

TAKIS PAPATSONIS



Ursa Minor
and
Other Poems

TRANSLATED FROM THE MODERN GREEK WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

Kimon Friar and Kostas Myrsiades

Stylistically, Papatsonis's mature poetry is characterized by its failure to use a strict verse form, its discontinuous and dreamlike combination of images, and its highly personal quality. It is a poetry which intends to elicit meaning rather than to lend itself to pyrotechnical effects; it utilizes patterns of rhythms and sounds to make meaning more emphatic. His language is that of the mystical poet whose obscurity is conditioned by his transformation of myth and symbol into philosophy through surreal images which express the flow of the subconscious. Neither canonical nor schematic, his poetry is deeply spiritual, infused with visionary language and images. He resolves the apparent dichotomy between the surreal and the religious or theological aspects of his poetry in a highly mystical outpouring of feeling.

Papatsonis's most mature poems treat themes of darkness and light, nature and divinity, the feminine presence as man's intercessor, and the Greek myths. This is a poetry which intermingles the erotic, esoteric, and ecstatic, and flows freely from the subconscious, embodying the abstract in sensuous images of a progressively more dense and mystical character. In spite of the obvious Christian symbolism with which Papatsonis endows his poetry, he preferred to view his poetic output as basically "pantheist" rather than "religious," a term frequently applied to him by Greek critics. He saw man's soul as a shell in which resides the presence of god, a presence to be found even in the smallest objects in nature which both contain and reveal Him. The universe for Papatsonis was a revealer of that majesty and love which constantly draws man toward the heavens.

Papayiotis (Takis) Papatsonis was born into an aristocratic family on 30 January 1895 in Athens. Most of Papatsonis's adult life was spent in the Ministry of Economics which he joined in 1914 as deputy chairman of the Commercial Bank of Greece. A visionary and a mystic, his poetic career extends from 1913 to 1976, although the period from 1930 to 1950 contains the bulk of his most important poetry and prose. It was during these years that he produced over half of his entire poetic output and almost two-thirds of the poetry he considered worthy of inclusion in his two volumes of collected poems. In 1967, with his election to the Academy of Athens, he was awarded the highest position a literary man may fill in Greece. Papatsonis died in Athens on 26 July 1976.

Kimón Friar is a distinguished and prolific translator of modern Greek poetry. His translations include Nikos Kazantzakis's *The Odyssey: A Modern Sequel* and *The Saviors of God: Spiritual Exercises*, and the selected poetry of Odysseus Elytis, *The Sovereign Sun*.

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