

## Dionysios Solomos

Ricks, D. (ed.), *Modern Greek Writing*, London 2003.

### Hymn to Liberty (extract)

We knew thee of old,  
Oh, divinely restored,  
By the light of thine eyes  
And the light of thy Sword.

From the graves of our slain  
Shall thy valour prevail  
As we greet thee again –  
Hail, Liberty! Hail!

Long time didst thou dwell  
Mid the peoples that morun,  
Awaiting some voice  
That should bid thee return.

Ah, slow broke the day  
And no man dared call,  
For the shadow of tyranny  
Lay over all:

And we saw thee sad-eyed,  
The tears on thy cheeks  
While thy raiment was dyed  
In the blood of the Greeks.

Yet, behold now thy sons  
With impetuous breath  
Go forth to the fight  
Seeking Freedom or Death.

From the graves of our slain  
Shall thy valour prevail  
As we greet thee again –  
Hail, Liberty! Hail!

### **Η καταστροφή των Ψαρών**

Στων Ψαρών την ολόμαυρη ράχη  
 περπατώντας η Δόξα μονάχη  
 μελετά τα λαμπρά παλικάρια  
 και στην κόμη στεφάνι φορεί  
 γεναμένο από λίγα χορτάρια  
 που είχαν μείνει στην έρημη γη.

### **The Destruction of Psara**

Alone – on Psara’s blackened height  
 Walks Glory – musing o’er the site  
 Of many valiant – daring deeds.  
 A crown upon her brow she wears –  
 Made of the scant and withered weeds  
 The desolate earth in silence bears.

*Translated by E. M. Edmonds*

### **The Cretan**

I

I gazed, and still far distant was the shore.  
 'Blest thunderbolt, give light, I pray, once more!'  
 Three thunderbolts fell, one behind the other,  
 close by the girl, and made a fearful din.  
 From sea and sky the lightning struck an echo,  
 mountains and shores gave tongue with many voices.

II

What I shall tell, believe me, is pure truth.  
 I swear this by my body's many wounds,  
 by those who fought with me and fell in Crete,  
 by her who grieved me sore, this world forsaking.  
 (Sound, Trumpet; shaking off the shroud, I forge  
 a path among the pallid resurrected,  
 cry: 'Who has seen the one whose beauty hallows  
 the Vale? Speak now and see all that is good. .  
 No shred remains of earth; and heaven's made new.  
 I love her still and with her will be judged.'  
 'On high we saw her first, her garland trembling  
 at Heaven's gate where singing she came forth.  
 Her voice was joy and sang the Resurrection,  
 all eagerness to live again as flesh;  
 the whole of Heaven heard and was amazed;  
 the conflagration of the world was lulled;  
 she was but now before us, making haste;  
 this way and that she looks and someone seeks.')

III

On rolled the thunder . . .  
 And then the sea, that raged like boiling broth,  
 was quieted, all calm and polished clean,  
 a fragrant garden, filled with all the stars;  
 Nature, by some deep mystery constrained,  
 shone forth in beauty and forgot her wrath.  
 No breath of wind touched sea or sky, not even

such as a passing bee makes on a flower,  
 but close by the girl, who gladly clung to me,  
 the full moon quivered limpid on the water;  
 something at once unravelled there and I,  
 before me was a woman clothed in moonlight.

## IV

The cool light trembled in her godlike visage,  
 in her deep jet-black eyes and golden hair.  
 She gazed upon the stars, and they exulted,  
 and shed their beams and did not dim the sight,  
 and from the unruffled surface of the sea,  
 a cypress-tree, ethereal, she rose,  
 reached out a lover's arms, but humbly too,  
 all radiant with beauty and with goodness.  
 Then noonday brilliance washed away the night,  
 creation, filled with light, became a temple.  
 At last, to me, who faced her in the currents,  
 the way a lodestone turns towards the North,  
 to me, not to the girl, she bent her head;  
 wretched, I gazed at her, and she at me.  
 I thought: could I have seen her long ago,  
 painted in church with awesome splendour,  
 or had my lovesick mind created her,  
 or dreamed her, even, with my mother's milk?  
 Sweet memory of old, and long forgotten,  
 it came before me then in all its power,  
 as when from mountain depths a spring bursts forth  
 and all at once is gilded by the sun!  
 A spring then did my eyes become; for long  
 that godlike face was hidden from my sight,  
 while deep within me I could feel her gaze  
 that made me tremble so, I could not speak.  
 But these are gods, that look from whence they dwell  
 down into the abyss where is the heart  
 of man: I felt her read my mind more clearly  
 than ever could my tongue have told my grief:  
 ...  
 ...  
 'My brothers in their prime the Turks snatched from me,  
 defiled my sister, slew her in hot blood,  
 at nightfall burnt to death my aged father  
 and next day threw my mother in the well.  
 In Crete . . .

two fistfuls of her earth I brought away.  
 O Goddess, help, keep safe this tender shoot,  
 my only hold against the precipice.'

V

Sweetly she smiled upon my spirit's pain,  
 tears filled her eyes, and they were like my girl's.  
 Alas, she vanished, but I felt her teardrop  
 touch my uplifted hand that reached towards her. —  
 From then till now this hand has not been mine,  
 that once was quick to draw upon the infidel.  
 It takes no joy in war: a beggar's hand,  
 for bread it reaches out to tearful strangers.  
 And when, at night, my eye from so much grief  
 grows weary, harsh dreams drag me back again,  
 and thunder crashes once more on the sea,  
 whose waves once more seek out my girl to drown her,  
 I wake near frantic and my mind gives way,  
 until the touch of this same hand brings calm. —  
 With this I cleft the waves, that smelled so sweet,  
 and knew a strength I had not known before,  
 not even when we fought with naked swords,  
 a handful of brave men against so many,  
 or when I struck down Yusuf and two more  
 close by the Labyrinth where we were pressed.  
 So strong my stroke, the louder beat my heart  
 because it beat against my loved one's side.  
 But then my stroke grew weary, when a sound,  
 sweetest of sounds, came forth across the waters.  
 This was no young girl's voice in budding woods  
 (hour of the evening star when waters darken)  
 who to the wellhead sings her secret love,  
 to trees and flowers that, opening, bend to hear.  
 This was no song of Cretan nightingale,  
 whose voice pours from its nest on high, wild crags  
 and sweetly strikes an echo all night long  
 from seas far distant and the distant plains,  
 until the stars dissolve before the Dawn  
 who, hearing, drops the roses from her fingers.  
 This was no shepherd's pipe on Psiloritis  
 such as I used to hear, alone and grieving,  
 when high in heaven blazed the noonday sun,  
 and mountains, seas and plains in light exulted,  
 and, seized by hope Of liberty, aloud

I'd cry: 'My hallowed country bathed in blood!'
 and weeping then, would lay my hands with pride
 upon her blackened stones and shrivelled weeds.
 Pipe, bird, voice: none of these could match that sound,
 whose like perhaps has vanished from the earth:
 not words, but sound so light...
 too soft to echo even from close by.
 Whether close by or distant I knew not,
 like scent of May there wafted on the air
 the sweetest, inexplicable...
 Such power as this have Love and Death alone.
 The sound seized all my soul and quite shut out
 the sky, the sea, the shore, even the girl;
 it seized my soul and often made me yearn
 to leave behind my body and to follow.
 It ceased, drained nature empty and my soul
 that sighed and at once filled with my beloved.
 And now at last the shore: I laid her head
 upon the strand with joy, but she was dead.

*Translated by Roderick Beaton*

### **The Shark**

Here comes the golden-winged bird, even now
 Leaving its bough to seek the rocky shore;
 And feeling there the sea's and heavens' beauty,
 There it draws forth its sound with all its magic,
 Binding in sweet bonds sea and lonely rock.
 (Before its hour the star will venture out.
 Send stars in thousands, night, to bathe with me!)
 Bird, little bird, singing with all your magic,
 If bliss is not your miracle of voice,
 No good has flowered on earth, in heaven, none.
 I had not hoped that life could be so good.
 But oh! if I could only speed like lightning,
 With you, foam, holding firm till I were back,
 Twice kissed by mother, fists full of home earth!'

And all of nature laughed and was his own.
 Hope, you embraced him, speaking secret words,
 Bound in tight bonds his mind with all your magic.
 New world and lovely, all of joy and goodness.

But his eyes meet the great beast of the deep,  
And far, alas! is sword and far is musket.  
Hard by the youth, the tiger of the deep.  
But as it cut with ease the fathoms, rising

Towards the white throat gleaming like a swan's,  
Towards the broad chest and the head so blond,  
Just so, the young man, freed with all his might  
From nature's lovely, mightiest embrace  
— She who so sweetly bound him, sweetly spoken —  
Unites in naked body flashing white  
The swimmer's art and all the surge of battle.  
Expiring, the great soul was filled with joy:  
In a lightning flash the young man knew himself.

Wonderful remnant of a fallen greatness,  
Dear lovely stranger in the flower of youth,  
Come and receive ashore the strong man's tears.

*Translated by David Ricks*

