

politically committed. He had not. But he was humanly committed. He was committed to this value of the integrity of the human being — to his sense that this integrity must not be violated, whatever the reason given or the excuses made, however good or convincing they may appear. And he was committed to this because unless the artist is allowed to be true to himself and to express what is true to himself, he cannot function as an artist. And in some measure, Seferis would have said, every human being is an artist. Unless one understands the artist's fundamental need to be 'true to himself' one cannot understand why his art must always be an affirmation of human freedom and why he himself in some way always becomes a symbol of that freedom. If Seferis's funeral was a national occasion — which it was — this was precisely because he, a non-political man, had become a symbol of that personal freedom for which we always long.

What, though, of the other question? Did Seferis hold beliefs that one might call religious? This is perhaps a more difficult question. Of course, Seferis was born into a world in which the great spiritual and liturgical tradition of the Orthodox Church was, so to speak, as much part of the Greek landscape as the mountains or the sea; and his childhood was nourished by the images and symbols of this tradition which animates by its presence every corner of that landscape. Later, these images and symbols from the Christian tradition were to be joined by those of the pre-Christian world, for these too, in another and perhaps more remote, less actual sense, animate every corner of the Greek landscape; and the heroic dignity and heroic suffering of some of the figures of this ancient world — of Odysseus or Oedipus or Socrates — became for Seferis types of the same passion as that lived by the Christian Saviour, especially as this is represented in what Seferis was to call 'the most sublime form of spring I know',¹ the Easter services of the Orthodox Church. So powerful in Greece is this myth of the wounded God who dies and is born again that, as another Greek writer puts it, when you walk in a Greek village at Easter behind the *Epitaphios*, breathing in the air the first scents of spring, you can then sense how close the buried Christ is to the

¹ *On the Greek Style*, 'Sikelianos', p. 15.

small brother of Persephone. And Seferis himself used to say how difficult it was for him to distinguish whether the figure being buried was that of Christ or Adonis.¹ Born and brought up in the environment of a living and great tradition, Seferis, from instinct and perhaps unconsciously, wove the events of his life and of the life around him together within a framework of a mythical vision so closely that, as in the case of the ancient Greek dramatists, it is difficult to separate the mythical elements in his poetry from the 'plot' itself.

Then, as we have already remarked, Seferis had this very vivid sense of the physical world — an almost primitive sense. He felt very closely related to the living things about him; he had a profound intimacy with them. That wedge which rapid and uncontrolled mechanization inserts between man's soul and his natural environment had not penetrated very deeply into him. Platonic thought has played a greater part in the Greek East than Aristotelian thought, and I think that this is not unconnected with a particular sense of the natural world — a sense which, to use a much abused term, one might call pantheistic. This is a sense that nature — the created world, including man's own physical existence — is rooted in the metaphysical world and as a consequence is capable of sharing in the highest functions of life. It is a sense that man should harmonize himself with the natural world and respect it, rather than set himself apart from it or rather than subject the natural world to some discipline, scientific or economic, which he can only do on condition that he cuts himself off from his natural roots. 'I have a very organic feeling', wrote Seferis, 'that identifies human life with the natural world of Greece.'² Seferis, I think, would have reciprocated the advice of the Japanese poet, Bashō: 'Go to the pine if you want to learn about the pine, or to the bamboo if you want to learn about the bamboo. And in doing so, you must leave your subjective preoccupation with yourself. Otherwise you impose yourself on the object and do not learn. Your poetry issues of its own accord when you

¹ *On the Greek Style*, 'Letter to a Foreign Friend' p. 171.

² 'Letter on "Thrush"', see p. 124 above.