

## THE KNIGHT AND DEATH (1513)

Nikos Gatsos

Just so, I see you motionless  
traveling through the years with the horse of Akritas and the lance of Ai-Giorgi  
I would put beside you  
with the dark shapes that stand eternally beside you  
until a place where you are extinguished eternally with them  
until you become a fire in the great Chance where you were born  
I would put beside you  
an orange from the snow-covered fields of the moon  
I would unfold for you the veil of an evening  
with red Antares singing of the young men  
with the River of Sky overflowing into August  
to weep with the North Star and freeze  
I would spread out meadows  
waters that never watered the lilies of Germany  
and I would ornament the iron you wear  
with a sprig of basil and a handful of mint  
with the arms of Plapoutas and the sword of Nikitaras  
But I, who saw your descendants like birds  
split open on a spring day the sky of my country  
and I saw the cypress trees of the Morea stop breathing  
there on the fields of Nauplion  
before the waiting embrace of the wounded sea  
where the eons wrestled with the crosses of gallantry  
I would place now beside you  
the bitter eyes of a youth  
and the closed eyelids  
in the mud and the blood of Holland.

This dark land  
will someday become green again  
The iron hand of Götz will overturn the caissons  
It will mound them with sheaves of barley and rye  
And in the dark oaks with the dead loves  
there where time turned a young leaf to stone  
in the breasts where trembled a tear-stained rose  
a star will shine silent as a spring daisy

But you will remain motionless

with the horse of Akritas and the lance of Ai-Georgi you will travel through the years  
a restless hunter from the race of heroes  
with those dark shapes that stand eternally beside you  
until a day when you will vanish eternally with them  
until you become again a fire in the great Chance where you were born  
until in the caves of the river  
the heavy hammers of patience resound again  
not for ornaments and swords  
but for pruning hooks and plows