

aged 66, at the General State Hospital in Athens from an abdominal aortic aneurism. Fittingly, he was accorded a state funeral. A final collection, *Autumn Manuscripts*, was published posthumously in 1990. His writings have been brought together in three volumes, published by Kedros, spanning in total nearly 1,400 pages.

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The Blind Man with the Lamp, as mentioned earlier, belongs to the third and last phase of Leivaditis's output. The book is divided into four sections: the volume begins with 'Laurels for the Defeated', a collection of 36 short prose-poems; this is followed by twelve prayer-like 'Conversations' addressed to the Lord; the religious character of the work is continued with a short section entitled 'Brother Jesus', consisting of four brief passages, reminiscent of the Gospels, and given the titles of 'Annunciation', 'The birth', 'The burial' and 'The ascension'; and the book concludes with another long series of prose-poems, 44 in all, grouped under the heading 'Up All Night'.

My intention is not to provide a detailed analysis of the book but to introduce some of its themes and techniques as a way of motivating the reader to take up and indeed contemplate this masterful collection. Although a late work, many of the characteristics of Leivaditis's earlier writings reappear here, including the everyday or conversational tone of speech (Leivaditis invariably steers clear of the purist or *katharevousa* variety of Greek), corresponding to the humble and familiar settings of the poems (e.g., a living room, a coffee-house, a street corner); the abundant use of ellipses, unanswered or rhetorical questions, and paradoxical sequences and surrealist imagery (a classic example: 'I believe in beautiful birds which fly out from the most bitter books,' from 'Credo'); and also a special affinity for the outcasts of society: the blind, the beggars, the anarchists, the mentally ill — 'those poor and mad

souls who imagined themselves to be birds, ladders or trees,' as Leivaditis wonderfully puts it in 'Entry Prohibited'. But by this stage, in 1983, important differences in his writing style had emerged. The epic stature of his earlier writings came to be replaced by short, compact and even aphoristic poems, sometimes only a line or two long. And the lyrical form of his previous work was to give way to poems that tend more towards prose and narrative.

The most significant change, however, concerns the mood and substance of the poems. Leivaditis's previous commitment to the politics of the Left had by now been transformed into, though not entirely supplanted by, a broader and deeper quest of existential and religious proportions, thus justifying the appellation given him of 'heretic of the Left'.¹ Although retaining his always strong social conscience, he had now embarked upon a passionate search for metaphysical meaning after what he regarded as the betrayal of his youthful hopes for creating a more just world here on earth.² The extent of the ground Leivaditis had traversed is nicely captured in two identically titled poems, 'Comradely Song'. In its first and lengthier incarnation, in the 1956 collection *The Man with the Drum*, the poem is a veritable eulogy to the Volga river as a symbol of the virtues and sacrifices of the workers and

¹ It is clear from his later writings that Leivaditis remained to the end sympathetic at least to the Left. To take just one example: in the posthumously published prose-poem, 'Histories,' he wrote: 'On that night I was going down a side street when I noticed a man being harassed by the police. He was middle-aged with a small beard. "What's your name?" they asked him. He was completely silent. "Leave him!", I said, "I paid with my soul for him. His name is Lenin?" (Leivaditis, *Poetry*, vol. 3: 1979-1990, p. 498)

² I would venture that a similar trajectory can be identified in Kazantzakis, who in the last decade of his life wrote the bulk of his novels and was moving away from both the communism and the heroic nihilism of his past to a view of the world more in keeping with mystical strands of Christianity.

soldiers of the Soviet Union.¹ But by 1983, the version included in the present translation has taken on a far more mournful, if not ironical, character. The poet's days are best 'passed over in silence' and the nights, where the stars no longer 'refute futility', are ones 'which I want to forget'. The 'old, comradely song' the poet whistles on his highway journey has now become only so much whistling in the wind.

The Blind Man with the Lamp gives powerful voice to the elegiac remembrance of the past and the concomitant desire for something wholly (and holy) Other. Memories of the battles and personalities of bygone days, imbued with feelings of loss and mourning, are portrayed so intimately that we almost believe that they are our very own. The nostalgia for 'the great days we lived through' ('Rain') is great and painful: we live 'with our watches stopped at another time' ('Soft Music'), and 'at night a gunshot from the past would suddenly be heard and the nostalgia would kill me' ('The Great Sin'). That past, and the poet who still resides there, are barely remembered today, and so stories of 'my wartime adventures' are met with incredulous stares ('The Unknown Soldier'). The postwar generation have already become 'the forgotten ones' ('Findings'), living amongst 'withered leaves and uprisings' ('In Memoriam'). All that remains is their memory of lost causes and ideals, or 'broken dreams and dead music' ('Years of Fire'), 'that great error in which we took refuge' ('Choice') — referring, of course, to the utopias of communism.²

¹ In the original edition, the poem was dedicated to Stalin. In later reprints, the dedication was altered to: 'For the unknown dead in the USSR during the Second World War.'

² This scepticism towards Causes and ideologies is evident in much of Leivaditi's later work. In *Handbook for Euthanasia* he wrote: '... but how many questions in this world have answers / and honesty always begins there, where all other paths to salvation have come to an end' ('The Key to the Mystery', *Poetry*, vol. 3, p. 96). In a similar vein, he was to write some years later: 'I loved the ideals of humanity / but the birds always