a translator.

2. *Boris Pasternak: Prose and Poems*, edited by Stefan Schimanski, with and Introduction by J. M. Cohen (Ernest Benn Limited, London, 1959). The 7-page Introduction is both a definition and an appreciation.

3. *Boris Pasternak: Poems*, translated from the Russian by Eugene M. Kayden (1st ed. by The University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 1959; 2nd ed. by The Antioch Press, Yellow Springs, 1964). The 8-page "Foreword" by the translator is largely a eulogy.

²³⁴ This letter was transcribed in the first instance from an unsigned carbon copy in my hands and later emended to indicate Seferis's underlining, etc., on the original, uncovered from his archive in Greece. I failed to record the form of my signature as it appears on the original.

4. *Boris Pasternak: Fifty Poems*, translated with an Introduction by Lydia Pasternak Slater (George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1963). The 15-page Introduction by the translator (Pasternak's sister) is largely a biographical account that is meant to defend Pasternak against certain misrepresentations, but it also includes critical commentary.

5. *Eloges and other poems by St.-John Perse*. The French text with English translation by Louise Varese and an Introduction by Archibald MacLeish (Norton and Co., New York, 1944). The introduction is a generous, poetic appreciation, with some biographical information, freely quoting a beautiful letter that Perse wrote Mr. MacLeish in 1942.

6. *Anabasis: A poem by St.-J. Perse*, with a translation into English by T. S. Eliot (Faber and Faber Ltd., London, 1930).²³⁵



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Telephone: 452-4060
November 6, 1966

Dear Mr. Seferis,

The attached appeared in today's *N. Y. Times* (Sunday edition).²³⁶ I thought you might like to have it for your files. I heard from Rex the other day, by the way; he tells me that he is now happily re-married to his first wife and looking forward to a Caribbean trip this December.

Several days ago I received a long letter from Philip with a number of suggestions for revising (and abridging) the FOREWORD to the Princeton Press edition — these the result of his having discussed the matter with you. I have been over his suggestions in detail, and I see no reason why they should not be incorporated in

²³⁵ Referred to in my letter; the Preface by the translator includes the now-famous judgement: "I believe that this is a piece of writing of the same importance as the later work of Mr James Joyce, as valuable as *Anna Livia Plurabelle*. And this is a high estimate indeed."

²³⁶ The reference is to a review by Kimon Friar (see the introductory essay) of the English edition of Seferis's selected essays, *On the Greek Style*, in the *New York Times Book Review*.

toto, especially since they all fall within that part of the text that was his initial responsibility. I am therefore introducing the alterations into the galley proofs (since the galleys are already in print), with the full support of the Press. From my point of view, these revisions improve the FOREWORD measurably, and I hope you will think so too (I gather, in any case, that most were the result of your prompting).

I am working hard to finish my novel before the Christmas vacation so that I can take Mary to a warmer climate, perhaps Mexico. I wish it could be Athens. After our recent 15 months there, I can't get over my feeling of somehow being an exile in my own country.

Our best wishes to you and Mrs. Seferis.

Yours,
Michalaki²³⁷



10.11.66²³⁸

Dear Michalaki,

Thank you for your letter of 6/11. I have received also your check. Indebted for sending me the N. Y. Times cutting. The writer is a clever and shallow busy-body.²³⁹

After Philip's alterations (which I have not seen) I feel there is no room for further discussion about the *foreword*. Do you know when the book is expected to be out?

If you go to Mexico let me know your feelings there.

Greetings to both from both of us

GS

²³⁷ The signature appears here, mistakenly, in the vocative case. See note 139 above.

²³⁸ This is a postcard.

²³⁹ The remark refers, apparently, to Kimon Friar, the reviewer of Seferis's *On the Greek Style* in the *New York Times Book Review* (see the footnote to the previous letter). Friar was an early translator of Seferis's poems, but at some point during the 1950s, he and the poet had a falling-out.



Delphi, 9.2.67²⁴⁰

Dear Michalaki,

Here a few days on vacation. I worked hard enough the last months of the year and I needed it. So I let our correspondence lapse. How could it be otherwise? Now I respond to you.²⁴¹

1. Patrick Creagh, no sign. Festivals may be profitable enterprises for T. S.; not for me.²⁴² I was asked at Spoleto the year before T. S. and refused.

2. Essay on *Homer* not yet available (before its publication in Italian). But on *Dante*, I posted it to you (reprint from *Epoches*, Nov. 66) many weeks ago by surface mail. I have posted also poems 1966 and the translation of *apocalypse*.²⁴³

I gave your address to Mrs. Kaiti Katsoyianni, who is interested for the translation of a recent book of correspondence of Mitropoulos.²⁴⁴ She is writing to you.

Excuse this paper: the best I can get hold of here. And try to finish your novel.

Cheers and best wishes from both to both of you.

Seferis

²⁴⁰ "Hotel Apollon, Delphi" on reverse of this note.

²⁴¹ The first paragraph is written in Greek; the rest is in English. The letter he is responding to is missing from his archive.

²⁴² My friend, the Irish poet and translator Patrick Creagh, then living in Italy, had apparently sent an invitation via me to Seferis to attend the Spoleto Festival, which T. S. Eliot had attended in a previous year.

²⁴³ *Tria Kryfa Poimata* (Three secret poems) and *I Apokalypsi tou Ioanni* (The apocalypse of St. John), both published in Athens in 1966.

²⁴⁴ See the introductory essay.



DEPT. OF ENGLISH²⁴⁵
PRINCETON UNIVERSITY
PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY

March 17, 1967

Creative Arts Program²⁴⁶

Dear Mr. Seferis,

I have been waiting to receive the Mitropoulos manuscript before writing you; it has not yet arrived, and Mary and I are now on our way to Florida for two weeks (I finished the novel; it is time to rest). I gather, however, that the publishing firm of Viking will be sending us a copy submitted to them from another source. I have also heard directly from Mrs. Katsoyannis and will be writing her as soon as Mary and I have had a chance to look over the text.

The poems and the Dante piece arrived several weeks ago; I have now had a chance to delight in both. The poems need time — they seem to me a new departure for you, one that your readers will have to adjust to — but I have immensely enjoyed my several readings of them, and I am going to go on reading them slowly to take in all the richness of their simplicity (which reminds me at times of the same quality in Solomos, though of course the shape of the richness is very much your own).²⁴⁷ Mary and I debated the possibility of translating the Dante piece for an issue of *The Quarterly Review of Literature* that will include several translations from the Princeton Press edition, but in the end we decided that “T.S.E.: Pages from a Diary” might be of more immediate interest to an English-speaking audience, so we are working on this instead (much as we would like to do the Dante piece had we the time, because there are excellent things in it that should interest anyone in any country concerned with literature).²⁴⁸ We will send you a copy of the English text of the Diary as soon as we have it ready.

²⁴⁵ A typed insert.

²⁴⁶ I had recently become director of the Creative Arts Program and occasionally used that Program’s stationary rather than the English Department’s.

²⁴⁷ The volume *Three Secret Poems* (Tria kryfa poemata) is discussed further in the introductory essay.

²⁴⁸ The translation, “T.S.E. (Pages from a Diary),” appeared in *Quarterly Review of Literature*, vol. 15, no. 1/2 (1967), pp. 209–228.

1

At Christmas I received his annual card; it ^{showed} represented the Annunciation.
 The day before Epiphany I ^{soon} read in the morning papers the news of ~~the~~ Thomas
 Eliot's death. So, ^{from a distance, his end seemed to me} ~~(in that way)~~ his end came to me from a distance (once removed)
 "...as though it had gone through an invisible door"
 as in the line from the "Elder Statesman" or from ~~the~~ Oedipus at Colonus:
 ✓
 ✓
 The "old eagle" has flown away from among us. It's not ^{the moment for} ~~the time to~~ ^{indulging in appraisals or reservations.} ~~concerning~~ ^{evaluation (appreciation) and objections (contradictions).} Time,
 which keeps us in order, knows better ^{than we do,} and it also knows the capricious, ^{eccentric} ~~eccentric~~
 peculiar strength, the ~~unknown~~ ^{destinate} fate of the seeds that ~~are~~ ^{must take hold} in the most
 unlikely soil ^{best} ~~unexplored~~ ^{unexplored} ground and not ~~only~~ ^(why some remain behind) in the field where we've sown them.
 At such times we, the friends temporarily, ~~left alone~~ ^{parting-severance}, can do nothing else
 but look ~~at~~ ^{over} our sentences, ^{such as} whatever they may be: the separation ~~gives them~~ ^{parting-severance} casts over
 them a haze ^{of incomunicable to others.} ~~a haze that~~ ^{in record in hurried notes}
 I copy below the lines that I managed to ~~retain~~ ^{find them} after our rare meetings
 in quick notebooks. I set them down as I came upon them, without additions, ^{though}
 only I have left out a few quotations. I wanted them to ^{at the time I recorded the notes,} ~~make his words~~
 even the most insignificant out of the daily turmoil—disorder—confusion.
 They helped me to reflect on the existence of such a man.
 Monday, May 28, '51
 Last night at Steven Spender's a reception in honor of Auden. ^{Mary} ~~Many~~ literary
 people, mostly strangers to me. And I, Greek-speaking, with foreign ways in
 a foreign place, trying to ^{coordinate} ~~coordinate~~ the faces I was seeing & for the first
 time with their ^{more or less familiar books} ~~books~~ ^{trying, for example} ~~names~~ ^{names}. Not to be surprised ~~for example~~
 when Auden, whom I had considered a self-controlled and athletic poet, ~~was~~ ^{started}
 running right and left before my eyes with such incredible sensitivity

Photo: John Blazewski

Draft of a translation by Mary Keeley, corrected by Edmund Keeley, of George Seferis's *T. S. E.: Pages from a Diary* (Athens, 1965). Edmund Keeley Papers, Manuscripts Division, Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

The page proof of the Princeton Press edition will be ready on April 1, with the Greek text en face and a frontispiece by Moralis (I still have to clear this with the painter and with Ikaros; I plan to do so as soon as the Press sends me a proof copy of the frontispiece; I hope they will agree to its inclusion for the \$100.00 that the Press is willing to pay, because it adds immensely to the first impression of the format). The price of the book was reduced from \$12.50 to \$10.00, which is always a good thing, and from what I have seen of it, it will be as handsome as we hoped. It is still due to be printed in May.

I wish we were going to Athens instead of Miami, really a horrible place if you stop too long to think about it; but we will have Athens in June, as usual. Until then, our best to you both (though I will write again if I have any news that may be of interest to you).

Yours,
Michalakis

P.S. Did you receive a copy of the current issue of *The Charioteer*, with a large selection of previously unpublished translations from the Princeton Press edition? If not, I will send you a copy — or bring one with me in June.



Seferis / Agras 20 / Athens 501 / Greece²⁴⁹

21. 4. 67

Dear — just two words: of course I've received yours of the 17/3. Hope you are back from Miami by now. If Princeton can send us a copy of the page proof (with the Greek texts) just have [*sic*] a feel of it, I'll be glad.

I'm writing mainly on Moralis frontispiece (which one have they chosen?) — I have telephoned to Ikaros and have seen the painter himself the day before yesterday.²⁵⁰ They answered that they hadn't any hint from you or Princeton on the subject. I wonder if yr Uni-

²⁴⁹ This is a postcard.

²⁵⁰ Discussed in the introductory essay.

versity has decided finally to save even those wretched \$100. Have they changed their mind?

I pray God that you may enjoy a very good summer holliday [*sic*].

Love to Mary

George²⁵¹



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Department of English
McCosh 22

Area Code: 609
Telephone: 452-4060
May 2, 1967²⁵²

Dear Mr. Seferis,

Thank you for your card. It arrived the same morning that I received word from the Press that the page proof of our edition is finally ready (I will receive my copy for correction tomorrow). It has been delayed all this time by the complicated typographical problem of matching the Greek to the English text. The book is now scheduled to be printed in July and distributed in early September. I find that my rather cavalier assumption that I could obtain a copy of the page proof to send you is a faulty one: I would have had to arrange for this additional copy months ago and charge the author's account \$100 for the additional expense involved. In any case, it is now too late; but I have written Philip to ask him to get in touch with you and bring you his copy of the page proof at your convenience so that you can at least "have a feel of it", as you put it. If you should have discovered any errors in the Greek text as Ikaros printed it in the edition we are using, perhaps you could bring these to Philip's attention so that we do not duplicate them in our edition. Mary will be reading through the Greek text for the Press just to see if she comes across any typographical errors (as you remember, it is simply a photo-copy of the Ikaros text; so any

²⁵¹ In the right margin: "Charioteer I received."

²⁵² Marginal note by Seferis in Greek: "tel. Moralis 8/5 he has received nothing."

errors in it are those that appeared in the original — and I gather from George Savidis that one or two have appeared).

Regarding the Moralis frontispiece, the Press has been waiting for a copy of the page proof of the front pages to send him before approaching him for permission; this they now have, and I gather that they have sent him a letter, in care of Ikaros, with the proof enclosed and a request for his signature against the \$100 fee. I agree with you that it is wretched; they say that they normally pay \$10–\$20 for this kind of permission (presumably because it helps to find an audience for the painting or portrait involved), and when I said I could not be a party to such a ridiculous fee, they suggested \$50. I insisted on \$100 at the very least, and that is where the matter has rested. I do hope that Moralis will agree to this, because I would be distressed not to have at least one of his pieces included (actually half of one of his pieces) just to give some flavor of the marvelous work that he did for the Ikaros edition.²⁵³ If Philip shows you a copy of the frontispiece, remember that it will not be printed with the blue color used for the proof: it will come out very close to the original color of the painting in the final printing of the book.²⁵⁴

Mary recently finished the Mitropoulos letters (which reached us after our return from Florida — the copy from Greece two weeks after our return), and she has sent in a favorable report, with a detailed description of the contents, to the publishing firm of Viking. We have had no answer from them. I myself have not had a chance to get into the book what with all the work that has piled up at the end of the term, but I hope to shortly. I hope by the time we reach Greece that we will have some definite news about its possibilities in this country (I haven't written Mrs. Katsoyanni since receiving the book because there is still nothing definite to tell her — though I did write her a note from Florida to explain the delay).

I don't dare speak about the situation in Greece; I wouldn't know what to say, except that it upsets me.²⁵⁵ Perhaps we will have a

²⁵³ The 1965 Ikaros edition of Seferis's collected poems included a number of illustrations by Yannis Moralis.

²⁵⁴ This proved not to be the case (see the introductory essay).

²⁵⁵ The Colonels' coup, resulting in the 1967–1974 dictatorship, had taken place on 21 April.

chance to talk about this after we reach Athens in late June. I notice that your card was mailed the day of the coup, which suggests that at least the mails are still moving freely. We have had no direct word from anyone in Greece, including my brother [Robert], who is in the political section of the American Embassy — no doubt very busy these days.

A final note regarding the book: the Press has already sold out more than half of the first edition of 1,500 copies through subscription, on the basis simply of an advance notice. They have now decided to increase the first edition. They have also decided to lower the price from \$12.50 to \$10.00, which is all to the good.

Our very best wishes to you both,
Michalakis



Seferis / Agras 20 / Athens 501 / Greece²⁵⁶

6/ 6/ 67

Many thanks, dear, for *good reading* and the review “on the Greek Style”.²⁵⁷ Are you keeping your schedule for your trip over here?

Best wishes for Mary and you

George



Princeton — Sept. 26 [1967]²⁵⁸

Dear G. S.,

The book appeared today, and your ten copies will be on their way to my brother [Robert] shortly. Official date of publication: late October. I'll send copies of any reviews I come across. Best,

M.

²⁵⁶ This is a postcard.

²⁵⁷ “Good Reading” was a section of the *Princeton Alumni Weekly* devoted to reviews of books selected by the Princeton faculty. The book in question was *On the Greek Style: Selected Essays in Poetry and Hellenism*, the 1966 selection of Seferis's essays translated by Rex Warner and Th. D. Frangopoulos.

²⁵⁸ This is a note attached to a copy of the jacket of *George Seferis: Collected Poems, 1924–1955*.



GEORGE SEFERIS, AGRAS 20, ATHENS 502, GREECE

21. 10. 67

Dear Michalaki — A week ago your brother had the kindness to bring me the first copy of the Princeton Seferis.²⁵⁹ I believe I have some experience about diplomats: I liked him — I was relieved the book had at last reached me. I liked its physical appearance (except: a) the Princeton use of the jacket, like an omnibus train, and b) the *Moralis* decoloration).²⁶⁰ Beyond this it is a handsome volume, and I thank you for having taken many pains for it. The Greek text is well combined with the English. There is only a mysterious misprint (it doesn't exist in the *Ikaros* text: on p. 406, line 4 ODYSSEYA.²⁶¹ As for the foreword, my feeling is that it's taken now its best form. — I received also (with Belgian stamps ??) the *Quarterly Review*. Observations: *Memory*: fingering the pipe: does one understand that it means flute and is connected with the *reed* mentioned before and after in the poem? (perhaps I make the remark because I'm smoking a pipe now)²⁶². *T.S.E.*²⁶³ "Civil war" correct: 1944–1949. The story about the Turkish merchant is told in the *o allos kosmos*²⁶⁴ (Epochs March '66, 7 translated in the London Magazine). This is for your information. p. 218 the story of the rolling a cigarette is said by Valéry and *mentioned* by Alain. Eliot seems to admire Valéry, not Alain. A clarification is needed, I think. p. 221 the ceremony of the Cambridge doctorate had taken place in June 1960. The decision was announced to me in February. Last and not least p. 227: "the territory covered by *your* (not our) language . . .". That's all. Now as it is about Eliot and mention is made of Pound, I think it would be kind to send him a copy of the review. Would you do it

²⁵⁹ The friendship that developed between Seferis and my brother Robert (then political officer at the American Embassy in Athens) is discussed in the introductory essay.

²⁶⁰ For more about the "decoloration," see the introductory essay.

²⁶¹ Word written in Greek characters.

²⁶² The reference is to line 7 of "Memory I," rendered as "I was fingering this pipe absent-mindedly" in the *Quarterly Review of Literature*, vol. 15, no. 1/2 (1967) and in the first edition of *George Seferis: Collected Poems*. Subsequent editions rendered the line as "My fingers were running idly over this flute."

²⁶³ The reference is to the translation of Seferis's "T.S.E. (Pages from a Diary)" that appeared in the *Quarterly Review of Literature*, vol. 15, no. 1/2 (1967), pp. 209–228.

²⁶⁴ Written in Greek characters.

and please include typewritten card “with the compliments of George Seferis and Michalaki” (if you care to add yr name).

On the reverse of the cover of the review I see it announced the Kariye Djami by Paul A. Underwood, Princeton Press, Bollingen series \$55.²⁶⁵ You had mentioned to me some time ago that Princeton could make some discount as I am an author published by them. If that is so, tell me please also if I can pay the final amount in drs. to your relations here, or perhaps I'll write to my publishers (Atlantic) to send it to you. Thanks.

Well, dear Michalaki, that's all I had to say for the time being. I don't feel in a very good mood for creative work. The other day a *Time* (N.Y.) correspondent with a photographer invaded my house a[nd] kept me the whole morning machine gunning me with flashes and unbelievable questions. I received them (making an exception on my rules of life) because I didn't want to be uncooperative with Princeton Press etc. But no word appeared on this freekey [?] paper last week about the book. And one wonders why so many expenses in cables and films. The rest [illegible] knew it in summer Ever to both G.S.



Aérogramme

Department of English / Princeton University / Princeton, N. J.,
U.S.A.

Department of English
Princeton Univ.
Princeton, N.J.
October 30, 1967

Dear Mr. Seferis,

I'm glad that my brother had a chance to meet you; he is a literate boy (I can say that because he is a year younger than I am) and on the right side of things, I think. He is also unusually well-read for a diplomat — at least diplomats in my country. I am also glad that you found the book handsome. I object, of course, to the same things that you do — in fact, have already so objected, adding

²⁶⁵ A note in my hand says, in parentheses, “(not yet published).”

my dismay over the way the Greek text occasionally fades. Our editor, Mrs. Eve Hanle, has asked me to send her a copy of your remarks because she hopes to use them to improve the character of the book when it goes into a second edition, which may not be far away. I will be vigilant in this regard myself, because the book is so nice in other respects; it seems a shame not to have it as perfect as is possible. The *Moralis* “decoloration”, as you call it, was a last minute eccentricity on the part of the famous Mr. Conkwright.²⁶⁶ Why he made the change, nobody seems to know, though our editor slyly suggests that he may be secretly color-blind.²⁶⁷ We will hope to prevail upon him — or someone else — to get the thing back to its original color for all future editions.

This brings to mind some news. Jonathan Cape has decided to bring out an English edition of the book, photographing the Princeton text, but hopefully eliminating its weaknesses. The Cape arrangement is in place of an arrangement that Mr. Bailey had negotiated with the Oxford Press that would have called for Oxford to import 150 (only 150) copies of the Princeton edition for distribution by Oxford in England. This seemed to me an absolutely ridiculous arrangement, and I objected to it strenuously, bringing the interest of Cape to Bailey’s attention. So now the book will have a substantial English circulation as it should, under the label of what is generally recognized as the best commercial publishing house in England these days (as the *New York Times Book Review* of two weeks ago states without qualification, I gather — at least our editor, Tom Maschler, is described as the young genius of British publishing, who has made Cape what it is today). The arrangement with England is entirely in the hands of the Princeton Press because we gave them world rights to the translation, but I am now pleased with what has come about. I do not think we could do better.²⁶⁸

I haven’t yet seen the *Quarterly Review* (it is printed in Belgium, hence your early receipt of a copy). I will note the errors (though

²⁶⁶ The principal book designer at Princeton University Press for a number of years, often cited for his fine work.

²⁶⁷ P. J. Conkwright was not in fact color blind, and I assume that the remark by the editor, Eve Hanle, was made tongue-in-cheek.

²⁶⁸ The Jonathan Cape bilingual edition of *George Seferis: Collected Poems, 1924–1955* appeared in hardback in 1969 and in a bilingual paperback edition in 1973. In the margin near the top of the page someone — probably Seferis — has written “Collected” in English script and brought a line down the margin to the end of this paragraph.

the “your” to “our” was the printer’s fault). I will also see that Pound gets a complimentary copy. Tomorrow I will call the Princeton Press and ask them to mail you a copy of the book you requested.* Don’t worry about the payment: I will charge it to my account and deduct the cost from any payment we may receive for the *Quarterly Review* items.

Time Magazine is of course a criminal institution in many ways, but it does have the advantage of bringing a book to the attention of readers who might otherwise miss it — especially abroad. I imagine the review — if it comes out — will be in next week’s issue. I’ll keep an eye out for it, and all other reviews that may interest you. So far, we have only one response, from that very generous soul, Archibald MacLeish; he writes: “This is a book and a translation worthy of Seferis, which is to praise it as highly as it could be praised. If any contemporary poet could be said to be essential, Seferis is that poet, and this is the true body of his work admirably, beautifully, and intelligently presented.”²⁶⁹ I wrote him to thank him for these kind sentiments, saying that I was sure you would appreciate them too.

I am making approaches to the Institute for Advanced Study²⁷⁰ regarding the possibility of an invitation to you. Is there any chance that we might entice you and Mrs. Seferis here for a semester or so? I would like to do anything I can to help the problem of a creative climate, or at least of mood, and if you think a stay in this country would be of advantage to you in this regard, do not hesitate to let me know.

I find it hard to mention Greece; there is pain in it that I can’t afford these days.

Best to you both,
Michalakis

*I am not certain that it is in print yet.²⁷¹

²⁶⁹ A wavy line appears in the margin beside MacLeish’s remarks.

²⁷⁰ Preceding four words underlined by Seferis.

²⁷¹ Written in my hand.



GEORGE SEFERIS, AGRAS 20, ATHENS 501, GREECE

2. XII. 67

My dear Michaliki — Your brother (and wife) lunched with us yesterday; after a terribly busy week (Cyprus crisis) he managed in keeping his good form; it is not the learning that I like in him, it is the frame of mind; and we both enjoyed meeting for the first time his wife. — A day before (I had received a letter from Mr Carl Kaysen the Director (?) of the Institute for advanced studies [*sic*]. He refers to your mentioning of my name and writes me either for one term or for the year. As during the last months a [*sic*] begun to feel rather uneasy with my writing, I must confess that I felt the need of some sort of ventilation, at least for one term. I thank you, dear Michaliki, for having thought of me. Mr. Kaysen asks me: “what you would propose to work on if you came”. Is there any particular form for answering this? If they want me to mention a particular subject, I can say that by next *Fall* term, I shall be working on the *myths* and *legends* in Plato. I’d like to have your advice on this part before I answer to Mr. Kaysen. I take it for granted that you’ll be at Princeton by next mid-September, as we are gong to feel rather lost without you and Mary. In your answer, after consultation with your wife, please mention whatever practical detail you may think of some use for us. I shall not have a personal car, and intend to use a taxi for our needs. We prefer to come for next Fall term: a) because April ’69 is too remote, and b) because they say that autumn is beautiful in your lands. —

I must thank you also for ordering the KARIYE DJAMI at Princeton Univ. Press, only though the invoice in the box I received the other day, *No. 21978*, mentions 3 vols, I found only two volumes in the parcel, the vol. 2 (the Mosaics) and vol. 3 (the Frescoes) — Vol. 1 is missing and as far as I can see there are no marks showing that it’s been stolen. Can you do something about this, and do pardon me for bothering you.²⁷²

Archibald McL. is really moving.²⁷³ His generosity is the generosity of a real poet. I thank you also for the *Quarterly* to Pound. I’m

²⁷² Seferis has crossed out “with i.”

²⁷³ See MacLeish’s comment on *George Seferis: Collected Poems* in my letter of 30 October.

praying that no major obstacle will prevent us (Maro is coming of course with me) from realizing our plans for my *advanced studies*.

Cheers

GS



- 1) expand to paragraph²⁷⁴
- 2) urge 2 terms
- 3) bus to town
- 4) urge housing application



Aérogramme

Department of English / Princeton University / Princeton, N. J.,
U.S.A.

December 11, 1967

Dear Mr. Seferis,

Having just finished a novel,²⁷⁵ it seems that my typewriter has decided to take a vacation (I have to type very slowly to prevent it from sticking — and I fear that it may choke up completely before the end of this page). Mary and I were delighted to learn that you are seriously considering the Institute's invitation. We want to do everything we can to encourage you to do so; it would be a sort of ventilation for us to have you close next year, and I think you would find the circumstances congenial for whatever work you may have in mind. In connection with the latter, I spoke to both Homer Thompson (of the Agora)²⁷⁶ and Dr. Kaysen; they shared my feeling that the subject of "study" that you have chosen is an excellent one — quite appropriate, it seems to me, for an Institute so strong in classical research. Both gentlemen suggested that a paragraph

²⁷⁴ This is advice I planned to write Seferis, as he requested in his letter of 2 December, regarding the statement he was asked to submit outlining his fall project in connection with his application to the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton. This and the following notes in my hand appear on the back of the envelope from Seferis dated "2. XII. 67."

²⁷⁵ *The Impostor*, published by Doubleday in 1970.

²⁷⁶ As well as being director of the Agora excavations, Homer Thompson was a professor at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton.

elaborating a bit on the topic you indicated would be useful, though of course not required. Anything more than a paragraph would be superfluous. I am personally delighted by the idea of a poet approaching Plato — as I suspect Plato himself would be, despite his politics (always a distracting influence, it seems).

Homer Thompson asked me to encourage you to come for two terms if you can possibly manage it; I do so, though of course I understand your reluctance to commit yourself to that much time away from your home at this early date. I think Mr. Kaysen would be pleased for you to accept even one term, as we would be too — and as you say, the fall term would be preferable to the winter term as far as the landscape is concerned. There is a chance that I will be on leave from the University during our spring semester next year (from February on); that would mean that we would be in Princeton with you for all of the Institute's first term and part of its second term if the leave does go through, and for both terms if it doesn't. In any case, you mustn't consider our plans in making yours; if you should decide to take both terms here, you will have had more than enough of us by February, I'm sure.

[My typewriter is misbehaving terribly.]²⁷⁷ Let me offer one bit of important advice: if you do accept the Institute's invitation, you will receive an application for housing under their auspices. You should fill this out and return it to them immediately, because this would insure your getting one of the modern housing units that the Institute provides for its visiting fellows. They are comfortable and attractive, and though there are a large number available, I have known some visitors who did not get assigned to one of them because they procrastinated in returning the form and other visitors thus received priority. The transportation problem should not be great, by the way, because there is an Institute bus that makes regular trips into the center of town, and of course taxis are always available.²⁷⁸

I have called the Press about the missing volume of the *KARIYE DJAMI*; they are mailing you a replacement today. The payment from the *Quarterly Review* more than covers the cost of the three volumes; a check from them is on its way to me, and I will shortly forward you the balance.

²⁷⁷ The sentence is in brackets in the original.

²⁷⁸ Seferis has put a wavy line in the right margin beside this paragraph.

I go off to the repair man before this machine disintegrates totally. You would think that it had written the novel entirely by itself.

Do let us know as soon as your plans are final.

Our best to you both,
Michalakis



Agras 20. Athens 501
Greece²⁷⁹

Volume 1 of Chora (Underwood) arrived today with case.²⁸⁰ Thanks. See vol 1., p. 40 i chora to achoritou²⁸¹: the dwelling place of the uncontainable.

Seferis



Nafplion[?], New Year's 1968²⁸²

Dear Michalaki,

Many thinks [*sic*] to say, but for the time being chornia polla kai stous dio sas.²⁸³ I've written today to Mr. Kaysen accepting for the Fall Term 1968. I've received the missing volume of Karye.²⁸⁴ I'll ask you for more books.

Cheers
GS

²⁷⁹ This is a postcard; according to its postmark, it was mailed "15. 12. 67."

²⁸⁰ This is the missing volume mentioned in Seferis's letter of 2 December and mine of 11 December.

²⁸¹ Four words written in Greek script.

²⁸² This is a postcard.

²⁸³ The equivalent of "Happy New Year to both of you." The six words in Greek were written in Greek characters.

²⁸⁴ Also mentioned in the previous postcard.



Aérogramme

140 Littlebrook Road / Princeton, N.J., U.S.A.

January 5, 1968

Dear Mr. Seferis,

Just a quick note to say that I heard both from Mr. Kaysen and from you (via postcard) at about the same moment. Mary and I are absolutely delighted that you've accepted the Institute's invitation, and we stand ready to serve you in any way we can. Do write if you have any specific questions. And remember that the question of housing should not be postponed.

The Press sent an additional copy of the missing volume,²⁸⁵ so if you should end up with two copies, simply return the additional one to the Press by slow mail. I still owe you some \$7.00 on the *Quarterly Review* payment, and of course I'd be happy to mail you anything you need in addition: just drop me a card.

We go off to Mexico for three weeks next Saturday.²⁸⁶ It always alarms me a bit to think of discovering a new country at my age, but there is some excitement in it. I hope, in any case, to spend much of my time underwater, where all countries are rather the same and where one is spared the changing sounds of horror and idiocy that sometimes torment one in the open air. But I don't plan to think such heavy thoughts again before the second week in February.

We wait to hear from you.

All the best,
Michalakis

²⁸⁵ See Seferis's letter of 2 December and mine of 11 December.

²⁸⁶ Our companions on this trip were Kingsley Amis and Elizabeth Jane Howard, who met Seferis in Greece in the summer of 1969.



GEORGE SEFERIS, AGRAS 20, ATHENS 501, GREECE²⁸⁷

13. 1. 68

Dear Aztec-who-waits-to-hear-from-me-²⁸⁸ a) I have received a letter from Mr. Kaysen with enclosures concerning the American visa etc, but not any application for housing. Mr. Kaysen says on this matter just this: "I understand that you will be coming with your wife and that you would like to apply for space in the Members Housing project, and we will do our best in making provision for you". I bring this to your notice as you might perhaps help. As for the visa, your brother whom I saw yesterday will do his best from his end. — Meanwhile I had an invitation from Harvard to be Charles Eliot Norton Professor of Poetry for '69-'70. The idea and the opportunity to say certain things attracted me very much when I read their letter; then I felt obliged to turn down the invitation. I enclose copy of my answer.²⁸⁹ It will, I hope, explain to you my position. In any case could you please send me a catalogue of the lessons made by the Norton Professors (I understand that they keep printing them at Harvard University) and, please, could you send me the Stravinsky lessons in the *French* text which must have been issued by the Harvard Press. I've got the English (Vintage Press) Princeton. — Yesterday Karydis complained to me that altho many and various people have received the *Collected*, only he has been forgotten.²⁹⁰ I'm afraid he's right. Princeton press might I think to [*sic*] send him a copy with a letter of thanks for furnishing the Greek text, for which they didn't pay anything at all. — I was forgetting to ask you to say to Mr. Kaysen not to send me any money here. I'll need it when in Princeton. You had I hope a good time (and not too cold) in Mexico. Some years ago when I was led to consider strange conditions in the sea's bottom I was horrified. I wonder if six months underwater wouldn't lead you to feel the same horror and idiocy that torment us in the open air. Ever, all the best (as you say)

GS

²⁸⁷ "David Horne" — unidentified — appears in my hand at the top of this letter.

²⁸⁸ "Aztec" is presumably occasioned by my trip to Mexico, mentioned in my letter of 5 January.

²⁸⁹ Appendix, George Seferis to Franklin L. Ford, 27 December 1967.

²⁹⁰ Nikos Karydis was director of Ikaros, the Athenian publishing house that provided the Greek text for *George Seferis: Collected Poems*.



PRINCETON UNIVERSITY
PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY 08540

Department of English
McCosh 22

Area Code: 609
Telephone: 452-4060
February 5, 1968

Dear Mr. Seferis,

We are just back from Mexico in time to celebrate my 40th birthday, a thing that would normally excite me but I feel something more than 40 years ahead of the game (as they say in this country) after living through a rather startling earthquake on our last night in Mexico City and after surviving the one underwater exploration I attempted in waters so murky that I couldn't see my hand, let alone any symbolic landscapes. It was a good vacation, full of new history, but I find it something of a relief to be healthily back at my desk.

I have yours of the 13th before me, and I have just called Mr. Kaysen concerning the questions you raised. He said that you will receive the relevant papers regarding housing arrangements in due course, but that in any case you can count on having a place in the Members housing project. He also said that he would follow your instructions regarding the stipend (i.e., no money to be sent to Greece).

My editor at the Press (Eve Hanle) is writing a letter to Karydis along the lines you suggested. It turns out that the copy set aside for him was sent not to my brother in Athens (as in the case of all other copies to be distributed in Greece) but to my brother in Nigeria.²⁹¹ My brother in Nigeria just wrote to ask who in the devil this Mr. Ikaros is. I have too many brothers in too many countries, it seems, for the Press to keep instructions straight. Anyway, I have expressed my embarrassment regarding Mr. Karydis in the strongest terms, and I hope the Press's letter to him reflects an appropriate gratitude.

²⁹¹ My brother Hugh was then general manager of Mobil Oil in Nigeria.

We must someday talk about the Harvard business. I understand and admire your position; I think there may be another conceivable position, but I don't think this is the right place to attempt a formulation of it. I have written the Harvard Press for the materials that you requested and will forward them to you as soon as they arrive.

Maybe my next letter can be less hurried; I now have to pay for those three odd weeks of doing my own pleasure by doing the University's pleasure, and that leaves me no extra time today. One final item: it seems that the Press will have to bring out a second printing of the *Collected* within the year — perhaps as little as six months from now — because the demand has been much larger than they expected.

Best to you both,

As ever,
Michalakis

Enclosure just arrived²⁹²



16 III. 68. — Delphi²⁹³

Dear Michalaki,

Now the best period of your life is in front of you; I send you my *best* wishes, and the wishes of the Delphic oracle (although nobody knows what it really means) Have returned a surplus vol. I of Kahrie [*sic*] to you thru yr brothers [*sic*] care. Ever

GS

²⁹² Written in my hand.

²⁹³ This is a postcard.



Seferis/ Agras 20 / Athens 501 / Greece²⁹⁴

7. iv. 68

Michalaki, Two days ago yr Brother Robert brought me our passports with the U.S.A. visas. I write this just to give you an indication of my whereabouts during next months in case you might think advisable to inform also the Institute (if a letter is sent to me about the housing question on which please keep an eye) a) End of April—end of May: abroad, mainly Italy. b) June, July, August: Athens. We hope to fly to the States by the second half of September —

Cheers
G.S.



GEORGE SEFERIS, AGRAS 20, ATHENS 502, GREECE

Sun. 14. 68

Dear Michalaki . . Last Thursday, I had a letter from Mrs Ruth Barnett (Associate Ge manager of the Institute) with an attached application form for housing reservation; I answered on Friday and marked on my application as approximated dates of arrival and departure the 19th of Sept. and the 20th of Dec. — Today Maro and I had lunch with your brother and Louise²⁹⁵ and learned that you were spending next summer in Greece. I hope that the first date I indicated coincides with your schedule. But I hasten to let you know about the Institute housing matters, because you told me to do so. Please keep an eye so that we may have a nice flat. — I've marked on my application that if we can have one double bed room furnished with *two single* beds we don't need two separate bed-rooms.

Mrs Barnett writes that they keep for members coming from abroad a limited supply of house keeping items (linens, pillows, blankets,

²⁹⁴ This is a postcard.

²⁹⁵ Louise Schoonmaker Keeley, my sister-in-law.

dishes, silverware, kitchen utensils etc.) I wrote to her that as we are going to travel by air it'll be obviously impossible to bring such items with us. Indeed our intention is to get a taxi from the Kennedy airdrome at our arrival and drive immediately to the Institute. Therefore we must find at our flat the possibility to sleep and the necessary provision for making a breakfast next morning. Could Mary check with Mrs Barnett that this practical problem shall be o. k. and think of what house keeping items we should borrow or buy and let us know when we meet in summer.

We intend to make off for Rome on the 29 Ap. and be absent from Athens till sometime in June.

When back I'll telephone Robert and learn about your plans here.

Ever
George

P.S. I said to Mrs. Barnett that we are friends. Perhaps you might ask to see my application and letter to her.

GS

rent: starts day of arrival / ends when he leaves / perfectly adequate for household services / breakfast provided / no airport service²⁹⁶



140 Littlebrook Road, Princeton, N.J.²⁹⁷

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

April 17[?], 1968

Dear Mr. Seferis,

I've let the Institute know about your plans for the next several months. Mr. Kaysen's secretary said that you should have received — or should very shortly receive — the housing application. They have in mind that you will not be back in Athens until the end of May, so there shouldn't be any problem in this connection. Write

²⁹⁶ These notes are at the bottom of the page in my hand.

²⁹⁷ This is a postcard; it is postmarked in Greece "20 iv 68."



Mr. and Mrs. George Seferis in Rome just prior to their journey to the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, 1968. Photograph courtesy of Anna Londou and the Cultural Foundation of the National Bank of Greece.

me if you haven't heard by the time your return. We will in any case see you in early June (we fly to Athens either the 8th or 9th). Have a good Italian visit

Michalakis



PRINCETON UNIVERSITY
CREATIVE ARTS PROGRAM
125 EAST PYNE
PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY 08540

April 20, 1968

Dear Mr. Seferis,

A note to say that I've talked to Mrs. Barnett. She assures me that you will be assigned a fellows' apartment in keeping with your request — i.e., one double bed room with two single beds, a study in addition so that you can work at home. The assignments have not yet been made — and may not be made for some weeks — but

I will (if they allow me) actually check on the place they've assigned you. Since most of the apartments are equally pleasant, you have no reason to worry in this regard now that your application is in ahead of the deadline. Mrs. Barnett also told me that the apartment will be furnished with all necessary household items (including cutlery and table service items), so you do not have to bring a thing with you. They will also see to it that you have a delivery of food for your first meals.

As I said in my last letter, we will be in Athens by June 9, and we will either return on Sept. 13 or Sept. 19, depending on final flight arrangements. This means that we will either be here to meet you, or we will be arriving on the same day. In any case, we can talk about arrival plans when we see you — along with all else there is to talk about.

Have a good time in Italy; we wish we could join you now that we face two hard spring months ahead, including my offering a paper on Seferis at the first meeting of the Modern Greek Studies Symposium, at Maryland University, on May 1.²⁹⁸ If I can find the courage, I will show you the paper this summer.

All the best,
Michalakis



in haste

9 Aug. 1968

Dearest Michalaki — We are leaving tomorrow for Kardamyli²⁹⁹ (Leigh Fermore's [*sic*] Place).³⁰⁰ I'm not certain if we'll be back on the 18th Aug. But I expect we'll be certainly in Athens by the 20th. So ring me up at home on the 20th p.m. if there is no reply from me on the 18th.

We must get in touch before you vanish again on the 21st (according to your time table which you've left with me). The Institute wrote to me advising and recommending to apply for a Fulbright travel grant. I note the Fulbrights have not written to me at all

²⁹⁸ It was at this symposium that the Modern Greek Studies Association was created by a group of participants.

²⁹⁹ Place name written in Greek characters.

³⁰⁰ Patrick Leigh Fermor, the well-known British author who lives in the village of Kardamyli in the Mani region of Greece, was a long-standing friend of Seferis.

and I don't know where their abode is over here. My address in Kardamyli³⁰¹ is c/o Michali³⁰² Leigh Fermore [*sic*] — Kardamyli³⁰³ Messinia. Cheers. Seferis

✂

17 Loukianou, Athens³⁰⁴

Aug. 21 [1969]

Mary and I will be staying at the Skyros Xenia from Thursday (26th) to Monday (Sept. 1). We will have Kingsley Amis and Elizabeth Jane Howard (both English novelists, and actually married to each other) with us. We hope to have an evening with you on the Paralia.

Love,
Michalakis

✂

Michalaki³⁰⁵

The book I mentioned at noon: Ruth Benedict *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*

If you write to Princeton Univ. Press tell them to send me the catalogue of the books they bring out — Thanks GS

✂

GEORGE SEFERIS, AGRAS 20, ATHENS 502, GREECE³⁰⁶

2. x. 69

Dearest Michalaki — Hope everything goes well with you and Mary and Little brook and cats therein.³⁰⁷ The other day I had the printed

³⁰¹ Place name written in Greek characters.

³⁰² Name written in Greek characters.

³⁰³ Place name written in Greek characters.

³⁰⁴ This is a postcard, postmarked "21. viii. 69." and addressed to Mr. and Mrs. George Seferis, c/o George Evstathiou, Paralia, Skyros.

³⁰⁵ This is an undated loose-leaf note in Seferis's Greek script, probably from the late summer of 1969; see also Seferis's letters of 2 October 1969 and "Xmas '69."

³⁰⁶ At the top of the page: "x [circled] Balkan SOBRANIE smoking mixture."

³⁰⁷ Our home in Princeton, with two cats at that time, is on Littlebrook Road.

program of your October Symposium. I think you made a clean job; the cleanest possible: congratulations and good luck. Now, you are busy and I try to be as short as possible:

a) I reckon by the time of your coming back here I'll be rather short of tobacco could you buy for me (tobacconist of Palmer Square)³⁰⁸ as much of this stuff x³⁰⁹ as you can bring with you. Thanks

b) Ask your sweet wife to put enclosed check at my Bank, Princeton.

c) Books: 1. Fill up enclosed cutting (from N. Y. Review) with \$5 (ten month subscription) for Picasso's erotic engravings! You may bring the magazine numbers and art folio with you or send them over to Bob³¹⁰ according to yr convenience. I'm not in a hurry. Order to our friend the Bookseller (with my good wishes) to send me the two books (Bolgan and Benedict) marked on enclosed loose-leaf.

Lots of thanks and Good Luck. Affectionately.

Seferis

P. T. O.³¹¹

P.S. I was forgetting: Send c/o Bob or bring with you papers I left with you last year. GS³¹²

And the most important: Post *at once* enclosed letter to Ford Foundation. Thanks again.³¹³



CREATIVE ARTS PROGRAM
185 NASSAU STREET
PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY 08540

October 16, 1969

Dear Mr. Seferis,

It is a very bad thing to be in Princeton at this time of year, despite the lovely trees and the Indian summer mood of the weather.

³⁰⁸ Skirm's Smoke Shop, long a fixture on Palmer Square in Princeton.

³⁰⁹ The "x" is circled.

³¹⁰ My brother Robert, then still at the U.S. Embassy in Athens.

³¹¹ "Please turn over."

³¹² The postscript is written in the left margin.

³¹³ This second postscript is written on the reverse side of the page.

I have hardly had a moment to think since we got back, what with budgets due and artists to please and international symposia to coordinate over several continents.³¹⁴ But I want to take a minute to say that I have placed orders for the various things you need from here: the two books through the Palmer Square store, to be mailed to my brother (much more quickly and comfortably via APO — the “diplomats” service), and the same is true of *Avant-Garde* [sic] and the Picasso volume, which I hope to share some afternoon or evening in February. And I mailed the letter the same day. What remains now is the tobacco and the envelope of private papers. I will count on Mary’s elephantine memory to remind me of these at the right time. And let me say that we can’t get that time out of our minds.

The several people here who have seen the *Paris Review* text have been pleased by it (Ted Weiss and Bob Fagles, among others — and both are tough critics).³¹⁵ I took courage and presented a copy — my last carbon — to Carl Kaysen at the Institute, because I thought he would be especially interested in your remarks about your stay there. He responded warmly, both to the prospect of reading it and to you personally (I gather he was moved by your position last spring).³¹⁶ Trained by Armenians, I felt that there was no harm in keeping my large toe in the door, even though I feel that it has been slightly injured by the fact of your not being here this fall.

Our love to Maro. We think of you often. In proof of this, I will turn next to the Warner poem.

All the best,
Michalakis

³¹⁴ The reference is to the Modern Greek Studies Association symposium on Modern Greek literature that was held at Princeton University from 30 October to 1 November 1969.

³¹⁵ The reference is to the interview that I conducted with Seferis during his final days at the Institute for Advanced Study, first published as “George Seferis: The Art of Poetry xiii,” *Paris Review* no. 50 (Fall 1970), republished in *To Vima*, Athens, and by Agras, Athens, in a bilingual edition in 1982. Theodore Weiss is a poet, critic, and editor, and Robert Fagles is a poet and translator, both distinguished men of letters who are members of Princeton’s faculty.

³¹⁶ The reference is to Seferis’s public statement of 28 March 1969 against the Colonels’ dictatorship; the text is in the Appendix.



69. XI. 16

Dear Michalaki — I've kept your version in English of Rex's poem and send you back a second copy in Greek on which I've marked my corrections and observations.³¹⁷ I hope you'll find your way in my scribbling. If there is no hurry I think we might easily in an hour's conversation finish it. I had already rumours of your congress.³¹⁸ Love to both of you

G.

Please acknowledge this; I believe you've received my last corrections on the *interview*

P.S. Please get me E. Pound's: *Guide to Kulchur* and *The Spirit of Romance*. Both republished by New Directions.



MODERN GREEK STUDIES ASSOCIATION³¹⁹

185 NASSAU STREET

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY

PRINCETON, N.J. 08540

November 27, 1969

Dear G.S.,

Attached is a revised version of the Warner poem, hopefully [*sic*] incorporating all the suggestions you made. I've sent it off to Encounter³²⁰ (at Rex's suggestion).³²¹ If you have further suggestions, I'm sure that I can make final changes when they send me the proof — assuming they decide to take it.

³¹⁷ "Letter to Rex Warner," in *George Seferis: Collected Poems*.

³¹⁸ The Modern Greek Studies Association symposium mentioned in the previous letter. Our mutual friend, Zissimos Lorenzatos, came to Princeton to give a paper at the symposium and, on his return to Athens, no doubt reported on the occasion to Seferis.

³¹⁹ Stationary of the recently created Modern Greek Studies Association, initially housed in my office at the Princeton University Creative Arts Program.

³²⁰ Word underlined by Seferis.

³²¹ The translation of "Letter to Rex Warner" was accepted by *Encounter* and appeared in the February 1970 issue.

The interview has gone off to the *Paris Review*.³²² I entered all of your corrections personally before submitting it, so there should be no problem on this score.

Today is Thanksgiving (do you remember that strange occasion?), which prohibits my calling the bookstore to order the Pound books you want; but I will take care of that first thing in the morning.

We long to get back to Athens. Only two months of this local madness left — then the sea, the mermaids, the amphorae, and the last section of my novel, abandoned since early September.³²³

We'll talk about the Symposium when we see you. From most points of view it was a success. We are now planning another for 1971 to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the War of Independence — obviously the focus will be historical. We will talk about this as well when we see you. And so much more that is less dull and academic, hopefully [*sic*].

Love to you both,
Michalakis

P.S. Give our best to Zissimos when you next see him.



GEORGE SEFERIS, AGRAS 20, ATHENS 502, GREECE

Xmas '69

My dear Michalaki — Damascene etc.,³²⁴ the other day Bob came and brought me your most learned course on love exhibitions.³²⁵ Thank you for your kind thought. I suppose time is ripe for a Symposium on such affairs. I've spent this period of holidays in a dream like state: I have to face a 2nd century Dream-book: your message brings me back to reality: time draws near when you'll appear with your well fed beard and your submarine equipment; so allow me to be burdensome for a while:

³²² Discussed in the introductory essay; see also *Paris Review Writers at Work*, Fourth Series.

³²³ Early draft of *Voyage to a Dark Island*, published in 1972.

³²⁴ The entire salutation is written in Greek characters ("Damascene" here presumably means "born in Damascus").

³²⁵ It is possible that this refers to the manuscript of a project of mine that never reached completion: a collection of illustrations, from ancient times to the present, of the myth of Leda and the Swan, and a gathering of poems on the same theme, mostly of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

General remark: Ask your very kind wife to keep an a/c of *all* the expenses you are incurring for me; if you have no objection we'll settle all that at the time of our next meeting —: a) *tobacco*: (“BALKAN SOBRANIE smoking mixture”). — Bob told me the other day that he wrote to you to send the stuff over to him if necessary to ease your luggage problems. As I wrote to you I am completely out of stock; if I could be furnished with ten tins of 8 oz each I'd be terribly grateful. I'm sorry I'm giving you this trouble; b) at the same tobacconist (Palmer Sq) buy for me *three* packets of *Cornoy's* [?] “Pipe bowl polisher and pipe mouthpiece cleaner.” (each packet is an envelop [*sic*] containing impregnated cloth for the use. I had asked Lorenzatos to bring them but misunderstood [*sic*] me)

c). — Remember to bring with you or send to Bob personal papers I left with you last year.

d). — I wonder if you ever received the Picasso's engravings.

e) I enclose check (No 135) for two years renewal of my subscription at N. Y. Review. Please forward it with their note.

f) There were two books which my letter of 2 Octob. I never received (Bolgar's³²⁶ and Ruth Benedict' *Patterns of Culture*) I'm not in a hurry but just mentioning the fact.

g) What happened with Encounter and Rex's poem? He wrote the other day saying he liked your translation.

Have a very good new year. 'Tis the affectionate wish of your friend GS



Michalaki:³²⁷

= *R. R. Bolgar*: *The Classical Heritage* (and its beneficiaries from the Carolingian [*sic*] age to the end of the Renaissance) Harper “Torchbooks” NoTB1125

= *Ruth Benedict*: *Patterns of culture* (Houghton Mifflin Co, Boston The Riverside Press Cambridge, Mass.)

³²⁶ Inserted above are the words “a paperback.”

³²⁷ This is an undated loose-leaf sheet in Seferis's hand, probably enclosed with the preceding letter. At the top of the sheet is “924-1730,” a Princeton telephone number, written in my hand. See also Seferis's letter dated “Xmas '69.”



140 Littlebrook Road / Princeton, N.J. 08540³²⁸

January 19, 1970

Dear G.S.,

A quick report from 140 Littlebrook:

1. The tobacco has been bought and is now being packed for shipment to my brother. The pipe bowl polishers will be included.

2. I mailed the personal papers to Bob several weeks ago. You should have received these by now.

3. The Picasso engravings were solicited almost two months ago. These too should be in my brother's hands by now.

4. N. Y. Review of Books subscription has been renewed.

5. The two books ordered from our friend on Palmer Square are on their way, but these will take time (so the man told me yesterday).

6. Encounter has had the Warner poem since I wrote you about it. I'm sending a letter of inquiry in today's mail.

7. George Plimpton of the Paris Review likes the Seferis interview. He has some editorial suggestions for our consideration, and these will be sent to me for my arrival in Athens. He expects to include the interview in the spring issue of the Review.³²⁹

8. My new novel, *THE IMPOSTOR*, has just appeared. I am bringing a copy of it with me for you and Mrs. S.

9. The Keeley-Savidis edition of 21 new poems of Cavafy has just been purchased by the Dial Press in this country for a nice advance, which I will spend on fish in Faleron (Marida).³³⁰

10. Mary and I will fly off to London on the 28th of this month, then to Athens on February 2nd, God willing. We are both tired. We both look forward to seeing you and Mrs. S under a new winter sun.

Our love,
Michalakis

³²⁸ This is an air letter (not identified by the term "Aérogramme").

³²⁹ It was in fact published in the fall 1970 issue.

³³⁰ Tiny fish, generally translated as "whiting." "Marida" was added in my hand.



PRINCETON UNIVERSITY
 CREATIVE ARTS PROGRAM
 185 NASSAU STREET
 PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY 08540

January 23, 1970

Dear G.S.,

“Letter to Rex Warner” is in the current issue of *Encounter* (February, 1970). I just received an air mail copy. I had not yet heard that they had accepted the poem, let alone received a copy of the proof (as happened last time), but fortunately the only error I can discern is a missing apostrophe. The only other poem in the issue is one by Borges — not nearly as good as yours.

We’ll be seeing you in something over a week. The bulk of your tobacco left yesterday.

Love,
 Michalakos



Aérogramme

140 Littlebrook Road / Princeton, N.J. 08540, U.S.A.

140 Littlebrook Road, Princeton, N.J. 08540

September 28, 1970³³¹

Dear GS,

I’m sorry that business is what first brings me to my typewriter for a chance to find out how things are with you: I would rather just write to say that I hate not being in Greece, which means that I am sad and uncomfortable being where I am — more so this

³³¹ Written at the head of the aérogramme, in Seferis’s Greek script: “apokr. Oct 8. 1970 (lismonisa anafero T.S.E.).” Though the script is not entirely legible, this appears to indicate that Seferis replied (apokritika) on 8 October 1970 — an item missing from my archive — and that he “forgot to mention T. S. Eliot.” The latter is no doubt a reference to the essay “T. S. E. (Pages from a Diary),” which was added to the “Bibliographical Note” in the 1971 paperback edition of *George Seferis: Collected Poems* under the heading “Seferis’s principal prose works,” after my request for updating in paragraph 2 below.

year than ever. Mary is less sad because she has the house and the cat to keep her lively; I have budgets and dull colleagues and problems that no one with a pretense to literary sensibilities should have to suffer. But you know all about that, so I won't bore you with my pain from daily trivialities or even my familiar nostalgia.

The young man at the Princeton Press who will be editing the paperback edition of *George Seferis: Collected Poems* has asked me to bring the bibliography up to date. Also the page of biographical data. Could you help me with these by telling me what you feel should be included in each category? For example, shouldn't we include your latest essays under "II. Seferis's principal prose works"? If so, could you give me the exact references, in keeping with the style of the hardback edition? Anything you can add under IV (Selected trans.) would also be appreciated because I cannot find all three versions* of *Three Secret Poems* (some of my books are still in Athens). I don't think there have been any other critical articles in English besides mine in Comp. Lit. Studies and Peter Levi's, which will hopefully [*sic*] be published in the Princeton Press edition of the Princeton Symposium papers. And there is the *Paris Review Interview*. If you can think of anything else in this category, please let me know. The Biographical Data should include your Princeton Institute appointment and anything else you consider appropriate. I would like to speak there of heroic statements and the like, but I will restrain myself.³³²

We miss you and Maro. We miss Athens. I will write again in a quieter mood, when my life — and my solicitations — are less urgent, and when I can find my sense of humor again.

All the best to you both,
Michalakis

P.S. The Press hopes to bring out the paperback edition in January if we can give them the new material expeditiously.

*or do we ignore the pirated version?³³³

³³² This refers to Seferis's statement against the Colonels' dictatorship (see Appendix, "George Seferis's Statement of 28 March 1969").

³³³ The asterisk and the note appear in the left margin. Of the three versions of *Three Secret Poems* that had been published at this time (see the introductory essay), the two that were finally listed in the "Bibliographical Note" of the paperback edition were by Walter Kaiser and Peter Thompson, suggesting that the translation by Paul Merchant is the one that Seferis considered "pirated" and that Sherrard and I therefore decided not to list.



Gseferis / Agras, 20 / Athens 502 / Greece³³⁴

Dear Michalaki. — I need without delay the following book *Menseniediech*³³⁵ Mensendiech³³⁶: “Look Better and Feel Better. Publishers Harper and Row, 49 East 33rd St, New York 16, N.Y. Thank you.

How are you both?

I was in Paris and just arrived back to Athens.³³⁷ Best wishes

George



You’ll remember our “Japanese Parthenon” where Bob studies.³³⁸

Dec. 22

Dear George,

Couldn’t find the book you wanted³³⁹ in Princeton, so have asked Harper and Row to send it directly by air mail — our Christmas present. Please let me know whether or not it arrives safely; and love to you both.

M

³³⁴ This is a postcard; its postmark gives the date as “15.XII.70.”

³³⁵ This word is crossed out.

³³⁶ This word is inserted above the line.

³³⁷ Certain medical records of this period that are in the Gennadius Library’s Seferis archive suggest that the trip to Paris was at least in part for the purpose of medical consultation.

³³⁸ This was written across the top of the postcard, mailed from Princeton and postmarked “Dec. 25[?], 1970.” My brother Robert was at that time a Mid-career State Department Fellow at the Princeton University Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs, housed in the Yamasaki building popularly described as the “Japanese Parthenon,” and depicted on the postcard.

³³⁹ This refers to the book *Look Better and Feel Better*, mentioned in Seferis’s previous postcard.



Seferis / Agras, 20 / Athens, 502 / Greece³⁴⁰

Dear Mike:

Mensendieck, “Look Better and Feel Better, publishers; Harper and Bow [*sic*] (49 East, 33d St. New York 16, N.Y.)³⁴¹ I need this book for a cure I’m submitted to — urgently. Please ask to be mailed to me *by air*.

I’ve written already to you 3 or 4 weeks ago, but had no reply. Ever, *kali chronia*³⁴²

George



Aérogramme

140 Littlebrook Rd. / Princeton, N.J. 08540³⁴³

January 9, 1971

Dear George,

I was distressed to learn that you haven’t yet received the Harper + Row book, which I ordered to be sent to you *by air mail* the very day that your first card reached me — some weeks ago.³⁴⁴ I called Harper + Row yesterday to check on the matter and was assured that the book would reach you shortly if it hasn’t done so already. The local bookstores are of no use since they don’t have the book in stock. I will look into some New York bookstores this week to see if I can find a copy to send you with my own hand. Should this mean that you end up with 2 copies, you can always pass on one of them to a friend in need.

Do send us something more than a postcard so that we have some notion of how you and Maro are getting along. We are especially nostalgic at this time of year, because unlike the past two Januarys, we are not getting ready to see you in person. How we

³⁴⁰ This is a postcard; it is postmarked “31.XII.70.”

³⁴¹ Inserted in my hand: “889-7500.”

³⁴² The equivalent of “Happy New Year,” written in Greek characters.

³⁴³ This letter is in my handwriting, unlike the bulk of the correspondence, which is type-written.

³⁴⁴ The saga of the Harper and Row book is outlined in the introductory essay.

will survive the spring without Athens, I don't know, but a word from you every now and then would help.

Love from both of us,
Michalakis



G. Seferis, Agras 20, Athens 502, Greece³⁴⁵

Dear Professor,

Nor book (I hope you keep the reference), nor anything similar to a book reached me up to now.

It is a pity, Iago.³⁴⁶

Cheers
G.S.



Florida — January 20, '71³⁴⁷

Dear George,

I tried several of the largest bookstores in New York searching for “Look Better + Feel Better” — no luck. Has it reached you? Please let me know so that I pursue the matter, if it hasn't.

The Hemingway home was a sad experience in ways I will explain when we see you.³⁴⁸

Michalakis

³⁴⁵ This is a postcard. Postmark: “14.1.71.”

³⁴⁶ Shakespeare, *Othello*, Act iv, scene i.

³⁴⁷ This is a postcard, with a photograph of Ernest Hemingway's house in Key West on the front.

³⁴⁸ I was not only saddened but dismayed by the guided tour through Hemingway's furniture and other memorabilia and by the general exploitation of Hemingway's legacy for the purpose of attracting tourists.



PRINCETON UNIVERSITY
CREATIVE ARTS PROGRAM
185 NASSAU STREET
PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY 08540

February 2, 1971

Dear George,

To show you that I am really faithful despite contrary indications, I give you a brief itinerary of my frustration with Harper and Row:

Dec. 21 : book ordered by mail

Jan. 6: book order submitted by N. Y. to Scranton, Pa.

Jan. 14: book actually mailed from Scranton by air

Jan. 10 ff: regular inquiries to N.Y. cannot trace whereabouts of the book

Jan. 28: first call to Scranton (futile)

Jan. 31: second call to Scranton (futile)

Feb. 2: third call to Scranton, during which I was assured that the book was mailed on Jan. 14, but that you were billed for it, as I expressly requested you shouldn't be in my letter of Dec. 21.³⁴⁹

Questions:

Has the book reached you?

Was an invoice enclosed? If so, please ignore it. I will pay for the book as a Christmas present.

Tonight I begin my (and Princeton's) first course in contemporary Greek poetry: four weeks on Cavafy, four weeks on Seferis, and several more weeks on lesser lights.³⁵⁰

Love to you both,
Michalakis

³⁴⁹ Undated notes for this letter appear in my archive as follows: "Dec. 21, I wrote; Jan 6, *Ordered*; Jan 14, Sent by Air Mail; Scranton: Jan 31, Checked; Feb 2, Checked; I will pay bill!"

³⁵⁰ As I remember, this course was taught as a special one-time course under the Council of the Humanities. Regular seminars in Modern Greek Poetry did not enter the Princeton curriculum until a decade later.



PRINCETON UNIVERSITY³⁵¹
CREATIVE ARTS PROGRAM
185 NASSAU STREET
PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY 08540

February 6, 1971

Dear George,

The business of Zissimos' essays was not initiated by me, nor is it a scheme of mine.³⁵² The two readers who read his essay on Solomos, in reporting on a proposed volume of the papers that were delivered at the Princeton Symposium in November 1969,³⁵³ both recommended that the Princeton University Press investigate the possibility of bringing out a full volume of Zissimos' essays. Miriam Brokaw then called me to ask who in Greece might know his *Meletes* and be capable of offering an opinion regarding the propriety of their publishing an English edition of his work. I suggested your name along with several others. Far from thinking that you, as Zissimos' friend and Greece's first man of letters, might consider this a burden, it occurred to me that you might well be insulted *not* to have an opportunity to offer an opinion on the project. This kind of thing is of course time-consuming and often boring; I know because I'm called on regularly for recommendations by publishers interested in Greek writers or by the writers themselves; but I try to do what I can whenever it seems to me important. I think Zissimos is important — and I know you think so too. Please forgive me, therefore, for having considered it appropriate to mention your name when Miss Brokaw called me. I assure you that my motive was not to cause anyone embarrassment but simply to help a mutual friend I admire.

Best to you both,
Michalakis

³⁵¹ In Seferis's Greek hand at top: "apokr. 11 fev. C. P." I interpret this to mean that Seferis answered this letter by postcard on 11 February, presumably the undated postcard that follows this letter.

³⁵² The issue having to do with Zissimos Lorenzatos' essays is discussed in the introductory essay.

³⁵³ Under the auspices of the Modern Greek Studies Association.

P.S. The *Paris Review* interview has just come out. I'll be sending you a copy as soon as the magazine reaches me. One reader, Sikelianos' daughter-in-law (former wife of Glavkos),³⁵⁴ was very moved by it according to a letter that came in today's mail.



February 11 [?], 1971³⁵⁵

Dear Keeley,

I fear my previous letter on "Z's business" has been totally misunderstood. Probably the reason of it is my inaccuracy in your language and I prefer, in order to avoid a further confusion, to refrain from answering your Feb. letter. Let's postpone explanations till I see you in Athens. Z. certainly he is important; but I *don't know enough of the American public*. That's what I was trying to say to Miss B. Salute from your friend who refuses to be "first man" in anything (see text mentioned in your P.S.)³⁵⁶

G S

³⁵⁴ The poet Angelos Sikelianos (1884–1950) had a son named Glavkos from his first marriage, to the American Eva Palmer.

³⁵⁵ The postcard is not clearly dated, but Seferis's note at the top of my letter of 6 February suggests that his postcard was written on 11 February.

³⁵⁶ Seferis is referring to certain of his remarks in the *Paris Review* interview mentioned in my letter of 6 February and discussed in the introductory essay.



Aérogramme

140 Littlebrook Road / Princeton, N.J. 08540

140 Littlebrook Road, Princeton

February 27, 1971

Dear G.S.,

Yesterday I received a phone call³⁵⁷ from George Kennan, our distinguished foreign affairs authority at the Institute³⁵⁸ (and former Ambassador to Russia and Yugoslavia). He is also president of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, as you no doubt know already, since he went on to say that you were to be elected an honorary foreign member of the Academy — really about the best this country can do by way of honoring a foreign man of letters (the Academy has some sort of charter³⁵⁹ from Congress, though it is independent entirely of our government, and generally recognized as our most distinguished home for intellectuals and artists). Mr. Kennan gathered that it would be unlikely that you could attend the award ceremony in person in late May, and since he is planning to be in Greece at some point during June to take part in somebody's island cruise (Doxiadis, perhaps?) he wondered if he might be able to call on you at some point during that month to present the Academy's "credentials" relating to the award (he used the term "credentials"). He asked me if I would do him the favor of approaching you informally to see if a short visit by him would be in order.

I have a larger question: is there any possibility that you could be induced to come to this country in May, first of all to address (or read before) the Symposium in commemoration of the 150th anniversary of the Greek War of Independence that is being jointly sponsored by the Modern Greek Studies Association and Harvard University (through the Fogg Museum and Walter Kaiser's Dept. of Comparative Literature)?³⁶⁰ I don't need to say what a treat it

³⁵⁷ Previous two words underlined by Seferis.

³⁵⁸ The Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, where Seferis had spent a semester in residence.

³⁵⁹ Word underlined by Seferis.

³⁶⁰ The symposium took place on 7–9 May 1971.

would be for all of us to honor you on that occasion. And you could stay on through the month (from the 7th to the 28th) to accept the Academy membership in person. If this idea is at all conceivable, please let me know and I will pursue that matter so that your round-trip transportation is assured at the least (Mr. Kennan mentioned that he might be able to help me in this, but I assume that it would be largely the responsibility of the MGSa, which is all right by me).³⁶¹ In a separate envelope, I am mailing you a schedule of the Cambridge Symposium as it is now defined (not yet finally). You will see that we have brought together a number of interesting people, not the least of which is a Karaghiozi performer (G. Michopoulos) who promises to give us an entertaining evening to start the whole thing off in proper style.³⁶²

A final question: has the Dial Press edition of the new Cavafy poems³⁶³ reached you, along with a copy of the Paris Review interview? I worry about this, because the mails are desperately unreliable in this country these days (no doubt a lingering by-product of the democratic spirit — but also a bloody bore).

Are you both well? We miss you.

All the best,
Michalakis³⁶⁴

P.S. Julia, sitting in my study very seriously working on a learned article, sends what love she can spare in such dreary circumstances.³⁶⁵

³⁶¹ I was President of the Modern Greek Studies Association (MGSa) at that time.

³⁶² “Karaghiozis” is the leading character in the Greek shadow theatre that is identified by his name. Seferis was a fan of that dying form of popular theatre.

³⁶³ The so-called “*anekdota poiemata*” (unpublished poems) of Cavafy that George Savidis edited in 1967 and that appeared in 1971 in an English translation by him and me under the title *C. P. Cavafy: Passions and Ancient Days*.

³⁶⁴ Signature written in Greek characters.

³⁶⁵ Dr. Julia Loomis, an ardent Philhellene who had recently met Seferis, was at that time a professor in the Department of Classical and Oriental Languages at Queens College and editor of the Modern Greek Studies Association *Bulletin*.



GEORGE SEFERIS, AGRAS 20, ATHENS 502, GREECE

7. 3. 71³⁶⁶

Dear Mike.

It will certainly be an honour and a great pleasure to receive Ambassador George F. Kennan at my home in Athens. I feel this is the best arrangement; it is excluded [*sic*]³⁶⁷ for me to make the trip to the States, as you suggest, in May, two reasons: a) health and b) (between us) unwillingness to come over there in order to be honoured on an occasion, about which, under present circumstances, we should rather keep silent. (I refer you to Makriyannis).³⁶⁸ In any case, please convey my thanks to President Kennan for all his kind thoughts concerning me. When I was at the Institute I had occasions to admire him, and I had the opportunity of meeting him at Mr Kaysen's home.³⁶⁹ I keep in my library his *Memoirs*, a cherished gift of Mr Kaysen.

So I wish you all success for the Harvard Symposium. Tell Professor Walter Kaiser that I feel a great regret that I shall not be

³⁶⁶ There are two copies of this letter, the original in Seferis's hand that was mailed to me, and a transcription in Maro Seferis's hand — the latter no doubt a copy for Seferis's archive along with other documents that Mrs. Seferis copied over the years.

³⁶⁷ The transcription has a "c" inserted by a hand other than that of Maro Seferis.

³⁶⁸ General Makriyannis, hero of the Greek War of Independence and author of the now famous *Memoirs* (English translation by H. A. Lidderdale, *Makriyannis*, London, 1966), was a major influence on Seferis — as is outlined in the introductory essay — and the subject of one of his essays included in *On the Greek Style*, where he calls Makriyannis' work "the conscience of a whole nation — a testament of supreme value" (p. 65). In speaking above of the "present circumstances," Seferis obviously has in mind the dictatorial regime still holding sway in Greece in 1971, but his parenthetical mention of Makriyannis may be a covert mode of invoking the General's words (in what Lidderdale designates as his "Prologue") about his contemporary "circumstances that have made all of us bring ruin on this country of ours" and his assertion that "every day we roll nearer the precipice," a metaphor adapted by Seferis in his 1969 public statement against the Colonels' dictatorship (see Appendix, "George Seferis's Statement of 28 March 1969"). The poet may also have in mind a concluding passage in the *Memoirs* that he quotes in his essay on Makriyannis: "... let there be no 'I' from the strong man or the weak. . . . We are in a time for 'we,' not for 'I.' So for the future let us learn prudence, if we wish to create a land and to live all together."

³⁶⁹ After his retirement from the U. S. Foreign Service, George Kennan was appointed a lifetime professor at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton.

able to shake hands with him, but I believe that David³⁷⁰ will approve my attitude.

All the best, love to Mary
George

P.S. Nor Cavafy, nor the Paris Review have reached me. I shall be happy if I am informed, if and when possible, the approximate date of President Kennan's arrival here.



Aérogramme

140 Littlebrook Road / Princeton, N.J. 08540

140 Littlebrook Road

Dear George,

I called Ambassador Kennan and gave him your message. He told me that he looks forward very much to seeing you in Athens and he will be in touch with you directly to tell you his plans (I gave him your address). As I remember, he expected to be in Athens around mid-June, which is when we expect to be there too, after a stop-over of several weeks in London. I'm disappointed that you can't join us in May, but your reasons for not making the trip are both proper and understandable. I too would prefer to keep silent; alas, I'm doomed to this role of salesman for modern Greek studies when the studies are noble enough to sell themselves were there only somebody out there in this desert with the heart to listen. I hear rumors that Spiro Agnew has been solicited by Harvard to persuade Onassis to give the University a chair in Modern Greek. How can Elpenor persuade Elpenor to be heroic? — and the allusion gives both gentlemen too much credit.³⁷¹

I do hope the books I sent you reach you in good order. The Dial Press has done a handsome little book* — all thanks to the efforts of a charming and quite beautiful young lady who acted as editor there and who loves contemporary Greek poetry, not least of all Seferis.³⁷² In fact, she keeps telling me how much she would

³⁷⁰ The reference escapes me.

³⁷¹ Spiro Agnew was then vice-president of the United States. Onassis was Onassis. Elpenor was Elpenor, whether in Homer or Seferis.

³⁷² My friend Karen Kennerly.

like to do a book of yours. Perhaps I can get her to visit Greece and persuade you in person, a circumstance that I might expect would bring pleasure to you both.

Spring arrives tomorrow. There are still snow flurries in the air. We dream of Kolonaki in the sun, of the past and the future, having just finished a long night in celebration of our 20th wedding anniversary,

Love to you both,
Michalakis³⁷³

*of the “new” Cavafy poems.³⁷⁴



Seferis / Agras 20 / Athens 502 / Greece³⁷⁵

Dear Mike: Today Katsimbalis had a copy sent to him of the *Paris Review*. But not G.S. A week ago a letter, a moving one, from Henry Miller came to me c/o *The Paris Review* (Paris)³⁷⁶ But I didn't have a copy of the Review, which concerns me. Can't you please telephone to the man with whom you were discussing this interview when I was at Princeton and explain to him that this attitude is inconvenient to his trade if not just rude.³⁷⁷

I'm sorry for this additional trouble.

Seferis

³⁷³ Signature written in Greek characters.

³⁷⁴ The Dial Press edition of *C. P. Cavafy: Passions and Ancient Days*.

³⁷⁵ This is a postcard; the postmark reads “20.III.71.”

³⁷⁶ See Henry Miller to George Seferiades (Poet), 16 February 1971, Selected Papers of George Seferis, Manuscripts Division, Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library. For Henry Miller's account of his admiring and affectionate relationship with Seferis, beginning with his 1939 visit to Greece, see *The Colossus of Maroussi*. Two collections of Miller's letters to Seferis (1939–1941 and 1942–1971) were catalogued in Seferis's personal archive and are now among his papers in the Manuscripts Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Firestone Library, Princeton University.

³⁷⁷ For an account of this contretemps, see the introductory essay.



Photo: John Blazejewski

Edmund Keeley in 1968, at the time of the interview with George Seferis, later published in the *Paris Review*. Photograph courtesy of Edmund Keeley.



Aérogramme

140 Littlebrook Road / Princeton, N.J. 08540³⁷⁸

140 Littlebrook Road
Princeton, N.J. 08540

Dear George,

I just received an express letter from Zissimos giving me the distressing news that you *still* haven't received your complimentary copies of the *Paris Review*. I decided to call George Plimpton personally to see what the problem was.³⁷⁹ By some miracle, I actually found him (he is reputed to be more difficult to find than President Nixon — at least by direct phone). He assured me (this is the third

³⁷⁸ Postmark: "Apr 12/1971."

³⁷⁹ George Plimpton, editor of the *Paris Review*, was not in fact as inaccessible as this letter would have it, and, as the postscript and other of his comments suggest, he appeared to be genuinely pleased by the Seferis interview. For further comment on this bit of postal confusion, see the introductory essay.

George Seferis in 1968, at the time of the interview by Edmund Keeley, later published in the *Paris Review*. Photograph courtesy of Edmund Keeley.

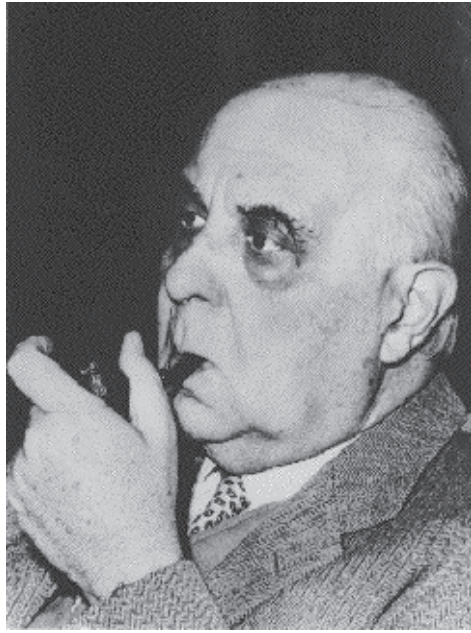


Photo: John Blazejewski

assurance) that complimentary copies had gone off to you some weeks ago, and their not having arrived might indicate some difficulty in the Greek mails — an ominous note, that. Anyway, he said that of course he would immediately see to it that a second set of complimentary copies was mailed off to you right away, this in addition to an air mail copy that was sent by his secretary after my last complaint. God and the Furies willing, you should have at least one copy of the volume by now and a double set of complimentary copies very soon. If you don't, I'll pursue Plimpton and his secretary with a shotgun, as they say in the American West: a rusty shotgun that has at least one mode of revenge besides the pellets that come out of it.

I have given Ambassador Kennan your message.³⁸⁰ He'll now be in touch with you directly.

We reach Athens on June 1, an thelei o Theos.³⁸¹

Love to you both,
Michalakis

³⁸⁰ See Seferis's letter of 7 April.

³⁸¹ "God willing." The previous four words are written in Greek characters.

P.S. Plimpton said that the response to the interview had been among the most enthusiastic in his ten years of offering this series to his readers.



G. Seferis / Agras, 20 / Athens, 502 / Greece³⁸²

Dear Michalaki, Today 12 Ap.³⁸³ I have received, at last! 1 copy of the Paris Review (they don't seem over there, under the shadow of Agha Khan, to indulge in lavishness — happily Henry Miller gave me the opportunity to obtain two more copies) and one copy of Cavafy's *new* (?) poems.³⁸⁴ It is not the moment now to discuss this matter. Put it on your agenda for our next meeting. — In any case thank you.

This card is posted by *ordinary mail*, you'll notice the difference of time with the usual air mail.

Cheers to both
Seferis



*The following letter was written by Maro Seferis to Edmund and Mary Keeley about two months after George Seferis's death on 21 September 1971.*³⁸⁵

GEORGE SEFERIS, AGRAS 20, ATHENS (501)

19. 11. 71

My dear ones.

Thank you for the article you had the kindness to send me. No, nothing has become more normal, on the contrary, I have become very tired, and I'm afraid my nerves will give way at some point. I

³⁸² This is a postcard. The postmark is illegible, but Seferis's insert below indicates that the postcard was written on 12 April.

³⁸³ The date has been inserted.

³⁸⁴ See the introductory essay for a discussion of the propriety of publishing poems found in Cavafy's files after his death.

³⁸⁵ Mrs. Seferis wrote in Greek script, and her letter has been translated by Edmund and Mary Keeley.

just manage to bear up. I have good friends and they help me, but unfortunately there are many people who are dreadful and mean-spirited, and sometimes there where you don't expect it. Luckily — shall I say so? — a great responsibility has fallen upon me with George's death, and I have a thousand and one things to arrange. In this, friends help me. Now something quite awful has happened again. Stamatis (you know him) has to go to England for a heart and lung operation.³⁸⁶ Of course I'll send Anna along with him, and I'll take care of the child, Daphne. All this has been added to all the rest. I'm telling you this in a few words. The void that George left me becomes more unbearable day by day, but I must hold up until everything is in order and I arrange things as he would have wanted. I'm trying, will I succeed? That's it, my good children; how nice it was then in America; I often think of that time and of you, how you treated us with such warmth and friendship. Are you coming back to us again?

I kiss both of you with much love always.

Maro

³⁸⁶ Stamatis Krinos, husband to Anna and father to Daphne mentioned in the sentence that follows. Stamatis died not long after the operation.

Appendix

The following letters are referred to in the text of the introductory essay or in the letters exchanged by George Seferis and Edmund Keeley.¹



BRITISH SCHOOL OF ARCHAEOLOGY
52, ODOUS SOUEDIAS
ATHENS, GREECE

9. ix. 59

My dear George,

I was most distressed to miss you while you were here — you come so rarely, and in any case I see so little of you these days.

Keeley has been writing to me about the difficulty of including in that anthology your “Thrush”. It would be a great pity, it seems to me, if it has to be cut. It is a good translation — better I think than any other I’ve seen, though the only other I’ve seen is frankly bad, so this is not saying much; and there is little more irritating than an extract only from an individual poem. I gather though that the question is more one of tact than of anything else — that you don’t wish in any way to upset Warner, who hopes to get out a selection of your work. This *is* tricky, I admit. I wonder whether if we mentioned in our volume that Rex Warner intends to bring out a fuller selection of your work, this would not compensate? (tho’ in fact I don’t think translations of this kind exclude each other — rather they stimulate interest). Keeley has of course published this version of the poem already, which would seem to be another reason why Warner should not really have cause for complaint. Any-

¹ I am grateful to the following for permission to publish letters reproduced in this Appendix: Anna Londou, Denise Sherrard, Arnold Erlich, Mrs. Henry Labouisse, Herbert S. Bailey, Jr., Gordon Hubel, Robert Keeley, and Maxine Groffsky.

how, do what you can to allow both versions if it can be done without any personal difficulty — Keeley has worked extremely hard on his translations of your poems — I don't think you are likely to have such alive *and* faithful English translations for a long while, and they are certainly, toute blague à part, much superior to Warner's, as far as I have seen those by Warner — and he will be most disappointed if he has to cut. But if it can't be it can't be.

We are in Euboea — in a lovely quiet place, the sea beneath, pine woods behind. Kathleen Raine is with us at the moment and sends her regards to you. How good it would be if you were to come for a visit. Perhaps another year, for, D V, we will be here on other years. (Zisimos also is due to come today: I wonder if you saw him, and how you found him?)

Give our greetings to your wife if she is in England — and return soon.

Yours as always,
Philip²



SHOW
THE MAGAZINE OF THE ARTS
140 east 57th street
NEW YORK 22, NEW YORK
PLAZA 2-6161

November 26, 1963

Mr. Edmund Keeley
Department of English
Princeton University
Princeton, New Jersey

Dear Mr. Keeley:

I understand that you have worked very closely with Giorgos Seferis as a friend and translator. Since I do not have his address, I wonder if you would be good enough to ask him if he would be interested in writing a 3,500 word article on the Age of Pericles.

² The letter is from Philip Sherrard.

The idea would be a view of that Age and its achievements through the eyes of a famous Greek writer. We would hope that he would cover such facets of the period as the personality of Pericles himself, his achievements and influence on the great artistic minds of his time. We feel that the article would have an extraordinary immediacy today because of Mr. Seferis' own unique position in the culture of modern Greece.

I am taking it for granted that Mr. Seferis does not write in English and we would, therefore, be most interested in having you translate the article, should he write in demotic Greek.

Could I prevail upon you to forward this expression of interest to Mr. Seferis? On the other hand, if you think that it would be more useful for me to get in touch with him directly, would you be good enough to let me have his address in Athens.

With many thanks.

Sincerely yours,
Arnold Erlich
Senior Editor



EMBASSY OF THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Athens, December 3, 1963

His Excellency
George Seferiades,
20 Agras Street,
Pangrati,
Athens.

Dear Mr. Ambassador:

Personally, and on behalf of my Government, I should like to express to you my deep appreciation for your message of sympathy on the occasion of the death of President John F. Kennedy.

It has moved me greatly that, in these days of mourning, you should share our sense of profound shock and our grief. The kindness and the warm solidarity shown to us by the Greek people in these sad circumstances are one more evidence of the close bonds linking our two countries.

I speak for all the American people when I say how grateful we are for your thoughtfulness and your friendship.

Yours very sincerely,
Henry R. Labouisse



Katounia — Limni — Euboea — Greece

16. i. 64

Dear George,

Americans work at enormous speed and seem inexhaustible. I have a letter today from Mike Keeley in which he says he is writing to you about — among other things — the possibility (which depends of course mainly on you) of himself and myself producing yet another translation of your poems (I have just received from Lacarriere his French translation). What do you think? I would cooperate if you would like it and feel it to be deserving. Mike has apparently written to Rex Warner, who supports the principle that the more translations there are, the better (within limits). It seems to me it is only worth our while doing a fuller set of translations than we have already done if our translations do in fact convey something — some quality, some apprehension — that Warner's do not. I cannot judge about this. I *suspect* our translations are more alive, and more loyal. But I cant say more.

Don't answer this. Write only to Keeley if you write at all. I simply want to let you know my reactions: that I would be overjoyed to help as I can if it were something you would like to see done, and that I believe there is a point in doing it.

Keep yourself well.

With affection to both of you.

Philip.³

³ The letter is from Philip Sherrard.



PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS
PRINCETON . NEW JERSEY

April 28, 1964

Mr. George Seferis
20 Agras Street
Athens 502, Greece

Dear Mr. Seferis:

As you already know from Professor Keeley, Princeton University Press is eager to bring out a collection of your poems, translated by Professor Keeley and Mr. Philip Sherrard. We want to make this translation as complete and authoritative as possible, and we believe that the translations by Professor Keeley and Mr. Sherrard will do justice to the quality of your poems, insofar as that is possible in the English language. We wish to publish the Greek texts facing the English translation, so that anyone who wishes to do so can compare the translations with the originals.⁴ This project, in our view, is one for the long term, to make your work as fully available as possible both in English and in Greek, and we intend to keep the book in print for a long time. In fact, as I am sure you know, it is one of the functions of a university press to keep important books available to the public for many years, even after normal commercial considerations would force the book out of print.

I have discussed the entire project in detail with Professor Keeley, and I do not believe there are any serious obstacles to going ahead. He has shown me your recent letter, and also the copy of your agreement, jointly with Rex Warner, with the Bodley Head publishers. It seems clear that the agreement applies only to Mr. Warner's translation,⁵ and that it does not give *exclusive* rights; and paragraph 4, in which the "author hereby warrants to the publishers that the said work is an original work, has not been published in

⁴ This sentence and the opening clause from the one that follows were underlined by Seferis.

⁵ This phrase underlined by Seferis.

book form within the territories referred to in Clause 2" refers clearly only to the particular translation of Mr. Warner,⁶ and not to any other possible translation or to the original Greek itself. Incidentally, I understand from Professor Keeley that Professor Warner is entirely willing for us to publish the translation of your poems by Professor Keeley and Mr. Sherrard.

I am enclosing herewith four copies of an agreement for publication of a Princeton University Press edition of your poems, as translated by Keeley and Sherrard. I hope very much that this agreement is satisfactory. I have been through it in detail with Professor Keeley, and we have endeavored, so far as possible, to meet the stipulations in your recent letter. I should say, however, that the royalty scale⁷ provided is the highest ever provided by Princeton University Press, and indeed by most American university publishers. We have published many books with this royalty scale, including other Nobel Prize winners such as Albert Einstein and C. N. Yang. In recent years our publications have won four Pulitzer Prizes in the United States, and in no case was a higher royalty offered. Indeed, much as we desire to publish this edition and translation of your poems, I believe that our Trustees would be extremely reluctant to authorize a higher royalty than we have ever paid before.⁸ Therefore I hope very much that you will accept the royalties offered. In this connection I should emphasize again that it is our policy to keep books in print for a long time, and this naturally increases the cost of operation, thereby reducing the rate of royalties that we can pay, but probably increasing the total over the time that the book is in print.

We have a continuing arrangement with Oxford University Press to⁹ publish our books in the British Commonwealth, and under this arrangement they would publish the book in England. Of course you are familiar with their publishing; I am confident that they would do well with the book.

Also I should say something about possible paperback¹⁰ publication. I have provided for this in the contract in two ways: a possible Princeton paperback, or perhaps a lease to another paperback

⁶ The preceding ten words of this phrase were underlined by Seferis.

⁷ Preceding two words underlined by Seferis.

⁸ Preceding seventeen words underlined by Seferis.

⁹ Preceding four words underlined by Seferis.

¹⁰ Word underlined by Seferis.

publisher. This would be desirable eventually, but it is impossible now to tell what would be best later. Therefore I want to hold these possibilities open.¹¹

I want to say also that we plan to make this a very handsome¹² publication. Our books, as you may know, are noted for their typographic excellence, and we expect to produce a book which will be typographically appropriate for its contents. I think you can be confident of having high-quality printing, and a handsome binding.

If you find the contract satisfactory, please sign all four copies. You will note that Professor Keeley and I have already signed the copies. Mr. Sherrard should sign them too, so I should be grateful if you would send them to him after signing them yourself. He can then keep one, send one to you, and return the other two to me. I shall give one to Professor Keeley.

I realize, of course, that you may have some questions about the agreement. If so, please don't hesitate to ask.

In closing I want to say again that we are looking forward to publishing this edition and translation of your poems. You can be sure that we shall do our best to give them the kind of publication they deserve.

Sincerely yours,
Herbert S. Bailey, Jr.¹³



10. 6. 64¹⁴

Mr Herbert S. Bailey Jr.
Director and Editor
Princeton University Press
Princeton - New Jersey

Dear Mr Bailey,

I thank you for your letter of April 28. Absence from Athens and ill health prevented me from answering earlier.

¹¹ Seferis has written "Greek text" in the margin next to this paragraph.

¹² Word underlined by Seferis.

¹³ Director of the Princeton University Press.

¹⁴ The letter is in Seferis's English script.

I am very pleased at the prospect of being published by Princeton University Press. On the other hand as I am not an expert in the technicalities of the matter I rely upon your interpretation of my Agreement with the Bodley Head.

Now some few questions.

a) The right I am granting you concerns only the particular translation mentioned in the Agreement and not the Greek text or other English translations. So clause No. 1 (in [illegible]): . . . “to publish or to cause others to publish the said work in *all forms in the English language* . . .” is not quite clear to me. It should read I believe “. . . in all forms in the above English translation . . .”

b) when you speak of paperback edition you mean an edition with or without the Greek text.

c) On page 3 of the agreement there is a correction initialled by you but not by Mr Keeley. What Mr Sherrard and myself are to do

d) Signatures of witnesses. Everybody can sign as such?

As soon as I have your answer I shall send the Agreements to Mr Sherrard for signature.

With my best wishes

Yours sincerely
George Seferis



PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS
PRINCETON . NEW JERSEY

September 24, 1964¹⁵

Mr. George Seferis
20 Agras Street
Athens, Greece

Dear Mr. Seferis:

After his very pleasant talk with you in July, Professor Keeley wrote to us to say that two questions remained to be answered

¹⁵ In the margin opposite the date, Seferis has written in Greek: “I wrote Keeley 8/11/64.”

before you would feel perfectly free to sign the contract for Princeton University Press's publication of your poems as translated by Keeley and Sherrard.

The first question had to do with our interpretation of the contract you have with the Bodley Head. I am pleased to be able to enclose the opinion of the foremost American copyright lawyer,¹⁶ which, in a clear statement, supports our interpretation of your agreement with the Bodley Head.

Your second question, as Mike Keeley related to us, had to do with the possibility of a paperback edition¹⁷ of your poems. Specifically, you questioned, as I understand it, whether we would guarantee that the original Greek would appear on the pages facing the English translation in the paperback edition. As Mr. Bailey has already written, we prefer not to make a definite contractual commitment on this at the present time,¹⁸ although we certainly tend to agree with your thinking and Mike's that the Greek originals should appear in any and all editions. Should, however, the possibility of a paperback edition have to be ruled out because of problems of space and price, we should like to be able to at least advance the possibility that only the English versions be published in paperback. That is not to say that this is what we prefer, but it is to say that we would probably prefer this rather than have to abandon the whole idea of a paperback publication. However, it is my personal judgment, based on estimates we have made of the length of the proposed hardback edition, that we would certainly be able to do both the Greek and the English in a paperback version.

With these opinions and assurances in hand, I hope you will now feel absolutely free to sign the contract and to forward it to us.

Incidentally, Mike Keeley also has a copy of Mrs. Pilpel's¹⁹ opinion and he heartily concurs.

With best wishes to you and the pleasant expectation that I might have the pleasure of meeting you this coming spring, I remain,

Sincerely yours,
Gordon Hubel²⁰

¹⁶ Preceding four words underlined by Seferis.

¹⁷ Preceding three words underlined by Seferis.

¹⁸ Preceding thirteen-word phrase underlined by Seferis.

¹⁹ Harriet F. Pilpel of the law firm Greenbaum, Wolff and Ernst.

²⁰ Executive Assistant, Princeton University Press.



November 18, 1964²¹

Dear Mr. Seferis:

I am again writing to you, even at the risk of seeming importunate, because I should like very much to know whether we may have your permission to present you in a reading of your poetry in our program at the Guggenheim Museum of Art. We should want you to read in Greek; and Mr. Keeley would read the English translations of the poems. The ICA²² has agreed to schedule this program, but we should like the reassurance of knowing that you consent before making our plans.

Ever since the first English translations of your poems began appearing, I have wanted to make a bi-lingual program to celebrate your poetry. We made such a program for Mr. Giuseppe Ungaretti last year, which I am happy to say that he very much enjoyed. We should be most appreciative if you could send us a post card simply saying yes or no — meaning that we have (or have not) your consent to plan such a program for you. If yes, then we should not bother you again but instead go to the ICA to settle the dates and other details.

Please accept my best wishes and admiration.

Sincerely yours,
Elizabeth Kray
Executive Director

Mr. George Seferis
20 Agras Street
Athens 502, Greece

²¹ "Copy" is printed across the body of the letter.

²² Institute for Contemporary Arts. This institute was arranging a lecture tour for Seferis at the time, a tour that Seferis had to cancel in January 1965.



GEORGE SEFERIS, AGRAS 20, ATHENS 502, GREECE²³

4. 1. 65

Dear Mr Hubel

I thank you for your letter of Sept. 24, 1964. After reading Mrs Pilpel's opinion I have signed the contract for Princeton Univ. Press's publication of my poems and had it signed also by Mr Ph. Sherrard. I return it to you herewith. As for the paperback edition I agree with you and I consider the question open for the time being. When the moment of such an edition comes, we shall *discuss again the matter of the Greek text

Yours sincerely
George Seferis

* Discussed at Princeton Fall 1968: Greek text shall be included²⁴



PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS
PRINCETON . NEW JERSEY

October 5, 1966

Mr. George Seferis
Agras 20
Athens 502, Greece

Dear Mr. Seferis:

I have just spoken with Mr. Keeley about the foreword he and Mr. Sherrard have written for our edition of your poems. Quite understandably, he is disturbed by your reservations in this regard,

²³ The following is a draft from Seferis's archive at the Gennadius Library, Athens.

²⁴ The first Princeton University Press paperback edition (1971) did not include the Greek text. The first Jonathan Cape paperback edition (1973) did, and so did the second Princeton University Press paperback edition (1981), but not the third (1995).

and he thought that I might be able to explain to you why we felt it so necessary to include this type of introduction.

Let me say at the outset that such introductions are the normal practice in scholarly editions published in this country. Indeed, it would be quite unusual for an American publisher *not* to include an introduction to the works of a distinguished foreign writer whose language and traditions were generally unfamiliar to an English-speaking audience. In our recent edition of the prose of Osip Mandelstam, we included just this sort of introduction.

You may feel that the poems should be able to stand by themselves. I believe that the translations of Messrs. Keeley and Sherrard allow this to happen; but for a reader who is unfamiliar with the context of your poetry, a short introduction and appreciation would seem to us essential if he is to reach the kind of understanding of your work that we hope our edition will occasion. This desire for a critical introduction is not limited to us and the translators. Long ago, when we were first considering the possibility of publishing an English edition of your poems, we asked a number of scholars in the field of modern Greek studies (both here and in England) what kind of edition they thought would be most appropriate. The consensus was that a complete edition, including a critical introduction and notes, would be preferable to one that merely offered a translation of the poems.

I can understand why Messrs. Keeley and Sherrard chose to write a short history and appreciation²⁵ rather than to confine their introduction to a discussion of their problems as translators. These problems, although very great, are of limited interest to most readers — even scholarly readers. And with the Greek text so readily available in this edition, those familiar with the Greek language can actually see for themselves how Keeley and Sherrard confronted and resolved these problems. It is your poetry, rather than the work of the translators, that deserves attention, it seems to us; and we feel that the foreword which Keeley and Sherrard have written admirably focuses this attention for the particular audience that our edition will reach. I most earnestly hope that you will find it possible to understand our position in this matter, and that the edition, as now conceived, will ultimately receive your full support.

²⁵ Word underlined by Seferis.

Since English is more widely read than Greek,²⁶ and since this book presents both English and the original Greek texts, we expect that our publication will become the standard authoritative international edition. Therefore it is important to have a foreword²⁷ which provides a context from outside the Greek culture and tradition. Without such a foreword many readers will be less able to appreciate your poems, and our only aim is to present the poems in the best possible way. I trust that you will understand and support our judgment in this matter.²⁸

Sincerely yours,
Herbert S. Bailey, Jr.



GEORGE SEFERIS, AGRAS 20, ATHENS 502, GREECE

12 Oct. 66

Mr Herbert S. Bailey Jr.
Princeton University Press

Dear Mr. Bailey,

I thank you for your letter of the 5th. I never had the intention to interfere with your editorial policy. The only thing I did was to express to Mr Keeley, in all fairness and friendship, my opinion on the introductory texts which were submitted to me. Our last meeting took place in Athens on the 10th of July. I do not know if the writers have brought any alterations to those texts and the feelings which I have expressed in a recent private letter to Professor Keeley were based on my July impressions, as I could remember them. In conclusion my final opinion is reserved for the time when the book will be in my hands. This opinion should not create any difficulties for your Press and shall be based, as far as I am concerned, not on the quantity of readers but on the quality of the texts.

Yours sincerely
George Seferis

²⁶ Preceding phrase underlined by Seferis.

²⁷ Word underlined by Seferis.

²⁸ Sentence underlined by Seferis.



PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS²⁹
PRINCETON . NEW JERSEY 08540

October 24, 1966

Mr. George Seferis
Agras 20
Athens 502, Greece

Dear Mr. Seferis:

Thank you for your letter of October 12. At no time did we consider your correspondence with Professor Keeley any sort of attempt to interfere with our editorial policy. On the basis of your remarks regarding the Introduction, Professor Keeley approached us about the possibility of our dropping this section of the edition. It was our view that it should not be dropped, and we merely wished to explain to you the reasoning behind this view. Our decision is of course based on the quality and appropriateness of the text in question. It seems to us to serve a legitimate purpose in an edition of this kind, and in our opinion, it does so in keeping with the high standard that we expect of our publications.

I am sure that the translators would be most grateful for any suggestions that you may wish to make once you have had a chance to study their revised text.

Sincerely yours,
Herbert S. Bailey, Jr.

²⁹ In Seferis's English script at the top: "America — Collected."



GEORGE SEFERIS, AGRAS 20, ATHENS 502, GREECE³⁰

25. XII. '67

Dear Mr. Kaysen,³¹

I thank you for your letter of November 21; Professor Edward [*sic*] Keeley was right in telling you that I might be interested in spending some time at Princeton as a member of the Institute for Advanced Study.

I came to think³² feel that to accept your kind invitation for the whole academic year, would mean for me too long an absence from my home; but³³ I shall be glad to come, with my wife, for next *Fall Term* (Sept. 23 — Dec. 13 1968).

As for the matter I intend to work on, I³⁴ have in mind to devote myself by then to the Myths and legends in Plato. I mean to study separately those rational elements in his writings. As you know perhaps³⁵ I am not a scholar but a poet and essayist. It is a long work³⁶ attempt to which I keep thinking since before my thirties; I am hoping that I can take advantage of your library's calm hospitality.

Please accept my best wishes for the coming new year;³⁷

thanking you again

Yours sincerely,

George Seferis

³⁰ Draft of letter in Seferis's English hand.

³¹ Carl Kaysen was the director of the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton.

³² Preceding three words crossed out.

³³ Preceding four words crossed out, then the last word is retained (with "stet" underlining).

³⁴ Here Seferis crossed out a long phrase: "can mention (if conditions do not change till my departure for the States next September."

³⁵ Word crossed out.

³⁶ Preceding two words crossed out.

³⁷ Here Seferis has crossed out a phrase and an entire sentence: "it looks like spending for me an American season. just after your letter I had an invitation from Harvard to be Charles Eliot Norton professor 1969—1970."

27. XII. 67

Mr Franklin L. Ford.³⁸
The Dean,
Faculty of Arts and Sciences,
Harvard University.

Private

Dear Mr. Ford,

I am highly honoured by your letter of December 12 inviting me to accept a one-year appointment as Charles Eliot Norton Professor of Poetry for the academic year 1969–1970 with a salary of \$28.000.

Although I have never spent long periods in the States, it is sufficient for me to recollect that my regretted friend T. S. Eliot or Igor Stravinsky held this post, in order to realize what this appointment means. So, I am certain, you will understand my sadness now that I have to inform you that, in the present circumstances, I am not able to accept it. Allow me, please, to explain my reasons as shortly as I can:

Toward 1962 I felt that it was high time for me to cease any participation in my country's politics, even emotionally. I spare you the details of this long and painful process. I mention this only in order to explain that I do not belong to the kind of people easily excited by political fluctuations or party rhetorics; I have no party, left or right. My only devotion is to my creative work; here the difficulties arise:

You know perhaps that since last spring a censorship is functioning in my country; and my belief is that no written work can prosper without freedom of expression; I mean not only my own freedom but also the freedom of any one else to fight my opinions. For this reason I have withdrawn from the printers [*sic*] hands two of my forthcoming books and I do not intend to publish anything in my country as long as this situation lasts.

Of course your wordrenowned [*sic*] University, whose life you invite me to share for a year, is splendidly enjoying the benefits of

³⁸ Unsigned copy enclosed with Seferis's letter to me dated 13 January 1968.

freedom of speech. But alas, I feel that if there is no freedom of expression in one's own country, there is no such freedom anywhere in the world. The condition of the emigrant does not attract me; I want to stay with my people and share its vicissitudes.

Please excuse my unadorned frankness; the importance I attach to this matter obliged me to adopt the way I wrote this letter. I expect to come next Fall Term to Princeton (Institute for advanced [*sic*] Study). I hope by then to find an opportunity and come to Harvard to present my regards to you.

Yours sincerely,



GEORGE SEFERIS, AGRAS 20, ATHENS 502, GREECE*

13.1.'68

Dear Mr Kaysen,

I thank you for your letter of January 3 and enclosures. Yes, as I have written to you in my last letter (25.XII.67), I intend to come to the Institute by the first days of September. I do not see difficulties for my visa and I hope I shall not trouble Mrs. Barnett. I thank you also for your willingness to do your best in making provision for us in the Members Housing Project.

Sincerely yours
George Seferis

* You are perhaps aware that this is my pen name; my passport name is: George. S. SEFERIADES.



*Telegram*³⁹

Hon E. J. McCarthy

U. S. Senate

Washington D. C. 20510

And Time Began arrived⁴⁰ last moment stop Embarking now for Athens. This just to wish you a very happy New Year and express my affectionate thanks

George Seferis



GEORGE SEFERIS, AGRAS 20, ATHENS 501, GREECE⁴¹

19. Jan. [1969]

Dear Professor Thompson,⁴²

We landed at Ellinikon just in time to greet the New Year for which we express to you and Mrs Thompson our best wishes. There was still light at the aerodrome — this characteristic Attic light — and I was happy I have been allowed to face it again.

I am glad that I had at least [illegible] the opportunity to consider your great country from the standpoint of the Institute's woods. It was far less confusing than from the crowded and noisy big cities. I should like to add that your kind thought of taking us to Cranbury and to your home just a week before our departure was inspired by a god: you made to us the gift of one of our brightest days in Princeton.

At the end the Dairy with the mecanised [*sic*] cows⁴³ intervened and took quite out of my mind what I wanted to mention to you

³⁹ The telegram to Eugene McCarthy in both Seferis's and my hands, probably sent as Seferis was leaving the U.S. just before New Year's, 1969. McCarthy introduced Seferis at a reading at the Y.M.H.A. Poetry Center in New York on 2 December 1968.

⁴⁰ The first four words are in Seferis's hand; the rest is in my hand.

⁴¹ "Copy for E. L. K." in Seferis's English hand at top.

⁴² Homer Thompson, the distinguished archaeologist, was a professor at the Institute for Advanced Study.

⁴³ At that time, the Walker Gordon Dairy near Princeton had a revolving milking station with milking machines for its herd.

before our parting. During my goodbye call on Mr Kaysen I ventured to ask him, as you had advised me, if there was a possibility of coming again next Fall at the Institute. He answered that: a) the Institute's usual policy was to space visits and b) he considered next Fall a difficult period as there was a heavy demand for memberships. — I feel that this puts an end to the matter.

We are looking forward to our meeting here next Spring. Best regards to Mrs Thompson.

Yours sincerely
George Seferis



[George Seferis's Statement of 28 March 1969]
From George Seferis⁴⁴
For publication

A long time ago I made the decision to keep out of my country's politics. As I tried to explain on another occasion, this did not mean at all that I was indifferent to our political life.

So, from that time until now I have refrained, as a rule, from touching on matters of that kind. Besides, all that I published up to the beginning of 1967 and my stance thereafter (I haven't published anything in Greece since freedom was gagged) have shown clearly enough, I believe, my thinking.

Nevertheless, for months now I have felt, inside myself and around me, with increasing intensity, the obligation to speak out about our current situation. With all possible brevity, this is what I would say:

It has been almost two years now that a regime has been imposed on us which is totally inimical to the ideals for which our world — and our people so resplendently — fought during the last world war.

It is a state of enforced torpor in which all those intellectual values that we succeeded in keeping alive, with agony and labor, are about to sink into swampy stagnant waters. It wouldn't be difficult

⁴⁴ This is George Seferis's statement denouncing the Colonels' regime. My translation is based on a carbon copy of the original in the Selected Papers of George Seferis, Manuscripts Division, Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

for me to understand how damage of this kind would not count for much with certain people. Unfortunately, this isn't the only danger in question.

Everyone has been taught and knows by now that in the case of dictatorial regimes the beginning may seem easy, but tragedy awaits, inevitably, in the end. The drama of this ending torments us, consciously or unconsciously — as in the immemorial choruses of Aeschylus. The longer the anomaly remains, the more the evil grows.

I am a man without any political affiliation, and I can therefore speak without fear or passion. I see ahead of me the precipice toward which the oppression that has shrouded the country is leading us. This anomaly must stop. It is a national imperative.

Now I return to silence. I pray to God not to bring upon me a similar need to speak out again.



Claryville, New York, 12725
August 4, 1970

Dear G. S.

We have been gone a month and we miss Greece. I hope it — Greece — will become a chronic rather than an acute disease; for us, that is.

I have found no solutions nor sought any. If I find one I shall pass it on.

After three weeks in the mountains I can say we are happy, or trying to be.

Congratulations on your anthology. Here we eat wild strawberries for breakfast but we do not collect flowers.

Be happy, always

Bob⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Robert Keeley, my brother, for some years a member of the U.S. Foreign Service stationed in Greece.



160 Mercer Street
Princeton, N.J. 08540
12 February 1971

Dear George:

The occasion for writing is principally feelings of guilt over not have communicated for so long. Also the appearance of the interview in the *Paris Review*. And the enclosed "Autobiographical Notes" by Borges in the *New Yorker*, which I read this morning in an old issue and thought you might like to have if you have not seen it. There are some wonderful items in it, such as how he distributed his poetry to the powers that be by stuffing his booklet in the overcoats of the visitors to the offices of a literary magazine (page 62) and the business at the end about his enemies and how he deals with adverse criticism (page 98). Please keep this. I expect it will be published in book form at some date, if it has not already happened.

We are living not far from where you lived when you were at the Institute for Advanced Study. Our house is on Mercer Street, near the corner of Springdale Lane, which some people use to get to the Institute. This past fall my daughter Michal was learning to drive a car, under my tutelage, and one of the hardest things she had to learn was "parallel parking", which features prominently in the New Jersey driving test. I used to take her to the parking lot next to the main building of the Institute to practice her parking, using as guinea pigs the innocent cars parked there by the faculty. They never threw us off, but must have thought us mad, parking and re-parking the same old Citroen, all morning long. She has now passed her test and is driving "solo."

We will be going to Uganda next, where I will be Counselor of the Embassy. It is a pleasant country, about 9 million people and about half as many giraffes, baboons, lions, rhinos, buffalo, monkeys, etc. Christopher⁴⁶ is thrilled with the idea of chasing after all the animals. I look forward to the climate, which is most pleasant. Best of all we are given leave once a year and are flown to Athens,

⁴⁶ Christopher Keeley, Robert's son.

the nearest “civilized” point on the map, apparently. We hope to make that trip often. And the most direct route to Uganda is via Athens by plane, so we may pass your way in early July on the way there. I hope we’ll find you at home in Pangrati then. We may be in Athens a week or ten days then (early July).

We think of you often and hope your morale is as good as the circumstances permit. Cheers and love from all of us,

Bob⁴⁷



THE PARIS REVIEW
17 RUE DE TOURNON PARIS 6 633-6518⁴⁸

March 22, 1971

Dear Mr. Seferis:

Since our New York office sends out contributor’s copies of the magazine, I assumed that you had already received the Paris Review with your interview.

I am terribly sorry that you have not yet received copies of this issue. I am sending you today two copies by air-mail.

I think the interview is splendid.

Best,
Miss Maxine Groffsky
Paris Editor



Princeton⁴⁹
18 April 1971

Dear George:

Your March 5 letter was a pleasure, especially the joke about my transfer from a human zoo to an animal one. I am writing in haste, mainly to send along the enclosed clipping from the New York

⁴⁷ Robert Keeley.

⁴⁸ In the right margin, Seferis has written in Greek: “received, thanked 28. 3. 71.”

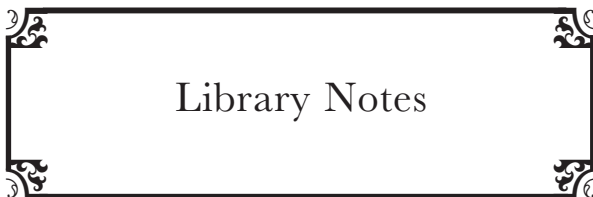
⁴⁹ Envelope return address: 160 Mercer Street. / Princeton, N.J. / 08540

Times about your friend McCarthy, who is concentrating more and more on poetry and less and less on politics these days, it seems. We have changed our plans slightly and hope to be in Athens from about June 24 to about July 7.⁵⁰ At least part of that time we will be staying with Argyni Goutos in Kifissia, but I hope to rent a car so as to be able to get around the city and out to the beaches. Today is Orthodox Easter and Mike and Mary are off celebrating in Northern New Jersey, but I have too much school work so am staying in to try to catch up. My courses here end in only two weeks, after which I have to go to Washington to take a 3-week course in the underdeveloped world (I have lived most of my life in that “world” but they think I need to learn some more about it) and to try to learn something about Uganda. Sorry to hear from your letter that you were not well. I hope you have improved and are able to enjoy the Easter season. We are sorry not to be there to carry candles around the Plaka as we used to like to do at this season. Practically all the news we hear from Greece is depressing, but worst of all we hear so little and feel so remote and helpless. Be of good cheer if you can, and we hope to see you soon. As ever,

Bob⁵¹

⁵⁰ Dates underlined by Seferis.

⁵¹ Robert Keeley.



Library Notes

THE SALTON GIFT OF GREEK AND ROMAN COINS: REMARKS ON A COIN OF PHAISTOS

A recent exhibition in Firestone's Main Gallery emphasized the extent of Library holdings in coins and currency: over four hundred items were on display, with more than fifty donors represented.¹ Coinage of the ancient world comprised nearly one-fourth of the total, filling five out of nineteen display cases. That is not an unreasonably high proportion. Until the development of banking and the present electronic age, Greek and Roman models determined the form of European money. For artistic quality, the best of them have never been matched. And the preserved literary evidence for the ancient world is relatively sparse, so that coinage forms an important part of the historical record. The Library's classical coins still draw more attention than anything else in our numismatic collections, both from students who handle them in precepts and from scholars, near and far, who have an interest in researching particular series.

It is a special pleasure to report that 1996 saw a very significant addition to this essential part of our holdings, Mr. and Mrs. Mark Salton's gift of one hundred eighty-eight Greek and Roman coins. The gift falls into two parts, representing two distinct collecting interests. The seventy-nine Roman pieces are all of the imperial period: silver denarii of the third-century Severan dynasty, chosen from the Salton collection specifically to fill gaps in Princeton's series. One particularly interesting piece has a reverse design representing the two young heirs of Septimius Severus, Caracalla and Geta, under the literal protection of a giant standing Jupiter.² As a

¹ "Money: Whence it Came, Where it's Going," 26 January – 20 April 1997.

² H. Mattingly and E. A. Sydenham, *Roman Imperial Coinage IV.1*, p. 121 no. 240: 210 A.D.

fine example of Roman official ideology expressed in coinage, it found a place in the recent “Money” exhibition.

Half-a-dozen Greek coins from the Salton gift were also put on display. It was especially hard to make a selection here. As with the Severan denarii, all of the one hundred nine coins in the group are highly exhibitable — of excellent quality, beautifully maintained, and representing a wide geographic and chronological range. The Saltons’ principle of collection was “Animals on Greek Coins,” but this was interpreted in the broadest way, affording some delightful surprises. The group contained not only coins whose chief design was an animal, like the bull on the Cretan piece to be described here, but many in which the animal was a tiny symbol associated with the main type. A charming example is a rare fifth-century silver stater of Cilician Soli, on Turkey’s south coast.³ Its central design of a stylized grape-bunch is flanked by a perfectly modelled little housefly — perhaps the personal badge of a satrap, since Cilicia then formed part of the Persian Empire.

To describe the whole Salton gift here would be impractical and inappropriate. Rather, a single piece has been chosen for extended comment, in order to suggest the possibilities for study these coins provide. It may seem perverse to highlight what is surely one of the group’s less aesthetically appealing pieces, a silver stater of Cretan Phaistos dated to the late fourth or early third century B.C. But its rarity and iconographic interest justify the choice. And Cretan issues are often of mediocre execution compared to the best Greek coins, simply because they were rare in antiquity, as they are today, and do not reflect a steady local tradition of skilled die-engraving.⁴

Obverse: Young Herakles standing facing, his head turned to the left (the viewer’s right), a club in his right hand, a bow in his left; to his right, his lion-skin, hung on a tree; to his left, an ear of grain (barley) or olive-leaf. Around him to left and right, four large dots.

Reverse: A bull charging left; around him, a wreath composed of slender leaves and many small berries (olive?).

³ E. Levante, *SNG Switzerland I*, no. 40var.

⁴ On the island’s classical coinage the standard reference, especially for dating, is G. Le Rider, *Monnaies crétoises du Ve au Ier siècle av. J.C.* (Paris: Geuthner, 1966); the fullest repository of coins is still J. Svoronos, *Numismatique de la Crète ancienne* (Macon: Protat, 1890). Most

11.74 gm., 22–24 mm., die axis 10. From the Hermitage collection (Schlessinger sale, Berlin, Feb. 4, 1935, no. 1068).

Travellers to Crete will remember Phaistos, the city that produced this coin, as the site of a great Bronze Age palace, nearly the equal of the better-known Knossos complex excavated by Sir Arthur Evans. Devotees of the book arts may think of it as the find-spot of a famous baked-clay roundel now in the museum at Herakleion. Tentatively dated to the early second millennium B.C., the so-called “Phaistos disk” is stamped with repeated pictographs in a whorl-shaped linear pattern. It has been described as an early example of the use of movable type, though its message is still undeciphered, like that of the just as mysterious “Linear A” script that succeeded it in Bronze Age Crete.

The Dark Ages of the Aegean world saw the collapse of this exotic palace culture, and the rise in its place of the Greek city state. Phaistos was gradually overshadowed by its equally ancient neighbor Gortyn. The two communities shared Crete’s richest agricultural plain, the Mesara; it was probably a source of friction between them, but in any case inter-city rivalry was almost a way of life — certainly a way of deploying spare energies — for classical Greeks. This was particularly true of Crete, now somewhat cut off from the main stream of Aegean politics and commerce. By the third century B.C. the whole island was engulfed in conflict. Inscribed oaths survive as evidence for bitter local hatreds: “Never will I think well of the Lyttians . . . I will do every possible harm to the city of the Lyttians.”⁵ At some point in the second century B.C., Gortyn destroyed Phaistos and appropriated its land. Only Roman rule, imposed in the mid-first century, brought a final end to the island’s conflicts: it was Rome’s policy to repress inter-city rivalries within her empire. Gortyn continued to prosper, becoming the center of the island’s Roman administration and then of its first Christian bishopric.

At its site a great inscription, sometimes called “the queen of Greek inscriptions,” is visible today.⁶ It records Gortyn’s laws as they were codified in the fifth century B.C. — whether early, middle,

of Crete’s inscriptions can be found in M. Guarducci, *Inscriptiones Creticae I–IV* (Rome: Libreria dello Stato, 1935–1950).

⁵ *Inscriptiones Creticae I*, Dreros no. 4.

⁶ *Inscriptiones Creticae IV*, no. 72.

or late is debated. Fragments are preserved of a still earlier code. These laws reflect the influence of the Dorian Greeks who had invaded Crete at the end of the Bronze Age. For present purposes, what the successive versions have to say about money is most interesting. The early fragments show that fines at Gortyn, and probably elsewhere in Crete, were at first assessed not in coined money but in axes, bowls, and tripods, the currency of Homeric epic. Since Greeks had known the use of coinage from 600 B.C. or before, this assessment in metal artifacts is usually seen as a sign of social conservatism. Likewise Dorian Sparta, whose customs were close to those of Dorian Crete, until the third century B.C. banned the minting and internal use of precious-metal money. The purpose was to protect a ruling class of landowning warriors from the temptation to venality and commerce.

But on this point Gortyn's fifth-century code has already departed from Dorian conservatism, assessing penalties in silver staters (the denomination of our Phaistos piece) and their fractions. Cretan minting of coin is thought to have begun in the fifth century as well, though its chronology is very doubtful. The monetary penalties, largely for personal violence short of homicide, are not inconsiderable — up to two hundred staters for rape of a free man or woman — and they apply to slaves and serfs who work the land as well as to their aristocratic masters. Since the code allows convicted offenders to be seized and held by their accusers, a sort of legalized kidnap-and-ransom system may be reflected here.

Still, the fines seem high for a region that produced no silver: Plutarch, in his account of Solon's laws for Athens, regarded low fines as an expectable consequence of regional scarcity.⁷ We do not know how classical Crete obtained the precious metal for its money. Trade cannot have been a major factor. A preserved second-century agreement between two Cretan cities provides for the fair division of silver recovered from a wrecked trireme, and it has been proposed that such incidents provided much of the island's coinage. That seems unlikely, even though ancient Cretans had a reputation for both piracy and avarice. More plausible is Le Rider's suggestion⁸ that Cretan mercenary soldiers brought their pay home, augmenting the island's metal supply: Greek mercenaries were paid in silver or even gold. It is understandable, in any case, that Cretan

⁷ *Solon* ch. 23.

⁸ *Monnaies crétoises*, p. 191.

cities did not mint much silver coinage, and that with some notable exceptions it tends to be ill-executed. Overstrikes on the issues of other Greek cities are common, sometimes so carelessly done that the earlier coins are still identifiable. In fact this is one of the few ways we have to date these issues, by putting them in the context of other, better-regulated Greek series, for Cretan coins often have no inscription at all, let alone indications of date. Since Princeton's new piece shares obverse and reverse dies with an overstruck piece in Paris,⁹ it too is probably overstruck, though no traces of the earlier design remain.

But technical limitations did not daunt Cretan die-engravers, and what gives Crete's coinages special interest in spite of their frequent crudeness is the variety and liveliness of their subject-matter. Such variety can be explained. The rich and lively iconography of the Minoan-Mycenaean past, whose fragments still impress us today, was far more visible in classical Crete. But much of it was already mysterious. Since Cretans were natural tale-tellers (or, as cynical contemporaries put it, "liars"), new explanations proliferated. So did rival versions promoting local interests. That was not peculiar to Crete: "Greek legends usually disagree," said Pausanias in the second century A.D., "and about lineage as much as anything." This is reflected to an unusual degree in Cretan coinage.

Oddly, a shortage of silver may also help to explain the variety of design. Local money did not regularly leave the island in trade, as Athenian silver left Athens, where it was the product of local mines and one of the city's most successful exports. Unlike the stereotyped Athenian "owls," Crete's issues did not need to retain a single recognizable pattern for foreign markets. It seems likely that the coin designs were devised in a spirit of civic self-assertion, for the eyes of other Cretans. Many depict myths, and local variants of myths. Some are not now identifiable. We know, thanks to the ancient authors Theophrastus and Pliny, that the Gortynian design of a young woman seated in the branches of a giant plane-tree represents Europa, whom a bull sent by Zeus (in a different version, Zeus in the form of a bull) had carried away from Phoenicia to Crete. But other Gortynian coins show a later moment of the story. They tell us what we would not otherwise know: that Zeus, with truly godlike versatility, consummated the affair in eagle form. Phaistos produced its own version of this design, showing a young

⁹ *Monnaies crétoises*, pl. xxi.14.

man in a tree holding a rooster. It looks like a deliberate counterpart to Gortyn's Europa, but the story behind it is unknown.

By contrast, the obverse of Princeton's new Phaistos coin shows a relatively familiar figure, the panhellenic hero Herakles, with his usual attributes of bow, club, and lion skin. Even here there are unexplained elements — the grain ear or leaf at lower right, the four big dots in the coin's field, the tree on which the lion skin is draped. The tree may simply be a convenient bit of furniture, but already in Minoan times trees were prominent elements of Cretan design and presumably of cult. Surely a local cult or legend is referred to: Pausanias records a tradition that Herakles had fathered the city's eponymous founder.

The reverse designs of Greek coins often complemented those on the obverse, so the sideways-dashing animal here may be the Cretan bull whose conquest was one of Herakles' canonical labors. Its hooves seem to be tangled in ropes — a detail which supports this view, since it also appears in vase-paintings of the episode. But it could be Europa's bull. Or might the two be the same, as one ancient tradition asserted? (A rarer version of the design shows *two* bulls.) Much remains unknown, and such mysteries form part of the interest of Cretan coinage.

Another mystery is its function. Clearly, in under-monetized societies, governments did not routinely issue coinage as a general public good, and different coin series might be produced for different reasons. Ancient historical writers, more interested in political than monetary matters, seldom provide answers here. Fragmentary evidence from diverse sources must be put together. It is tempting to think the Cretan staters with peculiar local types were produced, at least in part, for the payment of fines like those specified in Gortyn's code, and it may not be irrelevant that any fines left unpaid by the perpetrators of crime had to be made up by Gortyn's highest officials.¹⁰ But evidence to link fines with particular coin issues is so far lacking. Students of classical coinages are only beginning to address such problems, which exist for scores of minting cities besides Phaistos. The Saltons' gift will provide, for Princetonians and others, a fruitful study resource as well as a visual delight.

— BROOKS LEVY
Curator of Numismatics

¹⁰ *Inscriptiones Creticae IV*, no. 14.



Cover Note

During the past 250 years, Princeton professors have made important contributions to the sum of human knowledge, and their scholarly papers preserve not only their learning but also the process by which it was both created and accumulated. Their papers are rich sources for researchers; one need only consider the papers of Professor of Physics Joseph Henry, or the early modern documents collected by Professor of Spanish Charles Carrol Marden, or English Professor Willard Thorp's correspondence with T. S. Eliot, to realize that future generations of scholars will find in such papers much that is of use to them in their work. Intellectual history is especially enriched by delving into professors' papers; students of Modern Greek poetry, for example, will turn to the papers of Edmund Keeley — a very small portion is published here — for understanding the process by which an entire poetic tradition was made accessible to the English speaking world.

Another scholarly archive, one created by photographer Alison Frantz, has recently been bequeathed to the Manuscripts Division of the Department of Rare Books and Special Collections. Ms. Frantz, who died tragically in a traffic accident in Princeton, spent her long life recording the monuments of ancient and Byzantine Greece, including the archaeologist's drawing of a fragment of an inscription, on the cover of this issue of the *Library Chronicle*. Her archive is an archaeologist's dream. She has recorded the progress of expeditions to uncover the remains of private houses and public buildings, of temples and marketplaces; she has documented the ways in which the stones of ancient buildings were mined to create contemporary edifices; and she has photographed the columns and façades of temples still standing in the Greek countryside. Most

impressive, however, are the many boxes full of three-by-five cards on which Ms. Frantz pasted photographs of the ornaments and inscriptions recovered from the broken stones strewn throughout the Greek landscape. Each photograph is meticulously annotated, and all of them are now carefully preserved in her archive at Princeton. Only a few of them have been published, notably in her books *The Church of the Holy Apostles*¹ and *Late Antiquity, A.D. 267–700*.² Neither she nor the archaeologists who have used her photographs to illustrate their work have exhausted the knowledge to be gained from them.

New generations always ask new and different questions of a body of information. By preserving the papers of Princeton's scholars and making them accessible to future generations, the Library plays an essential role in the recovery of knowledge once possessed by the University's professors, but rarely if ever fully set forth in their books and articles.

— PATRICIA H. MARKS

¹ Princeton: American School of Classical Studies at Athens, 1971.

² With contributions by Homer A. Thompson and John Travlos (Princeton: American School of Classical Studies at Athens, 1988).

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