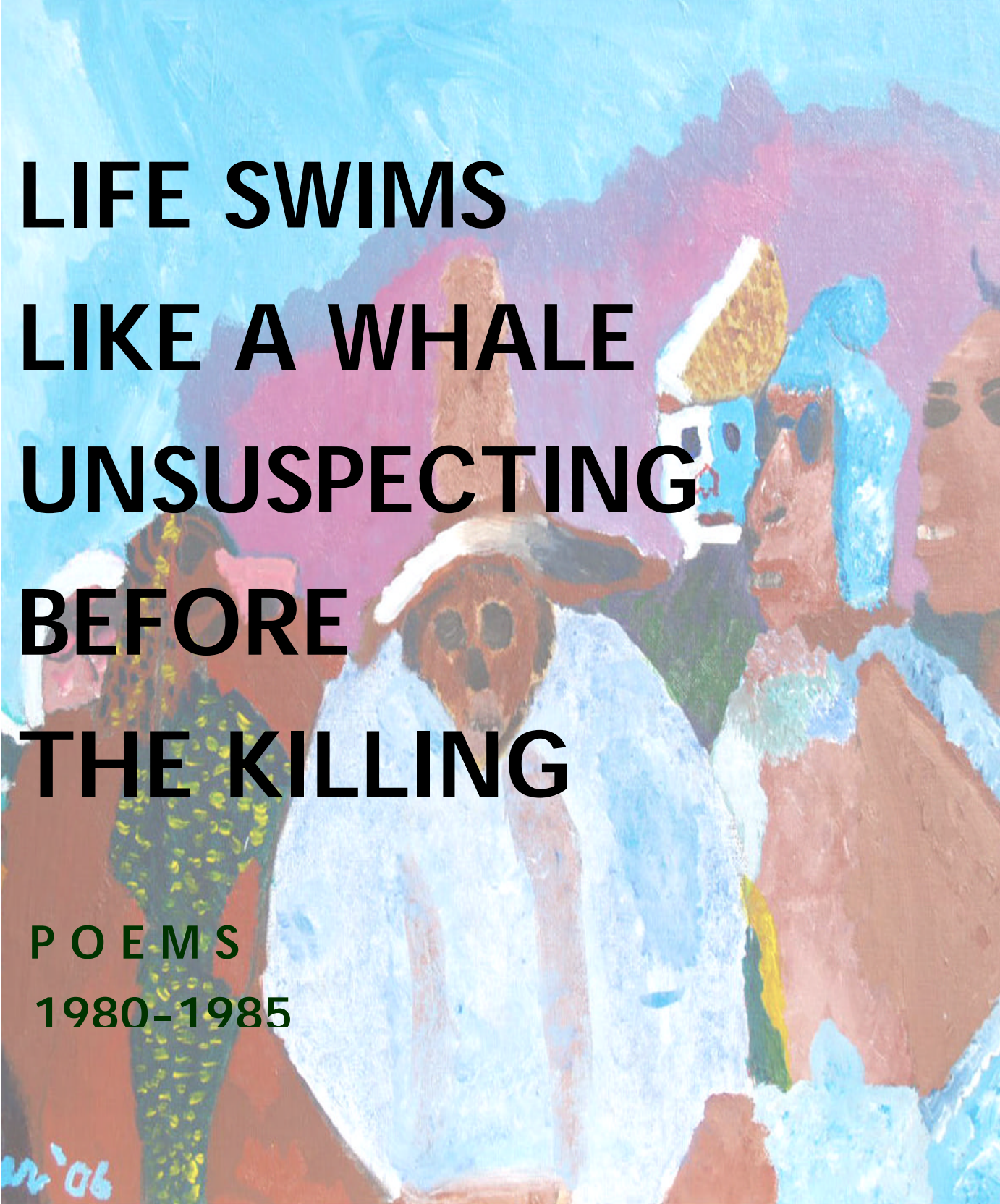


YORGOS BLANAS



**LIFE SWIMS
LIKE A WHALE
UNSUSPECTING
BEFORE
THE KILLING**

**P O E M S
1980-1985**

Translated by YANNIS GOUMAS

Yorgos Blanas: *Life Swims Like a Whale Unsuspecting Before the Killing.*
Poems 1980-1985

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Y O R G O S B L A N A S

**LIFE SWIMS
LIKE A WHALE
UNSUSPECTING
BEFORE
THE KILLING**

P O E M S

1980-1985

*A soul's a sort of fifth
wheel to a wagon.*

HERMAN MELVILLE

LIFE SWIMS LIKE A WHALE UNSUSPECTING
BEFORE THE KILLING

Love nurtures life,
death leads love.
Desires drag their blind
hearts onto a blind spot,
multiplying the shadows of time,
screaming in a language razed
by the pitiless speed of passion.
Above, mute darkness:
the dull flesh of the beast
and higher up:
serenity
basking like a pregnant cat
on the steps of Paradise.

EYES THAT ENTERED THE NEXT COMPARTMENT
AS I WAS THINKING OF MOUNTAINS

Eyes, resplendent eyes, come in from the dark
discarded in the tumultuous crowd.

Eyes, resplendent eyes, lost
before the darkness parted for a moment
by a sweet kiss never given;

soft brightness, gentle kiss
warmth of one reposed
in the stillness of another, and sleeps
as the hands of rain
fondle lanky mountains
and the wind beats wildly in its iron cage.

**FYODOR, YOU SHOULD HAVE ADDED
SOMETHING MORE**

Life blows like a wind
that awakens
and sees that it is left alone
in the deadly blindness of burnt stone
-- striving now to find something alive
knocking on doors, howling in parched courtyards
sinking its bloody nails
in walls of ruined houses
breaking
breaking its childish heart
on the faces of dead children:

“Children, everywhere children!
Did no one grow up?
How did they all die so young?
Where did the others go?”

Life blows like an unhappy wind.
Close everything, lest your tender heart lets in
a drop of Foolish Light.

HE'LL BE THERE AND HE'LL BE: ME

He'll be there;
and when the fragments of my brief life tinkle
like faded crystal in the lost
chambers of odd dreams
-- slipping on the clean bathroom floor, I,
with the despair of sturdy flesh --
he will observe me tearfully.

He'll be there;
and when misfortune's wind sweeps away
whatever's left of me:
my grumblings, my dreams
my rejected, minor poems
-- tangled in a maze of fat nurses
tubes, catheters, I, with the temerity
of one enduring life --
he will observe me tearfully.

He'll be there;
and when there'll be nothing left of my puny life
but two drops of sweat on the brows of my last companions
-- weighty, almost too heavy to lift as always, I,
filling my empty mouth with earth
that filled the mouths of thousands of others before me

the same dry, trivial earth --
he will observe me horrified.

He'll be there;
but not a soul to take his hand
not one to think how pathetically he resembles

that old photograph
 where my dead father is holding by the hand
his small son.

SAFEGUARD THE SKY FOR ME

Spring scares the souls.

Wayward winds half-open the doors of Life
cast a quick glance and depart howling in the wilds.

What they see is flickering in the eyes of children
when at night they try to make out
the slender threads
which uphold the sky and the moon.

ALL SOULS' DAY

The nights shine like candles in the hands of the dead;
and they stand -- for years now -- mute
under trees, in fields, on mountain sides, on seashores.

Only when the weather grows milder
and the flames sigh as they flicker in the Spring air

do they raise a hand
in an effort to retain
the only thing that is light to them.

For even the night is Light in the blackness of Death.

WHAT DID YOU DO, SINCE EVERY NIGHT
IS GOD'S NIGHT

What did you do?
Who made you leave in such a hurry
shirts ruffled
and the soul tucked underarm?

You knew you'd come a cropper
on the road to Death
as Love burgeons everywhere.

What did you do?
What was it you said
about better to roam
alone in endless fields of asphodels
than on these roads
which ravaged your heart?

First Death ravages
 then Life
and afterwards Love.

POETRY IS THE WASHING HANGING
IN THE COURTYARD OF PARADISE

Poets sleep like birds
in the blessed peace of forests.

Snow spreads its hair
over their wooden eyes
 rain soaks their hearts
and the sun dries their thoughts
in the clearings.

Somewhat late in the afternoon
 a blue-coloured oldster
gathers verses and folds them
like pure white bed sheets.

A HERO OF J.L. BORGES MANAGES
TO STAGE LIFE

Every dead child opens
a hole in the planks of Life
 from where fall
the odds and ends of Paradise:
tattered scenery
paper swords
costumes of angels on the dole.

The souls of children gather them
try them on and chase each other
on the stretches of motherly tears.

I SEE THE SEA THROUGH MY DEATH

A stone beside the sea
without trees
or
birds on the trees
nor
skies in the eyes of birds.

Only a stone
like a dead moon
next to lost pearls.

My soul:
closed eyes
in death's oyster.

TODAY MY SON BECOMES THREE YEARS OLD

Wakefulness, pain, and again:
passion and its cries
(since Time will not lift
his clumsy foot from its tail)
coloured beads in the jar of my life
some day my son will scatter them.

On an afternoon, I think
and the sea will promenade its dead
humming a theme by Pergolese.

LISTEN: YOU MIGHT ENDURE TO THE END

Swift is the Soul

swift and soft.

Remember it.

If you are alive it is because it can run

faster than Life

and pass through the holes of Death

unscathed.

Life follows you, slow and stiff:

panting, lagging, breaking at the ends.

But in time it gets used to your pace

softens, overtakes you -- wherever you are.

Your soul slowly hardens and slows down

and this is called Death. Remember it.

SOMEONE PUT DOWN HIS GLASS
AND LOOKED OUT: IN THE NIGHT

The dead look at the living
through hazy glass
with sorrow
clasping in their suffering hands
whatever they managed to take with them.

Now and then they recognize someone
and their hearts palpitate.
They open a hand and search:
a red bead
 a cheap crucifix
a coloured thread.

They examine their fingers for a while
-- how tender they have become with time --
and then they turn and disappear
clasping in their suffering hands
whatever precious
they managed to take with them.

EVEN ON A SIMPLE DAY IN JUNE
YOU SEE THE DEAD

Suddenly it darkens.
Dense, funereal clouds
appear (as though someone
brushed off with his hand silent dust
nestling in a tuneless pianola
slowly playing Bach fugues)
to conceal
the devious dominance of light.
The world is a gaping mouth
and through the darkness of its surprise
come and go
like useless insects
the questionings of the dead.