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Georges Seferis' youth through his correspondence with his sister Ioanna Seferiadi: 1919-1924

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ABSTRACT: Although there are several biographical works about Seferis' youth, we consider that the correspondence with his sister Ioanna Seferiadi could offer new data and nuances about the years Seferis spent as a student in Paris (1919-1924). The letters he wrote to his family constitute perhaps the oldest autobiographical document of the poet, since his diaries *Days* start in 1925, whereas all the correspondence published to the date is much more recent. The aim of this paper is to provide new data on the poet's youth, taken from this interesting unedited autobiographical document.

KEYWORDS: George Seferis, Ioanna Seferiadi, Stelios Seferiadis, correspondence, autobiographical document, French literature, contemporary Greek literature.

RESUMEN: Aunque existen varias obras biográficas sobre los años de juventud de Yorgos Seferis, consideramos que la correspondencia con su hermana Ioanna Seferiadi podría ofrecer nuevos datos y matices sobre los años que Seferis pasó en París como estudiante (1919-1924). Las cartas que escribió a su familia constituyen, tal vez, el testimonio autobiográfico más antiguo del poeta, puesto que sus diarios *Días* arrancan en 1925, mientras que la correspondencia publicada hasta el momento es bastante posterior. El objetivo de este trabajo es aportar nuevos datos sobre la juventud del poeta, extraídos de este interesante e inédito documento autobiográfico.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Yorgos Seferis, Ioanna Seferiadi, Stelios Seferiadis, correspondencia, documento autobiográfico, literatura francesa, literatura griega contemporánea.

We are well aware that there are several biographical works about Seferis' youth. The first of these documents was the biography by his sister, Ioanna Tsatsou, published in 1973 under the title *Ο αδερφός μου ο Γιώργος Σεφέρης*¹. This work, which sheds light on quite a little known period of the poet's life, was revolutionary at that time, considering that the author offers us not only first-hand information about the poet's youth but also important passages of his correspondence and some of the poems he composed in those years. Nevertheless, it must be stated that, for obvious reasons, the work lacks the objectivity and the rigor required by a strictly scientific work. In her justified (or not) attempt to protect her brother, the author omits certain information and certain phrases of the correspondence. For this reason, a revision and an updating of the data were required.

We cannot forget the important works of Michalis Pitsilidis² or Deni Koler³, which also offer important biographical information. Meanwhile, Roderick Beaton's biography⁴ constitutes nowadays the fundamental work for any researcher of the life and work of the poet. In his rigorous study, Beaton points out that a research in Constantine and Ioanna Tsatsou's personal archives could reveal new and unedited material useful to work with⁵.

Indeed, the archives of the Gennadios Library of Athens have been since 2008 home to the correspondence the poet addressed to his sister between 1919 and 1970, as well as to the letters from her⁶. The present paper is the result of an extensive research in the archives of the Gennadios Library during which we have studied the first period of the correspondence (1919-1924). Our aim is to provide new data on Seferis' youth taken from this unedited autobiographical document⁷.

¹ TSATSOU (1973).

² PITSILIDIS (2000).

³ KOHLER (1990).

⁴ BEATON (2003).

⁵ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁶ The poet donated his personal archives to the Gennadius Library before his death. In 2008, Mrs. Despoina Mylona-Tsatsou, Constantine and Ioanna Tsatsos' daughter, donated her parents' archives that, until then, were in the family home in Kydathineon Street.

⁷ Seferis' letters in the biography that Ioanna Tsatsou wrote constitute only a small part of the entire correspondence.

I. THE CORRESPONDENCE

Seferis' correspondence with his sister is available in the Gennadios Library's archives of the American School of Athens. Seferis' letters can be found in file 52, subfile 1 of Constantine and Ioannas Tsatsos' Archives, while Ioanna's letters can be found in file 99, subfile 1 of Giorgos Seferis' Archives. The correspondence is composed by more than 800 letters spanning the years between 1919 and 1970. We can clearly distinguish three periods. The first one (1919-1924) begins with the first family separation in 1919: Seferis remained in Paris, while Ioanna, together with her mother and brother Angelos, went to Smyrna for their summer vacation; after that, they settled in Athens. This period covers all the time Seferis was a student in Paris, ending just a few months before his return to Athens.

The second and third periods are currently under study. The second period (1927-1937) begins with some letters from the summer of 1927 and 1929, although the correspondence becomes more regular from 1931, with the departure of Seferis to London, which will be put to an end when he finally returns from Albania in 1937. This is a period in which both of them make their first forays into adult life. In those years, Ioanna completed her studies of Law and her PhD, which was followed by her marriage to Constantine Tsatsos, with whom she had two daughters. On his part, Seferis was in London as a Vice-consul and in Koritsa (Albania) some years later, when he published his first poetic works *Strophe*, *The Cistern* and *Mythical narrative*; they were a topic of discussion in several letters by both siblings. The correspondence was interrupted during the period of the Occupation and resumed in 1948, when the third period (1948-1970) begins. In those years, the poet writes from different places (Beirut, Ankara, London and Cyprus) whereas Ioanna is always in Athens. It should be noted, however, that this correspondence consists of far more impersonal letters, especially compared to those from the first period, which are full of youthful enthusiasm and brotherly affection. During this period, they discussed mostly practical issues such as rents, commissions and economic matters.

The first period is perhaps the most interesting one, since it covers the entire period when Seferis was a student in Paris and it thus constitutes a very important autobiographical document of the poet in relation with this period. It should be taken into account that his diaries *Days* begin in 1925, whereas the

correspondence published to date is considerably more recent. In addition, this is the correspondence with his sister, a very close person to the poet, as much by kinship as by age and by common interests. Throughout this period of six years, his studies of Law kept him away from his mother and sister almost permanently, meeting them only twice, in the summer of 1920 and in that of 1922. During those years, the correspondence between them was very fluid, with greater profusion of letters in 1921 and a marked decrease after the Catastrophe of Asia Minor.

The correspondence of the first period reveals a very close relationship between both siblings, in part due to their low age difference but especially because of their common passion for literature. It also reveals an important mutual contribution: from Paris, Seferis was concerned with his sister training. During the time she was with him in France, he took her to the performances of the theater of the Comédie Française and they used to read together literary works of French poets they liked. After the family separation, Seferis wrote her very frequently about French literature. When he read some new work he liked, he immediately recommended it to Ioanna and he used to write down whole poems, such as *Le Bateau Ivre* of Rimbaud, which he learned by heart during his retirement in Sceax in the summer of 1921. Ioanna Seferiadi was already at that time a very educated person, since she had received from childhood a thorough education in which French language played a fundamental role. Therefore, the critical dialogue between them was always intense and fluid⁸.

On her side, Ioanna occupied an important place in the poet's life, as he always found her to be a great support for him. On the one hand, she played the role of mediator between Seferis and their parents and especially in the complex relationship with his father. Just as his diary *Days A'* is full of complaints⁹, so are also his letters of this period. Ioanna was his shoulder to cry on in those years. Moreover, during those years of absence from Greece, Ioanna was the link between the poet and the Greek literary reality. At his request, she kept him informed about the Greek philological situation and about new

⁸ Indeed, Ioanna Tsatsou was an intellectual woman and writer. She began to write at a mature age and she wrote mainly autobiographical, but also some interesting poetic works. About Ioanna Tsatsou's work see TSIROPOULOS (ED.) (2002); GARCÍA AMORÓS (2008).

⁹ GIATROMANOLAKIS (2000): 18.

editions, even subscribing him to the literary journals of that time and sending him the books he wanted, but also the books she liked:

Ἴδοῦ, σοῦ εἶναι δυνατόν νά μοῦ κάνεις μία μεγάλη χάρη; Μπορεῖς νά μοῦ στέλνεις ταχτικά πληροφορίες γιά τήν ἑλληνική πνευματική κίνηση; Καταλαβαίνεις πόσο ἀπαραίτητο μοῦ εἶναι, ὕστερα ἀπό τόσα χρόνια πού λείπω ἀπό τήν πατρίδα¹⁰.

Ioanna was in direct contact with Greek literary reality and consequently, she was in a position to inform his brother about this issue, although these reports should be considered biased, as discussed below.

In his literary interests, he found Ioanna to be a very strong support from early on when, although sure of his poetic value, in difficult moments he lost his self-esteem. By then Ioanna already had an absolute conviction that her brother was a great poet:

Ἔτσι λοιπόν, πού εὐχαριστήθηκα πώς ἀποφάσισες νά ἐκδώσεις κάτι. Σέ βεβαιῶ, πρέπει ἔτσι. Ἔσύ τό ἔχεις στό αἶμα σου, δέν εἶσαι καμωμένος γιά νά περάσεις τή ζωή σου ἐρασιτέχνης¹¹.

During those years of poetic essay, Seferis had reservations about publishing his poems and showing them to others. Ioanna was one of the few persons to which he showed his poems¹², given that he trusted her judgment and he always looked forward to hearing her comments and her views: «ἔχω πιότερη πεποίθηση στή γνώμη σου ἀπό τή γνώμη ὄλων τῶν κριτικῶν τοῦ κόσμου»¹³.

The Catastrophe of Asia Minor plunged them both into such a psychological situation that they stopped writing so as not to hurt each other. Due to distance and separation, overcoming the drama was much harder for both of them. The first period of correspondence ends with the return of Seferis to Greece at the beginning of 1924.

¹⁰ American School of Classical Studies at Athens. Gennadius Library. Constantine Tsatsos and Ioanna Tsatsou papers, file 99, subfile 1, letter 26/03/22.

¹¹ American School of Classical Studies at Athens. Gennadius Library. George Seferis papers, file 52, subfile 7, letter 31/01/1922.

¹² Some of which are already published in the biography that Ioanna wrote. Some comments about these poems can be found in BAGENAS (1996): 105-175; VITTI (1994): 17-23.

¹³ ASCS. GL. Constantine Tsatsos and Ioanna Tsatsou papers, letter 20/02/22.

2. THE STUDENT IN PARIS

In the summer of 1919, the Seferiadis family separated permanently. The months in which they lived together in Paris were the last time the whole family was together¹⁴. Seferis stayed in Paris, while his mother and his siblings went to Smyrna and to their adored Skala. In Ioanna's letters it can be seen that she was looking forward to her brother's arrival in Smyrna with his father, who finally arrived alone a few months later: «ἦρθε ὁ μπαμπάς. Ἡ θεία Μαρία, ἡ Ἑλλη καὶ ἐγὼ εἴμαστε στὴ Σκάλα (...) Κι ὕστερα ἀπὸ λίγο, ἡ τελευταία ἐλπίδα πὼς θὰ ἔρθεις, πεθαίνει κι αὐτή»¹⁵. The reasons why Seferis remained in Paris and did not travel to Asia Minor constitute a question that has not been sufficiently evaluated. Although in the biography *My brother Giorgos Seferis* Ioanna affirms she does not know the reasons¹⁶, the fact is that, funnily enough, in the same letter, she explained these reasons to her brother:

Νά σοῦ πῶ ὅμως, Γιωργούλο, φαίνεται πὼς εἶναι καλύτερα πού δέν ἦρθες. Ἡ μαμά εἶχε γράμμα ἀπὸ τὸν μπαμπά, ὁ ὁποῖος τῆς γράφει πὼς θὰ ἔμενες στρατιώτης μέχρι ἀποστρατεύσεως¹⁷.

Indeed, Seferis, who stayed in Paris throughout the course of the war with Turkey, was not mobilized at any time¹⁸, neither at that moment nor later. This would later lead to a deep feeling of guilt in the poet, which he expresses vividly in the letter he sent to her sister immediately after the Catastrophe:

γιατί νά μήν ἦταν βολετό νά εἶχα ξεκληριστεῖ κι ἐγὼ μαζί μέ τὰ ἄλλα παιδιά πού ξεκληριστήκανε πέρα στοὺς κάμπους τῆς ντροπῆς ἀπὸ βλακεῖες ἠλίθιων, ἐγωιστῶν, παλιανθρώπων... γιατί, ἀδερφούλα, γιατί; Δέ θὰ ἦταν καλύτερα ἀπὸ νά κάθομαι καί νά ἀγοράζω ἐφημερίδες ἐδῶ πέρα; Μπεμπούλα μου, ὅλες μου οἱ παλιές δειλιές ξαναζοῦνε μέσα μου¹⁹.

¹⁴ In the summer of 1922, the entire family was in Paris, it seems however that the relation between Stelios and Despina Seferiadis had definitely broken and the couple did not live at the same house during those months. See TSATSOU (1973): 165; BEATON (2003): 67.

¹⁵ ASCS. GL. Constantine Tsatsos and Ioanna Tsatsou papers, letter 01/14/09/1919.

¹⁶ TSATSOU (1973): 55.

¹⁷ ASCS. GL. Constantine Tsatsos and Ioanna Tsatsou papers, letter 01/14/09/1919.

¹⁸ Under the protectionism of his family, Seferis was never called up for military service. In January 1941 he was drafted, but thanks to the rapid intervention of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, he was returned to his post. See BEATON (2003): 287).

¹⁹ ASCS. GL. Constantine Tsatsos and Ioanna Tsatsou papers, letter 27/09/22.

Ioanna includes this passage in the biography, but in an effort to protect the figure of her brother, she omits the last sentence. We consider, however, that the latter sentence may have relevance in relation to Seferis' poetry. What were these «παλιές δειλίες»? Why did he feel them? Can this sentence be connected to the feelings expressed in his *Χειρόγραφο Σεπ. '41*, where he wrote «για νά βάλω τάξη στη συνείδησή μου»²⁰?

To return to the issue of Georges and Ioanna's separation in 1919, it should be noted that it was due to personal reasons as Beaton pointed out, since the relationship between Stelios and Despina Seferiadi had deteriorated for some considerable time. Indeed, in her letters, Ioanna tells her brother about their parents' discussions and difficult coexistence. However, the separation also had to do with the economic hardships they went through after their move to Athens, as Ioanna referred to her brother in order to explain to him why she could not be with him in Paris in 1920:

Τά εισοδήματα τοῦ βερχανέ²¹ ὄ,τι καί νά κάνεις, δέν εἶναι ποτέ ταχτικά καί δέν ἐξαρτᾶται ἀπό τούς συγγενεῖς νά γίνουν. Δέν πληρώνουν ταχτικά οἱ ἐνοικιασταί κάθε πρώτη τοῦ μηνός. Σοῦ λέω ἀπλά τό ἐξῆς: ἐδῶ στήν Ἀθήνα μέ δραχμές, ὄχι φράγκα, πού εἶναι τό τρίδιπλο, ἦρθε μέρα πολλές φορές νά εἶμαστε χωρίς πεντάρα, χωρίς νά μπορέσωμε νά περάσωμε τή μέρα μας καί νά ζητήσῃ ἡ μαμά καί ἡ θεία Ἑλλη δανεικά ἀπό τήν Παπαδημητρίου καί τήν κ[υρία] Γαίτου²².

These economic hardships are evidenced throughout the entire correspondence. Thus, at one stage Seferis alludes to the difficulties his brother Angelos and he himself were living through in Paris: «Βέβαια, εἶναι κωμικό νά μᾶς βλέπεις μέ τό μολύβι στό χέρι νά λογαριάζωμε πῶς θά περάσει ὁ μήνας ἢ πῶς θά φᾶμε τό βράδυ ἢ τό μεσημέρι»²³.

Beyond the anecdotal information, these economic difficulties came to affect the fragile relationship with his father, whom he often accuses of being stingy, but they will lead also to some bitter-sweet scenes such as the one he refers to in February of 1923:

²⁰ SEFERIS (1980): 61-62.

²¹ Βερχανές was a galleria within which there were shops. Two of the famous βερχανέδες of Smyrna belonged to Seferis mother's family, cf. FOTIADIS (1981): 75.

²² ASCS. GL. George Seferis papers, file 52, subfile 1, letter 17/05/1922.

²³ ASCS. GL. Constantine Tsatsos and Ioanna Tsatsou papers, letter 21/01/23.

Τέλος πάντων, δέν παραπονιέμαι μά, άφου σου γράφω τίς δύσκολες μου ώρες, γιατί νά μή σου τίς γράψω κι αυτές; Θυμάσαι τά ρούχα μου όταν ήσουν έδώ; Τά ίδια, πρέπει νά βάλω πραγματική σκέψη γιά νά βαστάξω κάθε πρωί. Καί στά σπίτια πού είμαι αναγκασμένος νά πηγαίνω, πρέπει ν' αναπτύξω ταλέντο γιά νά κρύψω τήν έλεεινότητά τους. Ένα άπόγεμμα στήσ Madame Bousquet, κόσμος, κορίτσια, παιδιά, κι έγώ, όπως φαντάζεσαι, τί νά κάνω; Κάπνιζαν στό καπνιστήριο όλοι, μέ βαστούσαν τά νεύρα, μά νεύρα πού πήγα νά τρελαθώ, βλέποντας ήλίθιους νά κοιτάζουν τίς γυαλάδες του σακακιου μου. Τί νά κάνω; Τούς λέγω πώς τάτσιγάρα είναι έξοχα όταν τούς αλείψει κανείς λίγο μυρωδικό. Τά κορίτσια κυρίως, πού αγαπούν τίς λεπτομέρειες τής ήδονής, ένθουσιάζονται. Πηγαίνω καί παίρνω άπό τήν τουαλέτα τής κυρίας του σπιτιου τό πρώτο μπουκάλι μυρωδικό πού μου έτυχε καί τούς αλείβω τάτσιγάρα. Σάν τά κάπνισαν, ήταν όλοι τόσο ζαλισμένοι, πού δέν έβλεπαν πιό μακριά άπό τή μύτη τους, έτσι μ' άφηκαν ήσυχο οί ματιές τους²⁴.

In addition to the economic hardships, the mood of the poet was also affected by the absence of his mother and sister with whom he had a very close relationship. This absence provoked in him a feeling of loneliness, nostalgia and helplessness that accompanied him throughout his entire stay in Paris. His fellowship with other Greek students –some of them also came from Asia Minor– with whom he built a friendship, does not seem to relieve the homesickness and the lack of family warmth he felt during this long period.

Σās άποθύμησα, σās άποθύμησα, μέσ τά μάτια μου ξεπετάτε. Έχω όμως τήν καλή έλπίδα πώς θά σās δώ, μ' αυτό στέκομαι στά πόδια μου. Θά πούμε πολλά άμα άνταμωθοϋμε. Τό όνομά μου διέφερε άπό τίς άλλες μέρες κατά τό ότι ζουρίστηκα καί δέν ήταν μέρα ζουρίσματος. Οί μόνοι πού μου είπαν καί του χρόνου είναι οί Βασταρδή²⁵.

To this feeling of nostalgia and helplessness also contributed several heart-breaks he suffered during those years in Paris. The first of them happened with a French girl, Suzon Clauzel, daughter of his landlady, with whom he had a brief but stormy love affair. In his letters, Seferis refers to her as «ήλίθια, έπιπόλαιη, κακοήθης»²⁶ and his love-hate relationship with her inspired this comic sonnet he sent to Ioanna in 1919 on the pretext he had written it for a friend²⁷. Both for

²⁴ ASCS. GL. Constantine Tsatsos and Ioanna Tsatsou papers, letter 13/02/22.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, letter 15/05/20.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, letter 30/11/20.

²⁷ TSATSOU (1973): 60.

Ioanna then and for us today, it is clear that it was his relationship with Suzon that inspired the sonnet. Ioanna includes in her book the first quartet; here we have her complete sonnet:

Ἀγάπησα, ξαγάπησα, τὴν ἀγαπῶ καὶ πάλι.
Μπερδεύτηκα, ξεμπερδεύσα, πάλι ἔχω μπερδευτεῖ.
Ποῖός ξέρει ἂν θά λευτερωθεῖ τὸ μαύρο μου κεφάλι
κι ἡ ξυλωμένη τσέπη μου ἂν θά ξαναρραφτεῖ.

Τὴ φίλησα στό μάγουλο, στό στήθος, στή μασκάλη
στά χέρια της, στά πόδια της, σ' ὄλο της τὸ κορμί
μέ τά φιλιὰ μου φεύγανε καὶ φράγκα ἀγάλι-ἀγάλι
καὶ πότε γιὰ τὸ σινεμά καὶ πότε γιὰ ταξί.

Τῆς εἶπα πὼς τὴν ἀγαπῶ, μοῦπε «θά σ' ἀγαπήσω».
Τί τὸν καλὸ μου ποῦφυγε δέν μπορῶ νά ἀφήσω.
Ποῖός ξέρει κι ἂν μέ ξέχασεν ἴσως μέ θυμηθεῖ.

Χτές μοῦπε «ξέρεις, ἀγαπῶ κάποιο ὄμορφο μοχωῶρη
ποῦφταξεν ἀπ' τὴν μοχωριά μέ τὸ στερνὸ βαπόρι»
τί νά τῆς πῶ, τὴν ἄφηκα ν' ἀπομποχωρωθεῖ²⁸.

The reaction that she caused in the poet was so strong that he systematically avoids talking about her in Greek: «Suzon, cette petite grue bien mise –je t'écris en français parce que le sujet est trop vulgaire pour ma langue»²⁹. The style and tone in which he refers to her in this passage is extremely derogatory by the use of the vulgar French word «grue». It is a word that perhaps, by the sentiment of shyness and self-censorship we can appreciate in many letters, he would hardly have used in his own language. As a result, Seferis had to move to another hostel, although their meetings, casual or not, continued. The influence of Suzon on the young poet's mind and mood must have been more intense than one might have first thought³⁰, not only in view of the many references he made to her, but also of the insistent advice of Ioanna to forget her:

Ἡ Suzon εἶναι στό ρόλο της. Τί περίεργο κορίτσι. Ἄραγε δέν ἔχει τώρα κανέναν ἄλλο, ἴσως θά ἔγινε φιλενάδα τοῦ Beranger. Ξέχασέ την ἐσύ, εἶναι τὸ καλύτερο πού ἔχεις νά κάνεις καί, ὅταν βρεῖς καμιά νόστιμη φιλενάδα, θά μοῦ τό γράψεις³¹.

²⁸ ASCS. GL. Constantine Tsatsos and Ioanna Tsatsou papers, letter 19/10/19.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, letter 13/10/20.

³⁰ PITSILIDIS (2000): 76.

³¹ ASCS. GL. George Seferis papers, file 52, subfile 1, letter 21/10/1920.

Moreover, a little later, when she believes the issue of Suzon is over, on November 20th: «Ξέρεις, Γιωργούλο, κάτι ακόμα πού μ' ευχαριστεῖ, μεταξύ τῶν ἄλλων, εἶναι πού δέ θά τά ξαναφτιάξεις πιά μέ τή Suzon, σέ φοβόμουνα ὡς σήμερα»³². Nevertheless, two years later, Ioanna realizes that the issue was not so over as they both thought. A sign of their trust in each other is the question Ioanna puts openly to her brother on September 10th of 1921: «Γιωργούλο, θά σοῦ κάνω δύο ἐρωτήσεις, ἡ μία ἀδιάκριτη: σ' ἀρέσει πάντα ἡ Suzon; Τή δεύτερη, σάν ἔρθεις καί κουβεντιάζομε³³ οἱ δύο μας»³⁴. Answering the question, Seferis refers to the last failed attempt to resume the relationship with Suzon. The failure of this attempt made him definitively overcome the influence of the young girl:

Νά μή στά πολυλογῶ, ἀποφασίσαμε νά τά σιάξωμε, ἐδῶ ἀρχινᾷ ἡ κωμωδία. Τήν πρώτη βδομάδα ἡ ὑπόθεση θαυμάσια. Τή δεύτερη ἀρχίσανε τά καυγαδάκια κι' ἄρχισε νά μοῦ λέει πώς ἐκείνη τόν ἀγαπητικό της ἤθελε νά τοῦχει θαυμασμό καί πώς ἐγώ ἤμουν ὑπερβολικά ὄνειροπόλος καί πράξη τίποτα καί πώς ἀπόδειξη οὔτε ἐξετάσεις δέν μπόρεσα νά περάσω. [...] Ἔτσι πέρασαν δέκα μέρες ἀκόμη, ἀλατισμένες μέ μερικές συζυγικές διαχύσεις. Βλεπόμαστε μέρα πάρα μέρα, ὅποτε ἕνα βραδινό, ὕστερ' ἀπό μιὰ τρομερή συζήτηση γιά ζητήματα γνωστά, τῆς εἶπα πώς τά νεῦρα μου δέν ἦταν κοινός τόπος καί γιά ζητήματα κούρας δέ θά μπορούσα νά τήν ξαναδῶ πρὶν ἀπό μιὰ ἐβδομάδα. Ἐφυγε λέγοντάς μου: «Adieu, monsieur». Ἔστερα ἀπό μιὰ βδομάδα βλεπόμαστε γιά τελευταία φορά. Τώρα βολοδέρνει μέ τόν Γούναρη, κωμικότατο³⁵.

The second heartbreak came when, after short months together, Kirsten Andresen, a Norwegian girl who spent a few months in Paris, finally had to return home³⁶. The relationship with Kirsten was not nearly like his relationship with Suzon. On the contrary, the poet brought the warmth of home that he had lost after the departure of his mother and sister. Again in French, he wrote about her: «Elle est à côté de moi, je suis si bien à côté d'elle. Avant, que je t'écrivais en grec, j'étais triste, maintenant je ne suis pas gai, mais je suis bien»³⁷. Kirsten inspired the poet several poems in French:

³² *Ibid.*, letter 14/11/1920.

³³ This way in the document.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, letter 10/09/1921.

³⁵ ASCS. GL. Constantine Tsatsos and Ioanna Tsatsou papers, letter 09/09/21.

³⁶ TSATSOU (1973): 91; PITSILIDIS (2000): 82-85; BEATON (2003): 67.

³⁷ ASCS. GL. Constantine Tsatsos and Ioanna Tsatsou papers, letter 18/11/20.

Je te vis un froid soir, pâle rose du Nord
le bouquin à la main où tu lisais des verbes
le piano soupirait ses longs fanés accords,
le salon était plein de chants vaseux des Serbes
tu relevais les yeux, bleus, hagards, indécis
vers les beaux souvenirs accroupis sous ta garde
et je songeais tout seul à tes côtés assis
c'est méchant bonheur, le Bonheur qu'on regarde³⁸.

Belle, svelte, hautaine
ainsi qu'un capitaine
prêt au combat.

Je t'aime quand tu te pavanés
dédaignant le profane
qui te lèche les pas.

Avec tes tresses blondes
inondant le monde
de tes grands [unreadable] mats.

Tu marches dans la foule
dans la foule soûle
que ton œil calma.

Tu domines la musique
de ta grâce plastique
de ta grâce qui tue.

et tu foules les notes claires
avec ta démarche altièrè
indiscontinue.

Forte, comme le clair de lune
comme le flot qui brise la dune
comme le beau vers,

poison qui ronge et qui mord
qui promet la douce mort
couché dans son ver[re].

Belle, svelte, hautaine
ainsi qu'un capitaine
prêt au combat

³⁸ *Ibid.*, letter 24/10/20.

je t'aime quand tu te pavanés
dédaignant le profane...
gisant dans mes bras³⁹.

Although for a little time they tried to keep the relationship in the distance, the poet decided to definitively terminate it soon thereafter. In this period of the correspondence there are no references to his relationship with Jacqueline Pouilloton yet, with whom he maintained a long and difficult relationship and he still presents her as a friend.

Another aspect that conditioned the mind and mood of the poet during those years was his complicated relationship with his father, Stelios Seferiadis. Both Beaton and Pitsilidis have dealt with the issue of the relationship of Seferis with his father. It may be pointed out that Pitsilidis' analysis is based on Ioanna's biography without going far into the issue. Beaton's analysis, drinking from other sources, is by far most comprehensive and it gives us new and important information. We believe that some relevant passages in the correspondence with his sister may contribute providing us with new possible nuances about the relationship between father and son. It furthermore may answer many questions about how this relationship influenced later the personality and character of the poet⁴⁰.

Stelios Seferiadis' lack of understanding and constant complaints are the focus of many of the letters. As we discussed earlier, the economic question was the subject of some disputes between father and son. Seferis did not perhaps understand the gravity of the situation and repeatedly complained about the stinginess of his father:

Ἡ τσιγκουνιά του εἶναι φριχτή, ποῦ νά σαλέψει ὁ νοῦς σου. Εἴκοσι μέρες πολεμῶ γιά μιὰ μουσαμαδιά, μά ἐκεῖνος, ὅταν τοῦ ζητᾶς, δέ βγάνει τσιμουδιά, ἄρα κοιτᾷ περίλυπος, θαρρεῖς τόν πᾶν κρεμάλα, δέν ἔχει γιά τόν ἄλλοτε συναίσθηση μιὰ στάλα. Εἶναι πολὺ φιλόδοξος γιά ν' ἀγαπᾷ ὅπως πρέπει⁴¹.

Nevertheless, as it has already been pointed out above, the economic hardships in Smyrna after the World War I led Despina and Ioanna Seferiadi to the need to borrow money. This must not have been easy for them if we

³⁹ *Ibid.*, letter 09/01/21.

⁴⁰ PITSILIDIS (2000): 53.

⁴¹ ASCS. GL. Constantine Tsatsos and Ioanna Tsatsou papers, letter 14/10/20.

consider the high social position the family held while they were still living in Smyrna.

Beyond the merely economic issue, Stelios Seferiadis was a very demanding person, both with himself and with the others, especially with his oldest son, Georges, in which he had high expectations⁴². Stelios had studied in France, where he earned his doctorate with honors and he desired his son to follow in his footsteps⁴³. His presence in Paris during some periods altered the fragile emotional stability of the young poet. It is well known that Seferis hated the studies of Law and he always preferred Philology, to which he devoted time behind his father's back. Nevertheless, his destiny, as his career is concerned, was always determined by the commitment of his father⁴⁴. Very significant in this respect is a letter sent to him by Ioanna in 1920, in which she describes in detail the process of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs exams in which Seferis had taken part six years later⁴⁵: «... μά συλλογίστηκα πώς μπορεί νά σ' ενδιαφέρουν, ἀφοῦ σέ λίγο θά περάσεις κι' ἐσύ αὐτό τόν διαγωνισμό»⁴⁶. That demonstrates that Seferis' exams were planned by his father a long time before. The pressure that Stelios exerted on his son was perhaps exaggerated, and very often exceeded the endurance of the young student. All of this led him to have an enormous feeling of insecurity and lack of understanding:

Μοῦ δίνει νά καταλάβω πώς μέ θεωρεῖ βλάκα, τεμπέλη καί τό χειρότερο, πώς τοῦ εἶμαι βάρος καί κακό παράδειγμα γιά τ' ἀδέρφια μου. Κατά τίς 20 Ἰουνίου ἕνα βράδυ στό δωμάτιό μου μέ εἶπε ξέρεις τί; «*petit galopin*» ἐμένα, πού ὅλα τά παιδιά τῆς ἡλικίας μου μέ θεωροῦν γέρο, ἀλήθεια, μπορούσε νά μοῦ διαλέξει ἄλλο ἐπίθετο καί, ξέρεις, ὅλα αὐτά στήν κατάσταση πού βρισκόμουν, κουρασμένος, ἐξαντλημένος, ἐσύ, μπεμπούλα, ἴσως καταλάβεις, σοῦ γράφω ἔτσι σάν νά σοῦ ζητοῦσα ἐλεημοσύνη⁴⁷.

This situation led the poet to want to reveal himself: «Εἶμαι ὅμως τόσο γεμάτος ἀπό ὄλες αὐτές τίς ιστορίες, ἄλλωστε, καί ἀπό τή φύση τόσο στραβοκέφαλος, πού δέν ξέρω τί θά κάνω ἂν ἔρθει ὁ κόμπος στό χτένι», although he will never do. As Ioanna Tsatsou points out in her biography: «Στήν πράξη

⁴² TSATSOU (1973): 19; PITSILIDIS (2000): 63-64.

⁴³ PITSILIDIS (2000): 35.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 66.

⁴⁵ Seferis passed the exam in September of 1926. See TSATSOU (1973): 253; BEATON (2003): 120.

⁴⁶ ASCS. GL. George Seferis papers, file 52, subfile 1, letter 18/01/1920.

⁴⁷ ASCS. GL. Constantine Tsatsos and Ioanna Tsatsou papers, 1, letter 04/08/21.

ὁ Γιώργος δὲν ἦταν τόσο στραβοκέφαλος ὅσο θ'ἄθελε νὰ εἶναι»⁴⁸. His sense of responsibility and duty led him in October of 1921 to obtain his degree.

Despite his insistence and his severity, Stelios Seferidis failed to keep his son away from literature. Seferis was from an early age a curious and tireless reader. In his father's library he read many classic works of Greek and French literature⁴⁹, language he dominated perfectly, since in Aronis' school, where he attended primary school⁵⁰, he followed the French line⁵¹. Therefore, not surprisingly in these letters is appreciated an extensive and profound knowledge of contemporary French literature. The poet himself informs us about his favorite authors of that time:

Τώρα πού σοῦ γράφω, ἔχω δίπλα μου ἀνοιχτό ἓνα βιβλίο τοῦ Paul Verlaine, ὑπάρχει στὴ βιβλιοθήκη τοῦ μπαμπά, εἶναι ὁ ποιητὴς πού ἀγαπῶ πιότερο ἀπὸ ὅλους, μαζί μέ τόν Baudelaire⁵².

And a little later, in the summer of 1921:

κι ἔπειτα θά σοῦλεγα μερικούς καινούριους στίχους πού μ' ἀρέσουν. Ἀπό τότε πού εἶμαι ἐδῶ, ὁ Verlaine μέ καταδιώκει, δύο κομμάτια του κυρίως "Watteau" ἢ "Nuit d'un Walpurgis classique". Κι ἀπ' αὐτά τὰ δύο ποιήματα, λίγιοι στίχοι, γιατί νά μέ κυνηγοῦν;⁵³

In the letters he addressed to his sister, he frequently scores verses of the romantic poets Victor Hugo, Alfred de Musset, the neo-romantic Edmond Rostand and the symbolists Jean Moréas, Jules Laforgue, Paul Verlaine, Charles Baudelaire, among many others. At this time he had not yet read Valéry⁵⁴ and he did not know Eliot⁵⁵. The influence of French poets, mainly from Verlaine and Laforgue, the poets for which he had a predilection, is evident in many of

⁴⁸ TSATSOU (1973): 121.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁵⁰ For further information about Christos Aronis' School, see ARONIS (1963).

⁵¹ BEATON (2003): 40.

⁵² ASCS. GL. Constantine Tsatsos and Ioanna Tsatsou papers, letter 29/10/19.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, letter 09/08/21.

⁵⁴ Nasos Vagenas affirms that Seferis read Valéry for the first time in 1922 (VAGENAS 1996: 125). Nevertheless, in the correspondence of this period there is not a single reference to the French poet. We consider that, if he had read it, he would have mentioned it to Ioanna, and therefore we do not exclude the possibility that he read him a few years later.

⁵⁵ Seferis read for the first time Eliot on Christmas of 1931. See VAGENAS (1996): 17.

the poems he wrote in this period⁵⁶. Ioanna was, even then, well aware of the influence of Laforgue since she writes:

Ἐμένα, λοιπόν, μπορεῖς νά μοῦ τό βρίσεις ἄλλο τόσο, μ' ἀρέσει πολύ τό ποιηματάκι πού μοῦστειλες. Ξέρεις πώς κάθε ἄλλο παρά νά σοῦ κάνω κομπλιμέντα. Λοιπόν, μ' ἄρεσε, μ' ἄρεσε γιά τις εἰκόνες καί γιά τόν στίχο. Μοῦ θύμισε πολύ τόν Laforgue⁵⁷.

Seferis, which seems not to have noticed this influence, replied: «Γράψε μοῦ ἀκόμα τί τοῦ Laforgue σοῦ θύμισαν οἱ στίχοι μου, γιατί δέν τόν εἶχα καθόλου στό μυαλό μου ἄμα τούς ἔγραφα καί γιατί δέν μ' ἀρέσει νά μιμοῦμαι»⁵⁸.

On another occasion, he realizes that one of his poems had some influence of Baudelaire and for this reason he destroyed it: «Πρὶν τρία τέταρτα ἔγραψα ἓνα ποίημα, τό ὁποῖο καί ἐξαφάνισα, γιατί βρῆκα πώς ἔμοιαζε λιγάκι του Baudelaire»⁵⁹. The fact that he knew almost better French literature than Greek must not surprise us, if we bear in mind his intense contact with the cultural life of Paris in the 20s and the difficult access to Greek works from the French capital. In this respect, he always had an ally in his sister, who, at his request, used to send him works of contemporary Greek literature and devoted a part of her letters to inform him about Greek philological life. Seferis' order was concrete and detailed:

Γνωρίζεις τόσους καί τόσους διανοούμενους αὐτοῦ, ὥστε δέν πιστεύω νά σοῦ κάνει πολύ κόπο νά τούς ρωτᾶς γιά ὅ,τι καινούριο γίνεται καί γιά ὅ,τι βιβλίο βγαίνει. Κάνε μοῦ τή χάρη νά μοῦ στέλνεις ταχτικά κανένα δυό σελίδες γιά τήν ἑλληνική φιλολογία, χωρίς νά μοῦ τίς κόβεις ἀπᾶ τά γραμματάκια σου. Μ' ἐνδιαφέρουν πολύ οἱ κριτικές γιά τά ἑλληνικά καί γιά τά ξένα ἔργα, πρόσεχέ μου τίς ἰδιαιτέρα. Ἐπίσης μπορεῖς νά μοῦ στείλεις μαζί μέ τίς ἐφημερίδες (τό Ἐλ. Βῆμα μέ φτάνει, ἂν μπορεῖτε, καί τό Ἐμπρός ὅταν γράφει ὁ Παλαμαῆς) ἑλληνικά ἀθηνεῖκα περιοδικά, θά σοῦ εἶναι εὐκόλο νά μάθεις, γράφε μοῦ ἀκόμη ἂν μαθαίνεις τίποτα ἀπό Σμύρνη, φιλολογικά ἐννοεῖται⁶⁰.

Ioanna not only lived in Athens, but she also knew personally and had relationships with many intellectuals and writers of the time, such as Miltiadis

⁵⁶ VAGENAS (1996): 112-113; VITTI (1977): 177.

⁵⁷ ASCS. GL. George Seferis papers, file 52, subfile 1, letter 06/01/1922.

⁵⁸ ASCS. GL. Constantine Tsatsos and Ioanna Tsatsou papers, letter 27/01/21.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, letter 22/08/21.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, letter 26/03/22.

Malakasis, Lambros Porfyras or Romos Filyras. Therefore, she had contact with the Greek philological movement of that period and she was in a position to help her brother with this request. Thus, some important names such as Kostis Palamas –whom the young poet admired greatly–, Pavlos Nirvanas, Ioannis Dambergis, Polibios Dimitrakopoulos, Kostas Krystalis, Cleon Paraschos, Ioannais Gryparis, Lambros Porfyras, Georgios Souris, or Miltiadis Malakasis, but also the youngest who then began their literary careers, such as Nikos Chagier Bufidis or Romos Filyras, are mentioned in the correspondence. Some other important names, however, such as Napoleon Lapathiotis, Anastasios Drivas or Kostas Ouranis, who at that moment were publishing their literary works, do not appear. The most significant omission is perhaps Kostas Karyotakis⁶¹, to whom there is not any reference, despite the fact that in those years he had already published two of his three books, *The pain of men and things* (1919) and *Nepenthe* (1921).

On the basis of this information we know that during the years he resided abroad, the poet had a very intense contact with Greek literary reality. With the information and the literary works Ioanna sent him, Seferis could begin to make judgments and to form his own opinions on Greek literary production. His comments to his sister allow us to know exactly what works and what authors he read and the opinion he had about them. Judging by the following request, we can conclude that, even then, Palamas was one of his favorite authors: «Στείλε μοῦ, σέ παρακαλῶ, τὰ ἔργα τοῦ Παλαμᾶ ὅλα. Τά περισσότερα βρίσκονται σπίτι, θά μοῦ κάνεις μεγάλη χάρη»⁶². In another letter he asks her for the *Scarabaios* of K. Gryparis. Unfortunately, we ignore whether he received the book or not and whether he liked it or not. There are, however, some comments on certain poets that allow us to discern his opinion about Greek literature of that time. At one point, for example, a classmate asked him to teach her how to recite and she gave him a patriotic poem which the teacher did not like at all. Seferis chose the *Lacrimae rerum*⁶³ of Lambros Porfyras and «Παραμύθι» of Malakasis⁶⁴. We can consider therefore that they were poems he liked.

⁶¹ The first reference to Karyotakis in Seferis dates from 1936.

⁶² ASCS. GL. Constantine Tsatsos and Ioanna Tsatsou papers, letter 03/05/21.

⁶³ PORFYRAS (1921).

⁶⁴ Miltiadis Malakasis' poem is included in his work *Πεπρωμένα* (1909).

Nevertheless, in general terms, the Greek literary situation did not satisfy him at all⁶⁵. The young poet realized that the path the Greek literature followed did not lead but to an impasse. With absolute spontaneity and sincerity, he exposes his critics openly to his sister, most often negatively, on the works of the Greek literature he read. The review on Romos Filyras' poem «Οι ἐρχόμενες»⁶⁶ deserves to be highlighted:

Εἶναι τρομερό πόσο εἴμαστε ἐπιπόλαιοι ἐμεῖς οἱ Ρωμιοί, ὁ Φιλύρας μοῦ ἄρεσε πολύ στό «Ἐγώ εἶμαι ὁ πλανερὸς ἀζάπης», ἄν καί τό τέλος του δέν ἀξίζει τήν ἀρχή, [...] Μά, ἄς πάρουμε τή μορφή λέει στό δεύτερο τετράστιχο «...γελοῦν καί φαντάζουν πρὸς τή ματιά μας καί στ' ὄνειρο καί μέ πανέρια στόν ὦμο». Ἐκεῖνο τό “πρός”, ἢ θέλει τό γέλιο ἢ τό φάντασμα πάει πρὸς τή μα[τιά] ἢ ἡ ματιά πρὸς τό γέλιο ἢ τό φάντασμα, ἔπειτα, ἐκεῖνο τό “καί μέ πανέρια” τό “καί” τί θέλει; Τί θέση ἔχει; Ἐπειτα, στό τέταρτο καί πέμπτο τετράστιχα, γιατί ἐκείνη ἢ ἐπανάληψη τοῦ γλυκοῦ 5 φορές; Θέλει νά ἐκφράσει γλυκά, ναί, γιά τίς τέσσερις πρῶτες φορές τό καταλαβαίνω, ἄν καί ἄτυχο μέσο, μά τήν πέμπτη φορά δέν καταλαβαίνω τίποτα. Τέλος, ἀφήνω τά ὑπόλοιπα καί μερικές ὁμοιοκαταληξίες πού δέν τίς κάνει μωρό παιδί⁶⁷.

Another quite sour review is the one he makes of the work of Thasis Kyriazis *Στιγμές πού ζῶ*⁶⁸:

Εἶδα μία κριτική τῶν *Στιγμῶν πού ζῶ* στό *Νουμά*. Ἐκεῖ διάβασα καί μερικές ἀπ' αὐτές τίς στιγμές. Ξέρεις τί κάνει; Τόν μπολσεβίκο, οὔτε παραπάνω οὔτε λιγότερο, καί ὁ κριτής τόν ἐκθειάζει, δέ θέλω νά πῶ πώς εἶμαι ἀντιμπολσεβίκος, δέν μ' ἐνδιαφέρει ἀπλῶς –μά ἀκόμα μποροῦμε οἱ Ρωμιοί ἐμεῖς νά γράφωμ' ἔτσι– καί τί καινούριο δίνουμε στή φιλολογία, βάζοντας σέ στίχους τούς σταλινικούς λόγους τοῦ ἄλφα ἢ τοῦ βήτα;⁶⁹

His negative opinions about specific works are not at all an isolated event, since he also expresses his opinion on general works such as the journal *Numas*, which was considered the best literary journal of that time:

⁶⁵ From this point of view, Nasos Vagenas compares Seferis with Andreas Kalvos, Dionisios Solomos and K. P. Kavafis: «Και οι τέσσερις είχαν ν' αντισταθμίσουν στην ελληνική τους κληρονομιά το βάρος της αναστροφής τους και με μια ξένη παιδεία. Και οι τέσσερις πειραματίστηκαν στην αρχή ποιητικά με μία ξένη γλώσσα. Η βαθειά γνώση μιας λογοτεχνίας πολύ πιο δοκιμασμένης από την ελληνική δημιουργούσε για τους ποιητές αυτούς εκφραστικές απαιτήσεις πού η ελληνική γλώσσα δεν μπορούσε να ικανοποιήσει» (VAGENAS 1996: 108).

⁶⁶ FILYRAS (1920).

⁶⁷ ASCS. GL. Constantine Tsatsos and Ioanna Tsatsou papers, letter 30/11/20.

⁶⁸ KYRIAZIS (1921).

⁶⁹ ASCS. GL. Constantine Tsatsos and Ioanna Tsatsou papers, letter 22/08/21.

Μούρχεται τώρα ό Νουμάς σχεδόν τακτικά· ἀηδιάζω μέ τίς ἀηδίες πού γράφονται τώρα στήν Ἑλλάδα. Δέν καταλαβαίνω τί εὐχαρίστηση βρίσκουν νά εἶναι ἡλίθιοι καί νά γράφουν σάν τέτοιοι⁷⁰.

His almost total dissatisfaction about the literary situation of his country provokes in him a great feeling of indignation, even of embarrassment, not only about Greek literature, but also about the language used by these authors. The following passage reveals his despair over a situation he consider shameful and sad:

Τώρα, ξέρεις τί κάνουν στήν Ἑλλάδα κοντά στήν πλατιά τους ποίηση; Ἀρχίζουν νά ξυπνοῦν καί νά γράφουν ὅπως ἔγραφαν πρὶν 40 χρόνια στή Γαλλία ἢ σχεδόν, ξαναπαίρνουν τίς θεωρίες τοῦ Mallarmé σάν νά μπορούσαμε νά γράψωμε στή γλώσσα μας ἔτσι. Καί ἡ γλώσσα μας μᾶς τό ἐπιτρέπει καί οἱ ξένοι πού θά μᾶς διαβάσουν, τί θά ποῦν ἅμα τούς ξανασερβίρωμε τά κουρέλια πού πέταξαν πρὶν χρόνια; [...] Ὡστε πρέπει νά συνηθίσωμε νά σερνούμαστε πίσω ἀπό τούς Φράγκους καί νά μῆν τρέχωμε μπρός; Ξέρω κι ἐγώ τί νά πῶ. Ἄν εἶναι ὅμως ἔτσι, εἶναι δυστύχημα⁷¹.

All this fostered the inner growth of a deep desire to seek originality and to break with the trends of that time, through a new poetic style and language. The question of the language is crucial to understand the evolution of Seferis' poetic style. From his early poems, he asserts himself on the side of demotic language and he describes himself as «μαλλιάρός»⁷². He clearly is opposed to katharevousa's defenders, whom he believed responsible for the loss of Jean Moréas by Greek literature: «ἡ Ἑλλάδα ἔχασε τόν Moréas χάρη στήν ψεύτικὴ της γλώσσα τοῦ Παπαρρηγόπουλου, Βασιλειάδη»⁷³. During those years, the poet tried, although not without difficulties, to find his own poetic expression in Greek, a language which he still considered however poor, inaccurate and insufficient for poetry. It was a time in which the poet had not found yet his own poetic discourse, and he was, in the words of Nasos Bagenás «σε μία εκφραστικὴ σύγχυση»⁷⁴. The desperation that causes him not to have a suitable language for composing poetry is expressed on many occasions such as this, in which he is tempted to write in French:

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, letter 09/08/21.

⁷¹ ASCS. GL. Constantine Tsatsos and Ioanna Tsatsou papers, letter 09/08/21.

⁷² *Ibid.*, letter 06/12/21.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, letter 14/03/21.

⁷⁴ VAGENAS (1996): 110.

Γαλλικά θά μπορούσα ἴσως νά γράψω, μά δέ θέλω, γιατί ἀγαπῶ τήν Ἑλλάδα. Ἑλληνικά μοῦ εἶναι ἀδύνατο νά πῶ ὅ,τι θέλω, γιατί δέν ἔχωμε γλῶσσα, γιά νά τό πιστέψεις, πάρε ἕνα ὁποιοδήποτε γαλλικό βιβλίο καί προσπάθησε νά τό μεταφράσεις ἑλληνικά, θά πεισθεῖς πώς εἶναι ἀδύνατον. Στήν Ἑλληνική, ἐκτός ἀπό αἰσθήματα βουνίσια ἢ χωριανέικα δέν μπορούμε νά ποῦμε τίποτα γιά τήν ὥρα, γι' αὐτό καί τά πῶ πολιτισμένα ποιήματα πού ἔχουν γραφεῖ στήν Ἑλληνική μυρίζουν μυτζήθρα⁷⁵.

The summer of 1921, isolated in Sceaux to prepare his exams, the poet found by chance the work of J. Barbey d'Aureville *Les Diaboliques*, which immediately aroused in him a feeling of intense admiration, but at the same time a deep frustration in finding that the language with which he had to work was not as rich and flexible as French language was:

[...] νά πού ἔπεσα ἀπάνω στίς *Diaboliques*, τίς πήρα τό ἀπόγευμα γιά νά διαβάζω λιγάκι μετά τό φαί, ὥσπου νά ξαναρχίσω τό διάβασμα, τίς πήρα γιά νά διαβάσω μισή ὥρα, περιττό νά σοῦ πῶ πώς δέν μόρεσα νά τίς ξεκολλήσω ἀπό πάνω μου. Τό βράδυ ἔκλαψα ἀπό λύσσα, συλλογίστηκα πώς στήν εποχή μας, ἐκτός ἀπό κανένα θαῦμα, ποτέ δέ θά καταφέρωμε νά γράψωμε ἑλληνικά μέ τόση τελειότητα⁷⁶.

Given his views on Greek language, which at that time he considers «τόσο φτωχή καί τόσο ἀκαλλιέργητη»⁷⁷, his six-year stay in Paris during the 20s and his admiration for the impressive figure of Jean Moréas, we should not be surprised that he felt a great temptation to write in French⁷⁸. In addition to the poems he dedicated to Kirsten, the poet made several attempts to write in this language. In Ioanna Tsatsou's archives we found several poems written in French by Seferis. Here we would like to give a taste of this interesting material. They are poems in which the influence of French symbolist poets, mainly from Laforgue, is evident⁷⁹:

Plainte
Le crépuscule est las de son faste incompris
dans le lointain là-bas, pleurent des glas de rames,

⁷⁵ Like this in the original document. ASCS. GL. Constantine Tsatsos and Ioanna Tsatsou papers, letter 9/01/21.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, letter 11/08/21.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, letter 20/03/22.

⁷⁸ VAGENAS (1996): 109-110; SOLA (1997): 44-45.

⁷⁹ VAGENAS (1996): 115-175; VITTI (1977): 105-133; SAVVIDIS (1995): 102-134.

va, vogue, Ophélie, dans l'onde de mon âme
car aux rammeaux crochus mes rêves se sont pris.
Le crépuscule est las de sa robe dolente
et je sens tes pâleurs, qui me montent aux yeux,
visage ravagé par un départ si vieux,
que ton absence semble une mort nonchalante.
Dans le lointain, là-bas, deux amants ont pleuré,
ayant compris le vide affreux de leurs caresses...
les soupçons, les frissons de ton spectre me blessent
pourtant, tu le sais bien, l'amour n'est pas sacré.
Va, vogue, Ophélie, mon âme se tarit,
mon âme qui sera le malsain marécage,
où viendront, croassant des vols d'oiseaux sauvages,
loque à loque, émonder, ton cadavre meurtri.
Car aux rammeaux crochus, hagards, mes rêves, pendent
ils me les ont pendus mes rêves d'or nimbés...
et c'est comme un très noir et sinistre gibet...
pauvres rêves trahis par des cours qui marchendent...⁸⁰

Some authors have questioned what actually retained Seferis in the Greek language⁸¹. The responses have been highly diverse⁸². On our side, we believe we can affirm that what distinguished Seferis from Moreas was his powerful desire to become a Greek poet. All his efforts in the study of Greek language and literature, the poetic essay of these years, are focused on that objective. Seferis seems to be aware, even then, that he was a poet. He knew he had something different to offer and when he found the way to express it, he would shine. Thus, while it is true that at times he seems to lose his self-esteem:

Ἄν δέν εἶχα πειρασμούς θᾶγραφα καλύτερα, μά γιατί ἔλαφρυντικές
περιπτώσεις; Ἡ ἀλήθεια θάναι πώς δέν θᾶχω μεγάλη κλίση καί πώς πρέπει μιά
ἀπό αὐτές τίς μέρες νά κάψω ὅλα τά χαρτιά, νά κουρέψω τά μαλλιά μου καί νά
ἀφιερῶ στή νομική μου μελέτη⁸³,

it is not because he really believes he does not have talent but rather seek Ioannas' support. In this respect, what is also surprising is to find the same

⁸⁰ ASCS. GL. Constantine Tsatsos and Ioanna Tsatsou papers, without date, 1923.

⁸¹ See SOLA (1997): 45; MARONITIS (2000): 33-39; MARONITIS (1984): 108-130.

⁸² See SOLA (1997): 45-49.

⁸³ ASCS. GL. Constantine Tsatsos and Ioanna Tsatsou papers, letter 8/01/22.

conviction in Ioanna, who shortly after the Catastrophe, at the age of 20 years old, wrote her brother:

Δέ βαριέσαι, είμαστε δυστυχησμένοι άνθρωποι, δέν καταλαβαίνω γιατί γεννήθηκα, έσύ ναί, έπρεπε να γεννηθείς, θά κάνεις κάτι καλό, έχεις αυτή τή δύναμη, θάρθει καιρός πού οι άνθρωποι πού θάρθουν θά μουρμουρίζουν τ' όνομά σου μέ συγκίνηση και εύγνωμοσύνη⁸⁴.

However, in other letters we can clearly appreciate that the young poet was quite sure of his poetic value: «μιά σειρά από καμιά τριανταριά κομμάτια, πού νά παράξουν τά αίματα τών ακαδημαϊκών γερούντων και τών Μπωδελερικών νέων μας»⁸⁵. Thus, although he felt the temptation to write in French and he indeed wrote several poems in this language during these formative years, he desired to become a Greek poet and all his efforts and the constant study of Greek language and literature were focused on this aim:

Κι έπειτα, πήρα τόσο σοβαρά τώρα τή φιλολογία, άλλη συνείδηση κι αυτή, σχεδόν δέ σκέπτομαι τίποτ' άλλο όλη τή μέρα. Γυρεύω, γυρεύω τόν δρόμο τόν άπάτητο και θά τον βρω, γιατί πρέπει και άμα θά γράψω θά είμαι ό καλύτερος⁸⁶.

Since then he tried to find his own expression and style in the demotic language, studying texts of contemporary literature and the popular literature and ethnographic works, because he was convinced that: «θέλει μελέτη η ποίηση»⁸⁷. Always through his sister, he tried to obtain the works in which he was interested and to read them stealing time from his Law studies.

Παρακάλεσε, αν θέλεις, τόν Νίκο⁸⁸, να σου κάνει έναν κατάλογο τών έργων του Πολίτη, του καθηγητή του, καθώς και έναν κατάλογο τών γλωσσολογικών και λαογραφικών έργων πού θά μπορούσε να βρεϊ κανείς κάτω στην Ελλάδα. Ή Φιλολογία του Μεσαιωνικού Έλληνισμού καθώς και τά ποιήματα του άκριτικού κύκλου, μ' ενδιαφέρουν πολύ⁸⁹.

Closing this paper, it is important to highlight that these personal documents are spontaneous, direct and sincere letters, in which the poet wrote what

⁸⁴ ASCS. GL. George Seferis papers, file 52, subfile 1, letter 06/10/22.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, letter 22/04/22.

⁸⁶ ASCS. GL. George Seferis papers, file 52, subfile 1, letter 22/05/21.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, letter 15/05/1920.

⁸⁸ He refers to his friend Nikos Aronis.

⁸⁹ ASCS. GL. George Seferis papers, file 52, subfile 1, letter 15/05/1921.

he felt, just in the moment he felt it. It is, therefore, the oldest first-hand autobiographical information about the poet. Although the influence of French literature and the pursuit of Greek demotic language of the poet are very well known issues, we tried to offer here new data on the hard road Seferis followed until he found his own poetic expression. We believe this new data may contribute to the study of the poetic evolution of our poet.

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