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After the Fact; Precisely Now (translated by Edmund Keeley)

Yannis Ritsos

Edmund Keeley

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Two Poems

YANNIS RITSOS

After the Fact

The way things have ended up, nobody—so we say—is at fault. One left, another was killed, the rest—how account for it now? The seasons go about their business as usual. The oleanders blossom. The shade goes all the way around the tree. The motionless jug stayed in the hot sun, dried out; the water survived. Still, he says, we could have moved the jug here or there depending on the time of day and the shade, round and round the tree, circling until we found the rhythm, dancing, forgetting the jug, the water, the thirst—not thirsting, dancing.

—translated by Edmund Keeley from the Greek

Precisely Now

Now that you have nothing to say, nothing
to show, to propose, to defend—now
that everything is lost (and not only for you), precisely now
you're able to talk, circulating
among the implements of torture, turning
with your little finger the ridiculous wheels
of the ruined clocks or that big
hanging non-resistant wheel, still somehow damp
as it was when they brought it up from the sunken ship—

precisely now, drawing on the ropes attached to the ceiling,
hearing the noise of the pulleys above you
at certain indefinite points, like those stars that night
when we came back from the country, and in the marble forecourt
they'd set up in strict order
two rows of tall black wooden chairs
and in the middle the closed gold coffin of the king
without flags, without the crown and the sword.

—translated by Edmund Keeley from the Greek