

Entrevista a Yannis Yfantís / *Templo del mundo* / audisea

1. In your poem “EPXOMAI”, the speaker is transformed as he crosses through several mirror-like, labyrinthine spaces and times: “Με ρώτησαν από πού έρχομαι. / Τι να τους έλεγα; Δεν θα με καταλάβαιναν / και τότε / θα μ’ οδηγούσανε δεμένο στον ψυχίατρο”. How is it possible to shed light on that infinite, all-unifying tandem? Again, where are you from? What can you tell us about your origins?

It is possible to shed light on this tandem, if we comprehend that the poets are not many, but one (No one). Who has however many faces and many names scattered across space and time.

Every poet is one of the waves of that OCEAN, whose name is SPIRIT.

And again, where do I come from, which are my roots?

Oh yes: Let’s better look at one of the biographies that I use: “I don't know when and where I was born; looking for the healing beauty and the truth that liberates, I found myself on the paths of poetry.

*Here I am where Zero bites its own tail
with pain
and delight
here I am
in the midst of eternity
at its beginning and its end”.*

More details? See also my poem “Always Here”, in my book that AUDISEA has just published. And even, see the poem “Happy Song” on my website www.yfantis.gr.

Even more details? I was born in a farmhouse, at Raina, valley of Etolia, (in Central-West Greece, near the Ionian Sea).

My parents are mountain-folk, as my great-grandparents (islanders or landers) fled to the mountain gorges to save themselves when the Turks invaded Byzantium (medieval Greece).

The occupation of my parents: Farmers and shepherds, occasionally hunters, and even fishermen in the river Achelous and its tributary rivers. (Of course in my ancestral roots – from my father’s and mother’s sides – one can find preachers, ‘Kleftes’ - thieves’, in reality, mountain-partisans during the Turkish rule - , saints, singers, dancers, wanderers).

For centuries, because my ancestors practiced the art of weaving, my maiden name is ‘Yfantis’ (Weaver). ‘Webster’ in English, ‘Weber’ in German, ‘Glosbe’ or ‘Tejedor’ in Spanish. Oh yes, my surname is Homeric.

Certainly, I come from Greece. Modern Greece, Byzantine, Ancient. But, even more certainly, “I AM THE CHILD OF EARTH AND STARRY SKY”, as the Orphics tell us.

I’m saying who I am, according to the conventional language people have in order to communicate. However, deep down and more responsibly, I don’t know who I am, what I am, nor am I aware of what surrounds me as cosmos.

2. The sun and the moon appear strongly in your poetry “and above opens the sky with all its animals and its stars” What secret links tie us to that stellar map?

I’m thinking that the Hebrew word ‘alleluia’ becomes fully understood, if we accept that it is the Greek word ‘αλληλουχία’, (allilouhia) namely ‘sequence’. ‘Αλληλουχία’ means that every thing contains all things and is contained by all things. ‘Αλληλουχία’ means that every thing is related to all and all are related to every thing. And, at the end, all humans, all beings, all things, are ONE.

{ {But what is the Sun? A bright discus with rays whom the flowers, being his children, tend to take after? A bright sphere whom all fruits, being his children, tend to take after? The leader of the planetary system? I think that the Sun is the whole planetary system. The planets and us are his members. His blood runs in our veins, somewhere yellow, somewhere red, somewhere green. He is the heart and mind of us, his members. We see him outside of us, but, in reality, he is the nucleus of the body that consists of the whole planetary system and of everything that exists on this (planetary) system. The Earth and everything that exists on it is part of the body that we call Sun.

And the Moon? Earth’s satellite. But it has a face. If it was further away, we wouldn’t see it as a face. If it was closer, we wouldn’t see it as a face. It is exactly at the distance so that we can see it as a face. Isn’t our world magical? Our Sun-face we cannot look at, but our Moon-face we can look at.

And the stars? They are our own face, the molecules of our own body when we’re looking in the mirror of the void; when we’re looking at ourself who is an illusion so complete, so as to perceive it as an absolute reality. Just as we’ve never met our true self as it really is, so have we never truly met the stars. Most of the stars we see have already disappeared and we see as stars the light that had once started travelling from them to us. And there are stars that live this very moment, but we cannot see them because their light has not yet reached us. We have to do with a self that does not exist and we see him as an existing self. And there is a self that exists, and we don’t see him as an existing self. The world is magical and I myself am enchanted, a Fool that exists and doesn’t exist, moving among his infinite selves that surround him. And if I had to speak in complete scientific terms, the light looks at the light and gives it various names. “I don’t know anymore neither how to speak, nor how to think”} }.

3. A certain mysticism resonates in your poetics, are you a religious person?

A critic once wrote that “Yfantis’s poetry is permeated by a physiocratic mysticism”. Moreover, adding to this, I say that my poetry is permeated by the first distich that exists in my first book “Manthraspenta”: “All things are transformations of Zero; maya. / Put zero in your finger as a ring and you shall exorcise the Maya”. There is mysticism in my poetry, but it is not religious. This means that the only deity that I accept as deity is Nature. Every thing inside it I approach worshipfully. All of it is a temple. I am therefore religious, but not as a follower of a religion, but as a believer in the temple of Cosmos.

Yes, some consider me a paganist or a dodekatheist. But I believe that the ancient Greek deities are nothing else than the formatted dominant aspects/semblances of the eternal Nature.

Yes, at the time of the junta, when I had to declare a religion, (although my parents have baptised me a Christian Orthodox), I declared myself a pantheist. Since many years now though, I find it wiser to declare myself an agnostic, which means that I declare ignorance for anything that I cannot know. I stand in distance from all religions, but, at the same time, I have the happiness to take from them without any hesitation that which I like. Thus, on the one hand, I am the par-excellence religious one, and on the other hand, the totally unreligious one.

4. The poem «Πως ζούμε μυθικά μας διαφεύγει», sentences one of Ναός του Κόσμου greatest poems. What place do “myths” have in our age?

The clothes and the names of a myth’s heroes may change from era to era, but the nucleus of the myth always remains the same. I read the myths in humans’ books, but their interpretation I find in the Book of Cosmos and in life. In the dragon-plant for example, the leaves have the shape of a snake and the flower is a phallic lily. Thus, in just one plant, in just one single page of the Book of Cosmos, I see written the whole story of the fall of man that starts with a snake, and its rising that starts with the offer of a lily to a virgin. And similarly, the thieves that Theseus met are here, I see them, I hear them, I learn about them every day. The injustice that permeates Iliad is happening today, now, here. The Cyclops who sees things with one eye may be our neighbour. The ‘polytropos’, namely, the resourceful Odysseus that fights against all signs and wonders, is here. The suitors who are claiming as theirs everything Odysseus has made, are here. The myths interpret our life and our life interprets the myths daily.

5. In what sense would you say that we live “μέσα στον άχτιστο Ναό του Κόσμου”?

In the sense that Heraclitus gives us, as well as almost all the physiocratic philosophers of the Greek antiquity (Pre-socratics). And moreover, in the sense that the physiocratic philosophers of China give us, the Taoists. Thus, Heraclitus tells us:

“This world, being the same for everyone, was not created by any god or any man, but it was, it is and it will be, forever, an ever-living fire, increasing in a measure and decreasing in a measure”.

It is the without beginning or end Cosmos, the Nature, and for the poet, the “unbuilt temple”, the temple that was built by no one. Because, how can I call as “built” and “created”, something whose beginning and end I’m not aware of, something that I perceive only in the slightest possible way. It is hubris to define that which I cannot possibly define.

6. In an amazing poem of yours, a little girl manages to defeat a monster using a key element: a mirror. What is your conception of monstrosity?

Monstrous is the formatted invincible evil. Invincible for the common human. Because the hero (the power of truth), and the child (the power of innocence), have the way to defeat it.

However, the monster, in fact, kills itself. As it acquires such dimensions, that surpass the limits of the being that can be aware of itself, starts thinking of his own limbs as foreign and destroys them. “Hyperbole brings hyperbole”. And hyperbole is defeated only by hyperbole. Even in the girl’s mirror, what kills the monster, is the hyperbolic being that the monster looks at in the mirror for the first time.

7. «Κάθομαι κάτω απ’ το πουρνάρι δίχως σκέψεις. / Τάχα γιατί να σκέφτομαι; Τριγύρω μου υπάρχουν / ενσαρκωμένες σκέψεις τόσο όμορφες / που βλέποντάς τες με γεμίζουν ευφροσύνη». How do you conceive the relationship between thought, language and image?

Excuse me, but I’m not sure I understand what you’re asking.

Perhaps the answer lies in the poem itself. I consider this poem as “mystic”, which expresses what it expresses in simple, yet at the same time, non-conveyable way.

8. In terms of literature, which authors have had the greatest influence on your work?

If some authors influenced me on something, it is this: To keep from my works, only those that give me the absolute satisfaction, the satisfaction that is equal to the satisfaction that their works give me.

Of course Pound influenced me in regards to the connection between a poem's rhythm and form.

And also I must have been influenced without realizing it completely, by everyone and especially by Kavafis, Eliot, Seferis, Borges, the Mystics of the Orient, in the way that without intending it, we look like some of our relatives. However, who influenced me to write my most daring erotic poems that they didn't write? Who influenced me to write my most daring satirical poems that they didn't write? The poet does not become; he is born. If the poet became, then all my siblings would be poets. We lived around the same fireplace, we were eating the same food, listening to the same stories, and yet, only I became a poet, and that's because I was born a poet.

{{But I can say which authors I loved especially, and which ones I feel the need to read and re-read.

I've loved a lot all the cycles of the Greek Mythology. And moreover: Homer, Hesiod, Sappho, the Pre-Socratic Philosophers, Herodotus, the tragic, the lyric and the cynical authors of Greek Antiquity, the poems by the unknown authors of Medieval Greece, its fairytales, and all the great poets of Modern Greece, from Vitsentzos Kornaros and Solomos, to Kavafis, Kazantzakis, Ritsos, Varnalis, Kavvadias, Elytis, Gatsos, Karyotakis, Seferis.

From foreign literature, I've loved the Erotic Lyrics of Ancient Egypt. I've loved the Bible, (especially the Genesis, the Exodus, some of David's psalms, the insurmountable in wisdom Ecclesiastes by Solomon, and the Song of Songs, also attributed to him, the Gospels, the Apocalypse and some excerpts by Paul). I've also very much loved the Mahabharata, and especially its part called Bhagavat Gita. Lots of episodes from the Thousand and One Nights. The Chinese Taoists. The Japanese Zen.

I've also loved the Ancient Edda of the Icelanders, Li Tai Po, Omar Hayam, Dante, the mystic Spanish poets, the mystic German poets, Shakespeare, Hugo, Hölderlin, Nietzsche, Whitman, Rimbaud, Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, Lorca, Hermann Hesse, Thomas Mann (Tonio Kröger), Eliot, Pound, Ivan Gol, Hemingway (The Old Man and the Sea), Camus (The Stranger), Borges, Márquez, Pessoa, the Bulgarian authors Emilian Stanev and Anton Dontsev}}.

(The best I found in the East – Sufi, Hindu, Tao, Zen – I collected in a book of mine that is called “Mystics of the Orient”. What I managed to translate well from the whole world, I collected in a book of mine that is called “The garden of Poetry”).

But if I had to take seven books with me in an island where I would be exiled (as they say), I would take the two anthologies of mine that I've just mentioned, the Iliad, the Odyssey, Kavafis, The Waste Land (T.S. Eliot), and The Old Man and the Sea (Hemingway).

9. “ΝΕΟΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗ ΙΣΤΟΡΙΑ” denounces the following: “«Αν είναι που οι μισοί ξενιτευτήκαμε / αν είναι που δεν έχουμε μια σιγουριά / και δεν χορταίνουμε ξεκούραση και ύπνο και φαΐ, / δεν είναι που δεν είμασταν οι τυχεροί / είναι που μας ληστεύανε και μας ληστεύουν...»». In your opinion, what is the political and social value of poetry?

It makes humans forget and avoid the low things, and, at the same time, do the magnificent things. It makes humans fall in love with justice and hate injustice. It makes grow inside humans what they have as seed but hesitates to grow. It brings humans in that environment where they will know and love themselves. It makes humans rediscover the healing beauty and the truth that liberates. It makes humans find much in the minimal and everything (Pan) in Nothing.

10.¿Cómo ves el panorama político social actual de tu país? What is your view regarding the current political and social scenario in your country?

We’ve been going through a crisis for the past five years. Three months ago, a left government was we finally elected. What we see, all of us who want to see, is how the officials of a totally declined, non-democratic EU, together with the native crooks, want to bring this government to that difficult situation in which it will be forced to take measures contrary to its pre-electoral declarations-wishes, so as to humiliate it and take it out of the way. And they don’t care a bit for the Greek people. It is another version of the case of Allende, who was crushed by the USA in co-operation with the Chilean fascists.

And think of this simple thing: the country that leads the EU, owes us a forced occupation loan that exceeds our so-called debt. And it doesn’t return it to us, projecting the right of the stronger. And that same country, during the Nazi occupation ruined us by the barbaric abuse and the executions of non-combatants as well as by the utter financial catastrophe. All the countries it had harmed, it indemnified. The only country it hasn’t yet indemnified, is Greece.

And think only of this simple thing too: That each time our people entered the course of democracy and progress, the native and foreign powers interfered so as to intercept that course. In 1967, they intercepted that course with the Generals’ dictatorship. In 1997, they intercepted that course again, by supporting governments that undermined the country’s independence, health, education, civilization, economy, and above all, its people’s psychology.

It is a big burden, being a poet in a country where injustice, the hobby of foreign and native evil-doers, has become permanent.