

LIONS' THE GATE

Selected Poems of Titos Patrikios

*Translated by Christopher Bakken
and Roula Konsolaki*



Truman State University Press
New Odyssey Series

Published by Truman State University Press, Kirksville, Missouri
tsup.truman.edu
© 2006 Truman State University Press
New Odyssey Series
All rights reserved

Cover art: The Lions' Gate, Mycenae. © 2005 by Benaki Museum Athens.

Cover design: Teresa Wheeler
Type: Adobe Garamond, copyright Adobe Systems Incorporated
Printed by Thomson-Shore, Dexter, Michigan USA

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Patrikios, Titos, 1928-
[Poems. English. Selections]
The lions' gate : selected poems of Titos Patrikios / translated by Christopher
Bakken and Roula Konsolaki
p. cm. — (New odyssey series)
ISBN-13: 978-1-931112-64-2 (alk. paper)
ISBN-10: 1-931112-64-9 (alk. paper)
1. Patrikios, Titos, 1928—Translations into English. I. Bakken, Christopher,
1967- II. Konsolaki, Roula. III. Title. IV. Series
PA5627.A84A2 2006
889.1'34—dc22

2006033255

No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any format by any
means without written permission from the publisher.

The paper in this publication meets the minimum requirements of the American
National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed
Library Materials, ANSI Z39.48-1992.

Contents

Illustrations	viii
Acknowledgments	ix
Translators' Preface	xi
Introduction	xiii
The Lions' Gate	1
Early Poems (1948–1951)	
The Conquest of Everest	5
Latest News	7
The Friends	8
Open Borders	9
Fires	11
Tavern "Abundance"	12
From <i>Exercises</i> (1952)	
Faces	15
Paper	17
From <i>Dirt Road</i> (1952–1954)	
Earth and Sea	21
Facing Up to the Sky	29
From <i>Years of the Stone</i> (1953–1954)	
Drafts on Makronissos	41
Another Day in Ai-Stratis	44
Frame for the Light	46
Military March	47
Monologue	48
Verses, 1	49
Habits of the Detainees	50
Syllables	51
Plaster Sky	52
Night in the Tent	53
From <i>Litigations</i> (1955)	
While They Speak	57

Carnival Night	58
Last Light	59
Tomorrow	60
Three Dimensions	61
Flesh.	62
From <i>Apprenticeship</i> (1956–1959)	
Verses, 2	65
From <i>Apprenticeship Again</i> (1959–1962)	
To Learn.	69
My Hometown.	70
Elements of Identity.	71
Eight Years	74
A Family Lunch	75
The Door	76
From <i>Sea of Promise</i> (1959–1963)	
Cure.	79
The Blame	80
Trip	81
Letter	82
Cold Wind.	83
Catacomb.	84
Encounter.	85
Double Moon.	86
Metro	87
Via dei Coronari 123	88
The Other Town.	89
Besieged Time	90
Via di Tor Millina.	91
Villa Adriana	92
The Message.	93
Gare du Nord.	94
From <i>Deformities</i> (1959–1963)	
Persistence of a City	97
From <i>Optional Stop</i> (1967–1973)	
Secret Life.	101
Pretense	102

Demonstration	103
The Mountains.	104
Church of the Seven Sleepers	105
The Stone.	106
Foreign Skies	107
Waiting Area.	108
Woman	109
The Journey	111
Oedipus's Story.	112
Easter	113
Millennia	114
Allegory	115
From <i>Opposing Mirrors</i> (1988)	
Verses, 3	119
A Town in Southern Greece	120
Zebras	121
From <i>The Pleasures of Extension</i> (1992)	
My Language	125
Loves	126
Appropriation of Statues.	127
From <i>Resistance of the Facts</i> (2000)	
Ashes	131
Nightmare	132
Molyvos, 1	133
Molyvos, 2	134
The Young Researcher	135
Violence	136
The Final Evening of a Poetry Festival	137
From <i>The Lions' Gate</i> (2002)	
The Wiles of Odysseus	141
Of Pikes and Warriors	142
Notes	143
About Titos Patrikios.	145
About the Translators	147

Illustrations

Section pages and endsheets are illustrated with Titos Patrikios's handwritten Greek poems. English titles are listed below.

The Lions' Gate (first 9 lines)	Endsheets
Latest News (first 15 lines)	3
Paper	13
Earth and Sea (working draft, first 14 lines)	19
Monologue (first 13 lines)	39
Carnival Night	55
Verses, 2	63
My Hometown	67
Trip	77
Persistence of a City (first 20 lines)	95
Secret Life	99
A Town in Southern Greece	117
My Language (first 15 lines)	123
Ashes	129
The Wiles of Odysseus (first 20 lines)	139

Acknowledgments

We gratefully acknowledge Kedros Publishers, Athens, for their permission to translate and publish the poems of Titos Patrikios. We also acknowledge the following journals in which many of our translations of Titos Patrikios's poems were first published or are forthcoming:

<i>Absinthe: New European Writing</i>	“Cold Wind” “In the Plunder” “Three Dimensions” “Tomorrow”
<i>The Atlanta Review</i>	“Catacomb”
<i>The Evansville Review</i>	“Ashes”
<i>Gulf Coast</i>	“The Message” “While They Speak”
<i>Literary Imagination</i>	“Carnival Night” “Faces” “Frame for the Light” “Verses, 1” “Verses, 2”
<i>Lyric</i>	“The Mountains” “The Stone”
<i>Michigan Quarterly Review</i>	“Drafts on Makronissos”
<i>Modern Poetry in Translation</i>	“Via Dei Coronari”
<i>Passport</i>	“Earth and Sea” “Elements of Identity” “Syllables”
<i>Pleiades</i>	“Monologue” “Villa Ariadne”
<i>Poetry Greece</i>	“Cure” “The Message” “Via dei Coronari 123”
<i>Seneca Review</i>	“Latest News” “Open Borders”
<i>Sirena: Poesía, Arte y Crítica</i>	“The Blame” “Last Light” “Letter”

Tampa Review

Two Lines

“The Lions’ Gate”

“Nightmare”

“Trip”

“Besieged Time”

“Flesh”

“Underground Train”

“Via di Tor Millina”

“Cure”

Translators' Preface

This volume includes those poems we consider to be representative of Titos Patrikios's poetic output, beginning with his early poems of detention and including poems from his most recent volumes. Our aim is to give readers in English, especially readers unfamiliar with his work, a means to explore the breadth of his career and to evaluate his achievement. Inevitably, exquisite and perhaps even crucial poems must be neglected in the process of such a "selection." We were fortunate to have a week alone with the Titos Patrikios on the island of Rhodes one December several years ago, and in between alternating cups of coffee and wine, and during walks through the impossibly deserted streets of the old city, we made many of our choices with his gentle guidance. In the end, however, we determined the final contents of this volume and we humbly accept responsibility for any glaring omissions.

This book would not exist without the support of several people and institutions deserving recognition here: The International Writers' and Translators' Centre of Rhodes, Allegheny College, Renna Patrikios, Willis Barnstone, Rachel Hadas, and Kerry Neville Bakken. Thanks to the Benaki Museum, Athens, for the photographs from Mycenae. And thanks, especially, to Titos Patrikios himself, who dedicated many weeks of his life and so much wisdom and hilarity to this project, from Lindos to Athens, and beyond. Our friendship is without doubt the greatest profit of this happy labor.

Introduction

In “Ars Poetica?” Czeslaw Milosz suggests that:

The purpose of poetry is to remind us
how difficult it is to remain just one person,
for our house is open, there are no keys in the doors,
and invisible guests come in and out at will.

Milosz understood the importance of managing the contentious relationship between human personality and political ideology, not to mention in certain cases the tectonic ordeals of proscription, censorship, and exile. The self is one home, but the homeland is another—both are subject to unsettling visitations. If this volume of poems is any indication, the Greek poet Titos Patrikios also knows the difficulty of remaining one person, as well as the predicament of living in a country haunted by far too many visible and invisible guests.

Patrikios was born in Athens in 1928 to a middle class family of artists and intellectuals. His parents were both actors who traveled widely (including tours in United States in the early 1930s), offering the poet a rather cosmopolitan, if scattered upbringing. He was educated as a lawyer, but through several twists of fate, and because of the turbulent fate of his country, poetry has shaped his existence more than the law. Like many young intellectuals of his time, Patrikios was active in the Communist-led resistance against the German Occupation from 1941 to 1944. As if the noxious presence of the Nazis was not enough, Greeks on the right and left struggled for control of the resistance, exacerbating the already desperate situation in Greece during the occupation, and creating political fractures that led to the civil war that followed. At the end of September 1944, a month before the liberation of Greece, Patrikios was put against a wall in front of a firing squad (composed of fellow Greeks, Nazi sympathizers), but was spared death at the last minute.

Out of the vacuum left by the war, conservative forces from within Greece seized power, and leftists like Patrikios found themselves in a precarious position again, this time with the American and British-backed government of Themistocles Sofoulis, who emerged as prime minister in 1946. Keeping Greece from “going Red” had become a central priority for the Populist leaders of Greece, as well as for the Americans and British. The Communist Party was proscribed in 1947 and in the next several years, around 20,000 Greeks were sentenced for crimes against the state. Many communists, Patrikios included, were forced into political detention on the Greek islands of Makronissos and

Ai-Stratis. The conditions on these islands—Makronissos in particular—were deplorable: prisoners were subjected to torture, solitary confinement, hard labor, and brainwashing. In order to secure their release from detention, prisoners were required to renounce their membership in the Communist Party and sign a document of capitulation and “forgiveness.” Despite being tortured and suffering from tuberculosis, which worsened during his detainment, Patrikios never signed.

After Makronissos, Patrikios was transferred to Ai-Stratis, where he met fellow-inmate Yiannis Ritsos, by then an already established literary figure on the left. Ritsos encouraged Patrikios and others to write in spite of their imprisonment; Patrikios’s book *Exercises*, for example, consists of surrealist experiments “assigned” to the young poet by his mentor, who would announce a subject (“paper” or “faces”) that the detainees would improvise upon during their labor each day. Ritsos edited Patrikios’s first manuscripts and their friendship was crucial to Patrikios personally and artistically throughout his years of detention.

The early phase of Patrikios’s career is represented in this volume by selections from his early poems and from his books *Dirt Road*, *Years of the Stone*, and *Litigations*. These poems demonstrate the powerful influence of Ritsos, but also that of Yiorgos Seferis (the most potent voice in Greek poetry at that moment). Both poets served as models for how a young poet in Greece might confront the modern condition from within the inherited mythopoetic currents of their ancient culture. But these poets also carried in them the influence of high European modernism: Seferis was particularly informed by T. S. Eliot, whom he translated into Greek, and both Ritsos and Seferis borrowed certain stylistic techniques from the French symbolists. During his detention on Makronissos, Patrikios recalled secreting away a copy of Baudelaire’s “L’Albatross.” Two other Greek poets exerted strong influences on his early work: the pessimistic Kostas Karyotakis and the ubiquitous C. P. Cavafy. Whitman and Mayakofksy, he has said, were crucial in shaping his understanding of the role of the poet. Also, Aris Alexandrou brought into Ai-Stratis a copy of Ezra Pound’s *Personae*, which caused immense indignation to the supporters of social-realism within the camp. While participating in the assignments offered by Yiannis Ritsos, Patrikios and fellow detainee-poet Kostas Kouloufakos conducted parallel experiments of their own, in secret, under the invisible influence of Pound, thereby bypassing the Greek mentor’s authority.

These early poems bear the obvious marks of the poet’s imprisonment and detention. Though they are at times as bitter and sardonic as we might expect, they usually maintain a surprising degree of optimism and faith in the ethos of the ancient homeland, and in the truth-wielding potential of language, in spite of an official silencing. In this way, Patrikios will remind readers of two other

poets of exile and imprisonment, Nazim Hikmet and Pablo Neruda, poets similarly marked by the tension between celebration and protest, poets more in tune with existential uncertainties than the certitudes of Party praxis. Like Hikmet and Neruda, Patrikios remained more devoted to poetry than to any ideology.

The publication of Patrikios's *Dirt Road* (1954) was viewed as an important moment in Greek letters (the fiftieth anniversary of that publication was recently celebrated with fanfare in Athens). The book consisted of loosely symphonic long poems, like "Earth and Sea," that register what attracted Greek readers to Patrikios's voice early on: a poignant sense of what Greece was losing through a lens of almost surreal pastoral. Though steeped in a landscape of death and the stultifying atmosphere of the prison islands, these poems are ultimately lyrics of positive defiance, rising nearly to Whitmanian heights in "Facing up to the Sky," his homage to Ritsos.

For many Greeks, not just those on the left, the period leading through the Greek Civil War and the decade that followed is one of the darkest in recent cultural memory. Although Patrikios's poems of detention have their specific origins in a nearly forgotten bit of history—the ugliest manifestation of the Cold War in Greece—little historical context is necessary to support them; they offer understated and poignant documentation of a simple fact: the experience of living inside a frail, but resistant human body in extreme human circumstances. The poems from *Dirt Road* and *Years of the Stone* were written simultaneously, and both were forbidden—the poet actually had to bury his manuscripts to keep them from being seized by the authorities. Rather than compose hymns celebrating the unalterable nobility of his comrade detainees, which members of his Party would have preferred, Patrikios dedicated most of these poems to the mundane and undignified facts of camp life, presenting these with a matter-of-fact transparency that rises almost automatically toward irony.

The poems written between 1959 and the mid 1970s (represented by his books *Apprenticeship*, *Apprenticeship Again*, *Sea of Promise*, *Optional Stop*, and *Deformities*) demarcate the next phase of Patrikios's career. Returning to Athens in 1954 as a detainee "on leave," he had become a resolute anti-Stalinist, yet up until 1959 (when his status as a lawyer allowed him to leave the country) he continued being asked to sign documents of capitulation, strangely enough every year on his birthday. From 1959 to 1964, Patrikios studied sociology and philosophy at the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes and at the Sorbonne. In 1964, he returned to Athens to find himself again at odds with his fellow Greeks. By then, Patrikios had become more and more outwardly critical of the Communist Party and its activities around the world, leading finally to a definitive rupture

with the Communist Party and also with Yiannis Ritsos, who remained steadfast (at least publicly) in his political allegiance. But the poems from this period also satirized the high rhetoric, pomp and circumstance of artists who agreed to capitulate with the right wing and Patrikios's books were therefore simultaneously rejected by critics from both political extremes.

If the early phase of his career is marked by pastoral imagery and nostalgic lyricism, much of it juxtaposed with the ordeals of his island detention, in his next phase we find Patrikios becoming a primarily urban poet, a writer of short satirical and erotic poems. Many work upon the architecture of mysterious syllogisms, or legal formulas, and most proceed according to the logic of dreams. In 1967, the poet fled to France to escape the military dictatorship of the "Colonels." He spent his exile in Paris and Rome working for UNESCO and various French research institutes. The poet's loss of his home and his mother tongue are clearly evident in these poems, which combine nostalgic recollections of sexual encounter (challenging the reserved style of poetry popular at that moment in Greece) with an almost allegorical longing for what is absent: the body of the beloved woman, as well as the body of the beloved homeland. The brevity and directness of these poems also reflect a difficult ambivalence. Patrikios describes the early 1970s as a kind of "fallow period" for Greek writers; while poets in Greece were essentially "on strike," reluctant to publish under the circumstances demanded of them by the censors, those outside of Greece, like Patrikios, found in their displacement a profound, but guilt-ridden motivation to speak for those who could (or would) not.

Since his return from exile, Patrikios has been awarded the National Prize in Literature from the Greek government in 1992, and he served as the Chairman of the Athens 2004 Cultural Olympiad for one year. Kedros Publishers put out a three-volume *Collected Poems* in 1998. Patrikios has published several volumes since then, including *Opposing Mirrors*, *The Pleasures of Extension*, *The Lions' Gate*, and *Resistance of the Facts*, and several books of prose aphorisms. These books were not written in the shadow of foreign monuments, in adopted cities, from a distance; indeed, now Patrikios's book-lined apartment near Kolonaki overlooks a horizon dominated by the Acropolis. But certain tensions still inform his work. The leading Greek critic, Dimitris Maronitis, finds in the poetry of Patrikios several persistent archetypes, foremost among them, "the reinstatement of the outcast in public life," one that is "internally undetermined by the ghosts of dead friends and the memories of a group of people that has completely fallen apart."

As Patrikios himself puts it, in the poem from which we have borrowed the title of this volume:

Our past is forever full, terrible,
just as the story of what happened is terrible,
carved as it is now, written on the lintel
of the gate we pass through every day.

Here readers in English will finally encounter “the story of what happened,” in the voice of a Greek poet courageous enough to pass through the lions’ gate again and again, making what he can out of the terrible, sublime history of his country.

Christopher Bakken
Athens, Greece, and Meadville, Pennsylvania, 2006

Notes

“Earth and Sea”

Patrikios was twenty-six years old when this poem was first published in 1954. The pastoral environment described in this poem is the island of Ai-Stratis (see note below).

“Drafts on Makronissos”

Makronissos is a barren island off the coast of Attica, near Kea. It was used to imprison members of the leftist parties that were outlawed by the British and American-backed government, led by Prime Minister Sofoulis, in 1946. There, prisoners were subjected to torture, hard labor, and solitary confinement. In addition to Patrikios, the poet Yiannis Ritsos and the composer Mikis Theodorakis were detained there. It was repopulated with inmates again by the military junta that ruled Greece from 1967–73.

“BETO, AETO, CETO, SFA, the Gamma Center”: these are the names of the various detention centers, listed as they were located north to south. Skarvellas was the prison guard assigned to keep watch over Patrikios.

The phrase “Embros ELAS yia teen Ellada” is from a partisan anthem; ELAS is the acronym for the leftist Popular Greek Liberation Army, famous for its resistance activities against German occupation, but later outlawed.

“Another Day on Ai-Stratis”

Like Makronissos, the island of Agios Efstratios (or Ai-Stratis) was used as a detainment camp. It is located in the northern Aegean, off the coast of Lemnos and is, unlike Makronissos, both beautiful and inhabited (by a small population of fishermen, farmers, and their families).

“Military March”

Detainees were forced to sing propagandistic songs and military marches while laboring on Makronissos.

“Monologue”

The imagery of this poem is informed by the fact that Patrikios suffered from tuberculosis during his imprisonment. This fact was not lost on his guards, who frequently placed him in solitary confinement in a ravine without blankets or kerosene heaters.

“Night in the Tent”

The unpublished poet Costas Koulafakos was a close friend of Patrikios in detention.

“Elements of Identity”

This poem sparked a small controversy in the 1960s since it was thought by certain members of the left to typify a poetry of the movement’s defeat. Nikita Khrushchev’s “Special Report to the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union” was famous for its denunciation of Stalin, a condemnation in particular of the “cult of the individual” and the subsequent failures Stalin had inspired. Here, Patrikios looks forward ironically to what might be achieved in a fictional “Thirtieth Congress.”

“Persistence of a City”

“La Canea” is the Italian name for Chania, a city on Crete colonized by the Venetians from the fourteenth through the sixteenth centuries.

“Molyvos, 1”

Ancient Methymna, on the northern coast of the island of Lesbos facing the Turkish towns of Troy and Assos, is now known as Molyvos. Alcaeus and Sappho, both lyric poets, were contemporaries on Lesbos in sixth century BCE. Arion of Lesbos is credited with inventing the dithyramb. Longus, who may have lived on Lesbos, gave us the pastoral novel *Daphnis and Chloe*, which is set there.

“Church of the Seven Sleepers”

According to legend, persecuted by the Roman emperor Decius, seven young Christian men fled to a cave where they slept—for a miraculously long time—and awoke to find themselves in a newly Christian empire. A famous shrine to the Seven Sleepers has been excavated on Mount Pion, outside Ephesus.

“Of Pikes and Warriors”

The innovation of the *sarissa*—enormous, double-spiked pikes—gave the Macedonian phalanx, led by Alexander, an intimidating advantage in countless battles.

About Titos Patrikios

Titos Patrikios was born in Athens in 1928. He was active in the resistance movement against the German Occupation, but during the years of military dictatorship following the Greek Civil War he was “displaced” within the borders of his own country (to detention camps on the islands of Makronissos and Ai-Stratis), and later exiled outright to Paris and Rome. After he received Greece’s National Prize for Literature, Patrikios’s numerous books were assembled by Kedros Publishers into a three-volume *Collected Poems*; several new volumes have followed. This is the first full-length collection of his poems in English.

About the Translators

Christopher Bakken is the author of two books of poems: *Goat Funeral* (Sheep Meadow Press, 2006) and *After Greece* (Truman State University Press), which won the 2001 T. S. Eliot Prize for Poetry. His poems, essays, and translations have appeared widely. He teaches at Allegheny College in Meadville, Pennsylvania.

Roula Konsolaki received degrees from Aristotle University of Thessaloniki and Kapodistrian University of Athens. Now living in Crete, she teaches at a state school and works as a freelance translator from French and English into Greek. Her translations have been printed or are forthcoming in *Modern Poetry in Translation*, *Two Lines*, *Seneca Review*, *Literary Imagination*, *The Tampa Review*, and elsewhere. She is also the translator of *Kai Meta tin Ellada Ti...* (published in the U.S. as *After Greece*), by Christopher Bakken.