**GIORGOS SEFERIS**

BIOGRAPHY

BY ANNA SAMARA

Seferis was born in Vourla near Smyrna in Asia Minor, in the Aidin Vilayet of the Ottoman Empire (now İzmir, Turkey). His father, Stelios Seferiadis, was a lawyer, and later a professor at the University of Athens, as well as a poet and translator in his own right. He was also a staunch Venizelist and a supporter of the demotic Greek language over the formal, official language (katharevousa). Both of these attitudes influenced his son. In 1914 the family moved to Athens, where Seferis completed his secondary school education. He continued his studies in Paris from 1918 to 1925, studying law at the Sorbonne. While he was there, in September 1922, Smyrna/Izmir was taken by the Turkish Army after a two-year Greek military campaign on Anatolian soil. Many Greeks, including Seferis's family, fled from Asia Minor. Seferis would not visit Smyrna again until 1950; the sense of being an exile from his childhood home would inform much of Seferis's poetry, showing itself particularly in his interest in the story of Odysseus.

Wandering and exile are present in Seferis’s poetry, and his work is attuned to the history of Greece—the Nobel Prize committee recognized him as a “representative Hellenic poet.” His poetry often intertwines contemporary speech and experience with Homeric myth, and many of his poems depict the landscape of the Mediterranean. In their foreword to George Seferis: Collected Poems (1995), translators Edmund Keeley and Philip Sherrard noted: “The distinguishing attribute of Seferis’s genius—one that he shares with Yeats and Eliot—was always his ability to make out of a local politics, out of a personal history or mythology, some sort of general statement or metaphor.

Giorgos Seferis’ many travels as a diplomat provide the backdrop for much of his writing, which is filled with themes of alienation, wandering, and death. His first collection of poems, Turning Point, was published in 1931. Seferis’ later poetry ¬– e.g., Mythistorema (1935) and Imerologio Katastromatos I–III (1940–1955) (Logbook I–III)– often intertwines contemporary speech and experience with Homeric myth.

