

Three Late Poems by Yannis Ritsos

translated by EDMUND KEELEY and DIMITRI GONDICAS

The poems translated here come from two volumes, *The Negatives of Silence* and *The Naked Tree*, that Yannis Ritsos wrote during the summer of 1987 and are included in his posthumous collection, *Late, Very Late into the Night* (Kedros, 1991). Ritsos died after a long illness in November, 1990, at the age of 81.

POSTSCRIPT

What was said again and again lost all colour and meaning –
stones, water, windows, and that man with the old suitcase
waiting outside the customs house, while the town clock
struck eight in the evening and the ship did not arrive
although the hoot of its whistle was heard. There on the dock
the cross-shaped crane and the empty panniers.
Later, the stars came out above the heavy, torpid tugboats,
and there, in the deserted square, in front of the heroes' monument,
four sailors laid out the drowned diver.

Karlovasi, Samos, 22 July '87

USELESS KEYS

This far. Yes. There's nothing farther. Nothing.
The local bus lets off foreign tourists,
foreign baggage, foreign sleeping bags. You can't recognize
even this suitcase that once held
something of yours – the blue shirt you liked,

or the photographs of early lovers. The books on the shelves
 turn their backs on you. The keys piled on the table
 and you neither know which goes to what nor care.
 And this small silver key? Oh yes, I remember,
 it opens the jewelry box that fell in the well years ago
 with all those diamonds and sapphires and emeralds,
 and a gold Christ-on-the-cross with three rubies.
 They drained the well. Searched. Nothing. Only stones.
 It was young Persephone, they say, who took them underground.

Karlovasi, Samos, 7 August '87

SHORT CHRONICLE

The olive trees have grown heavy, the vines have ripened,
 the women get pregnant still, the boys swim,
 Kyr-Michalis bought a new boat,
 white with a double red stripe. In the evening
 the gri-gri fishing boats come out, their lights shimmering
 with a serene emotion, as though nothing, nothing at all,
 has changed in this world. Only those
 who wandered for years, who passed through many Symplegades,
 an earthen amulet from their home country always around their necks,
 those, last evening, brought us something new and eternal. But, the next day,
 Helen went to comb her hair in the large mirror, and the mirror
 had grown so very old and her hair had fallen out.

Karlovasi, Samos, 9 August '87