

Six Poems · *Yannis Ritsos*

THE MIRACLE

It's a miracle, he says, more than a miracle:
there where everything is used up (I first of all) what do I find
among the pebbles at the sea's edge but the sacred skull
of one of Achilles' horses—maybe that of Xanthus. In the camomile
I find the Patriarch's staff.
I take it up devoutly, I climb the marble stairs,
I don't tap it on the steps, the crowd gathers,
I stand before the pulpit, I hear my hair become motionless,
loose on my shoulders. The crowd becomes impatient, people jostle
each other;
I open my mouth to speak, and suddenly I realize
that I'm mute and that they hear me.

LIKE CHANGES

They moved to a new place every now and then. They'd take
a few suitcases with them, the essentials: handkerchiefs, socks,
very few souvenirs—the usual terms and names
for tools, plants, and birds. Maybe this gave them
a sense of familiarity with, of long-range mastery over,
that which they called “sometime” or “distant” or “never”
when drops of rain slid down their spines under their collars
and stopped at the small of the back, there where the shirt was held
tight
by a leather belt. Because in that territory
it rains ceaselessly; invisible, hypertrophic plants grow
inside closed wells, where once they thoughtlessly threw in
graters, basins, cases, broken mirrors
and those small hydrocephalic unborn bodies.