



NIKIFOROS VRETTAKOS
GIFTS IN ABEYANCE
Last Poems 1981-91

TRANSLATED FROM THE MODERN GREEK
WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

David Connolly

The poems in this volume come from collections published by the poet during the last ten years of his life (1981–91). The theme and tone of these last collections are set by the epilogue from *Liturgy below the Acropolis*, a long, dramatic poem for voices comparable in conception and scope to Odysseus Elytis's *Axion Esti*. Here, we encounter a sense of impending departure, a feeling of indebtedness to the world and a wish to settle accounts, a need to bid farewell to his friends-symbols: to the sun, the light, the world around, the hallowed Christ-like figure of man, the trees, the flowers, the sea, to his beloved Mount Taygetus and, not least, to poetry itself.

Vrettakos's poems are firmly rooted in the Greek landscape and colored by Greek light, yet their themes and sentiment are ecumenical. He writes, as Kimon Friar says, "with a sincerity that dares to be simple, naïve, obvious. He trusts to the purity of his emotion, to the lyrical lilt of his song to give his words an immediacy and quality that may turn them into sentiment and escape sentimentality."

"...a unique figure in Greek letters."

Vincenzo Rotolo

"A noble tearful sentinel of Poetry and Freedom."

Yannis Ritsos

"If poetry is but a simple word on the infinite complexity of the world, then, in as much as this one word can be said, Vrettakos said it."

Dimitris Chatzis

Nikiforos Vrettakos was born on 1 January 1912 in the village of Krokees near Sparta. He began writing poetry at an early age and, in 1929, published his first youthful collection entitled *Under Shadows and Lights*. In a literary career lasting some sixty years, he published over thirty-five collections of poetry, eight prose works, and a long critical study of Nikos Kazantzakis, and wrote innumerable articles and essays for periodicals and newspapers. He belongs to the so-called 1930s generation of Greek writers which also includes three other distinguished poets: George Seferis, Yannis Ritsos, and Odysseus Elytis, and, in recent years, his work has at last begun to achieve the critical recognition and acclaim that it so richly deserves. In Greece, he received more awards than any other poet of his generation. His work has been translated into most European languages as well as Arabic, Japanese, and Turkish.

David Connolly is assistant professor in Department of Translation and Interpreting at the Ionian University in Corfu and is also head of translation at the British Council in Athens. His published translations include Nikiforos

Vrettakos, *The Philosophy of Flowers* (1990), and Angelos Terzakis, *The Greek Epic* (1990). Forthcoming publications include Pavlos Lambros, *Post-Universal Harmony* (a collection of short stories). At present, he is working on a translation of Odysseus Elytis's *The Oxopetra Elegies*, in collaboration with the poet. He is married with two daughters and lives in Greece.