

YORGOS BLANAS



**YOUR
INESCAPABLE
FLOURISHING**

P O E M S

1987-1990

Translated by JOHN C. DAVIES

Yorgos Blanas: *Your Inescapable Flourishing. Poems 1987-1990*

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*...und die findigen Tiere merken es
schon, daß wir nicht sehr verläßlich
zu Haus sind in der gedeuteten Welt.*

R.M. RILKE

I

Your first winter has passed
like a painting before my window:
tears in my eyes, I await the spring.
Outside it snows; a warm snow like flakes of wool.
Behind the fences my unborn children chase around
and the diaphanous birds of light
strike against the windowpane, dipping to drink my tears.

II

Now, O Lord, I know that it was your form
in the sweet yielding of the dying day.
I recall my father standing in the gateway of the yard,
with his ruddy hands rustling
in his trouser pockets.
He thinks of nothing in particular, perhaps
that the roof needs seeing to
now that the weather has cleared.
Yet, something in that deep
blue afternoon tells him
that he has defeated death
— something like a feeling of ease
in his newly polished shoes.



The patience of the night holds me and I remain awake.
My soul a slender branch in your hands
struggles to frighten off all sleeplessness to come.
The nights stand, white unmoving forms
under the great patience of the stars,
and the wind, like the deep
sigh that struggled to fend itself from time,
brings a morning sweetness that transfixes
and a flood of ferment.

IV

I do your bidding, O Lord, and bow to your sleep,
flouting all that dazzling terror
which fills the night with startling cries,
with barefooted lamentation,
with teeming homes; there' s always
some broken drawer,
a door that' s jammed,
a tap that drips,
always something small and trivial
that refuses to acknowledge
the power of death.

I do your bidding and know that you will stand by me —
like the dog that lets itself
sink obstinately into worship
of the tomb of its loved one,
choosing rather to take the unknown path to death
than to accept the lonely surety of a stranger' s hand.

V

You used to scatter delicious summer nights:
the sky above, a magnificent hall of light,
and all the light of the day forged
into intoxicating perfumes.

Where has your old bountifulness gone?

What dark need brings you
a beggar to the troubled gateway of memory?

Many-coloured ship

You sailed into my azure expectation.

Now I finger your body: silent.

I finger my hands: blood.

VI

With what images, O Lord, do you test my blind heart?
How may my feeble memory endure such light?
With time — you know time well: silent wound,
just as you think it has closed, it has passed,
the memories start to fester —
I sink into a naked ripeness,
no branch to hold on to,
no rock to rest on,
and whatever I think I' ve grasped:
a burning day whose heat repels me.
And wherever I think I' ve stood:
mute night swallows me up.

VII

I abandoned myself into your wooden hands
listening to time tick by
greedily in the night' s heart.
Small consolation
your withered fingers and still less
the hope borne in your few leaves.
Yet it never crossed my mind
that I might be lost in this world,
wandering in a forest of self-slain hope.
Yet I never thought that
all the unrelenting toil of time might empty
beliefs and certainties,
forms and colours long-held.
I abandoned myself, I didn' t think, but still I hope
for your inescapable flourishing.

VIII

Life is not the place
for the one who accepted your outstretched arms.
Whatever the day on which you tread, it sinks,
whatever the hour on which you stand, it tumbles into ruins,
leaving in suspense that
self-evident alliance against time,
emptying the space that others had filled inside you.
Life is not the place
for the one who, alone, returned from your embrace.

IX

Grant that I endure to the end.
I know, I shall walk the course of life —
a trivial endeavour: just one hard night
of breathless running and then all condenses
into a trivial gesture,
a fine trembling at the corner of the lips;
so say that it was you who passed
through this great lull of souls.
But it isn' t this, it isn' t
the uncertain course that disturbs me.
I shudder at the thought that all this
May be nothing more than an instant for you,
a brief pause in the unending
ordeal of your living absence,
and I strive
to smother your face within myself.
Yet you, unhesitating,
lead him who denies you
through deaths inaccessible
and frightful returns.

X

How I have struggled to keep you within
the limits of my own time;
and there were occasions when I would rage
at your childlike insistence
on hiding yourself behind the shape of things,
leaving me alone
in frightful doubt
over my passion to confine
all my sight to one image,
all my thought to one song.
How I've struggled to call you, and yet
I know that we all grow up some time
— you included —
transcending the shape
of our gaze, the sound
of songs that stir
— tiny wee creatures —
on our gigantic fingers.
Yet I know that you have none other to watch you
and listen to you
than the wee creature that wriggles, beseeching
the vast presence of your hands.

XI

You are harsh, impassable, you don' t tolerate so much as
the slightest gesture of sorrow,
a door that closed
with the unforeseen certainty of death,
the steps — timorous and slow — of the despairing:
as if he' s suddenly afraid of his rending,
as if by giving in to his pain he will have to
cross that limit beyond hope
where life is indebted to death,
the despair of nothingness —
hoping in vain for an innermost collision
with your harsh and impassable presence.
You slide by, however, and move like a spirit
to where your every angle seemed inviolate,
standing sure between you
and non-existence.
You slide by, however, and move on, and from behind the light
beckon another harshness that devastates your paternal love,
and so I' m left with the fear of your far-off commands.

XII

I fear you!
How can I stand your power?
If I could look at your face
as I look at the absolute presence of a mountain:
serene, and given over to whatever
my gaze retains from the devouring hunger of the distances,
I could fear death
I could feel pain:
certain of the life passion
that looks at me now, licking
its predatory lips.

XIII

I am losing myself: I am afraid of
every flutter of the leaves and every
sigh of wind makes me tremble.
Why is it that I lose my strength
before the unflagging presence of time?
I sow deaths in my dreams and struggle
To keep myself from the impassiveness of plants.
Suddenly you scream out the anguish of the beast
and as the panic draws nigh,
raging at rooms obstinately mute,
you disappear through the half-open door of my days.

