

# Segue

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online literary journal

## DIMITRIS LYACOS

*translated by*

## SHORSHA SULLIVAN



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Segue

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## 10

go                                 girl                                 from rock-cut dwelling  
 take her up   share     well-drilled among us you summoned  
 drew up twelve                                 whose names are  
 and others around you a great crowd on the ripples stray leaves from an  
 autumnal                                 circling around you  
   of a theatre.

And rusted cymbals behind the gate past feasts fringe of a  
 life that flutters                                 in the cupboard oil in a  
 bottle  
 like milk and                                 who were they here perhaps in nightly  
 rites from where are they gathered from they are the  
 As if their bodies appear under their clothes like membranes under the light  
 strange confused all together a web that opens webs that seized empty  
 insects tremble in the wind take the spider watch it running between your  
 fingers it flees you to run behind the icons

God. His mild cold eyes   she who you came into now is  
 around me                                 you sprinkle the earth with fruit, eyelids with vinegar, our  
 cities with blood                                 secret cities secretly born  
 secretly mated                                 hot eyes of an adulteress  
 like this church I wonder when did anyone sleep here, who  
 and the painted bodies will ben

  kindly faces to face   just lately I know  
 I have never slept before on their monuments  
   they expand their wings above me as if I were to see  
 your dress God was wrapped up there frozen expressionless  
 you would say there were thousands of eyes together all the crosses silver above  
 windmills grind from  
 below white caterpillars and dust  
 Inside the                                 your breast they did not pass however

if I were to hold some of it the bread they gave me and a little meat too  
 That train was going out of the Zone remember what they told you     something  
 about the exile's  
 why do you always clasp your stomach just as you go asleep above you the saint,  
 horseman with the spear in his hands above you  
 Like a flute, a flute-player painted with fingers emaciated  
 she sews in the monster's mouth  
 At the back paths go up to the rock a tree it too from a rock the  
 ivy which on her lips                                 and climbs

into the most fertile God climbs, at the back the roofs the country that  
they were saying after the evening  
sleep all those around her a bed collecting the petals  
a nest of hair around there your spider is weaving  
its eyes your eyes mild still cold when  
you share out his body, one piece to everyone  
full of light steeped in the fire bouquets of thyme  
and the dirge the crowd below they lift him up in their hands candles  
twelve of the  
bastions and the men behind them in war

## 11

I think of you but not as I used to. My eyes open in sleep, a hand seizes me. And of the sweetness of somebody's touch. I am falling, and the same dream again of a child's breast that a woman holds in her arms. Lips on it, wet, blood-soaked her lips. I start upright. The others are sleeping. Days walking uphill, view of an evergreen plateau, stay there. Quiet. Except when the wounded mumble close to your ear. I took something that made me get over my fears and then I didn't care about anything. I did not care about anything. I couldn't care about anything, a knife cut took off my finger, and I couldn't care about stopping the blood. Nothing to stay for. The daybreak of a Pel re dawn without light. And around one side and the other monasteries empty nests and a whole crowd there, a river between. And there were a lot. They are singing, the bridal chambers are filled, holding hands. Below bodies the stream hustles along, on the bank a row of them fallen face upwards, I run around like a madman looking for you, a woman presses her daughter to her, poor, we haven't eaten for days. Gleam without hope still gleaming. In the dreams jostling the one in my other. As then a boy on top of his mother, help me to lift her, he was holding her tight by her soaked rags, have you got matches strike one, as if in her hands. Shows me black avenues and a door at the end. My name that I saw written on it. First time I felt this kind of pain, like a bite. I saw, yet another soldier fallen nearby. Tears in his eyes, called out where are you. Could not see, black with the soil, don't drink from this water, couldn't hear, the march past blanked it out. And it was the memorial chanted for us. On our backs, above us the poplars all round. For what was lost, country and youth we had lost. For the horses rolling in blood. And then their carcasses rest under the olive trees. When the sacrifice starts and they pour something over us. Where are you. And they are all gone there are only the gods that take off their jackets and give us cover. Dead holding on to images scattered until they too fade forever away. And I see the others, do not go near leave them get up by themselves. Like the bare ramrod hitting you in the stomach, a saw, an empty water-bottle. I recall. New Year's Eve. And deep down a knot. Sleeping beside me, who. As if to my words he whispers an answer. Now it grows dark, I am a child, I encounter the gypsy. Who takes by day to the roads and sings. In distant villages, in the graveyards for charity. They said he was dead. And during Carnival, in the squares roaming about. Comes and asks us to light a cigarette for him. Deep down a knot, memory, poor girl. Working all night, ruffling through uniforms. In the cloakroom of travelling players, should you find something to change. Your face fading again, to hold your head for a while, and your body is warm and when you are bending to kiss me you hesitate for a moment, as if you catch the sound of them coming. Or the sound of water or wooden fingers on drums. Beside me late flowers on your mouth and it is your kiss. The eve of the lights do you remember? On the day itself I dig into the stone wall and bury there the crown of a fir tree. Scapegoat, then, then we were together.

## 12

Cruel the evening again in the station the train and another station silent and the train tail of an animal somewhere ahead, and another station alien eyes not on you yet you want to hide again, a long narrow passage that flows away in the rain covers you. Sitting still you can't manage your thoughts cannot make you stand up you cannot go forwards or backwards. Socks wet, take off your shoes, not yet, you stay still, almost as to abandon the world, the lights go by, nothing but lights, nothing exists besides this. No thought moving your body not even a pain. One by one all those that fled all those you left, pieces, pieces like ice breaking and falling in front of your feet. And it melts before you can move. The rhythm of the metal draws you with it a shadow out in the corridor lighting a cigarette the same tree that had passed before you so many times. You smoke too. You take off shoes socks lie down. Cramp in the stomach, the usual. You cover your feet with the pullover, fall face down. Chilly berth that sticks on your face. You wear the pullover, you put the Bible under the jacket for a pillow. Her breast, her half-opened mouth. Some life. You unbutton your trousers put your hand in. A hand that holds you a body you stretched on top of. She is there you almost touch her and she is gone again, saliva, pale light and the listless pulse of the body powerless almost. You hold your breath, her breasts come, you press it hard, comes inside you, from inside you squeeze as many drops as you can, from inside you. Stay still, calm, empty, darkness hides you, then sleep. A nudge, you slip all but fall, you put out your hand, below the palm crumpled paper, a dog-eared book open. Turn over the cover: The First Death. You would smile. This too for a pillow, on top of the Bible. When you wake again two bodies entwined, the flesh between them in pieces, that melt, breast onto breast, that fades one into the other, fading out when you decide to stand up.

## Author Notes

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*Dimitris Lyacos was born in Athens in 1966. His trilogy Poena Damni (Z213: Exit, Nyctivoe, The First Death), written over the course of fifteen years, has been translated into English, Spanish, Italian and German and has been performed extensively across Europe and the USA. A sound and sculpture installation of Nyctivoe opened in London and toured Europe in 2004-2005. A contemporary theatre-dance version of the same book was showing in Greece in 2006-2007. Lyacos' work has been the subject of lectures and research at various universities, including Amsterdam, Trieste and Oxford. Various extracts from the trilogy have appeared in literary journals around the world.*

*Translator Shorsha Sullivan was born in Dublin in 1932. He studied Classics at Leeds and spent most of his working life in England. He has a special interest in modern Greek theatre and poetry.*

### About the Work

The three extracts published in *Segue* are part of Z213: Exit, first book of a trilogy that bears the overall title *Poena Damni*. The trilogy has been written back to front, so Z213: Exit has been written last and is awaiting publication—it has taken me about fifteen years to complete the work, roughly about five years for each book. That is an indication of how inspiration came about: very slowly, from a very abstract idea—deductively, if I am allowed the use of the expression. Each book is permeated by a linear narrative; as far as the connection between the three books is concerned I would say that Z213: Exit bifurcates to *Nyctivoe* (second book) and *The First Death* (third book). One might well think that there has been a quasi-structuralist initial plan, and perhaps, one could now observe a very well defined form, but I would like to say once again: the whole thing came about very gradually from day to day work and occasional “sparks” that seemed to me satisfactory enough to be integrated into the project. About the initial idea, I think it was rather a cluster of concepts loosely related to each other, with the “scapegoat –outcast” theme being quite prominent in the beginning. Of course as one goes ahead with the formation of a text, a more detailed map of ideas, meanings and interrelations is drawn.

Bearing in mind the difficulties encountered by a long term project in every field, whether it be arts, science, or a more practical endeavour, I don't think there were easier or more difficult parts to be generally mentioned. Simply, sometimes one would finish off a text faster than other times; if you take extracts from my books one by one and ask me which was easier and which was more difficult to write I will simply tell you I don't remember any more; as long as one is satisfied with the text, one tends to forget those details and moves on to the next thing; however, I might mention *Nyctivoe* (second book of the trilogy) which, seven years after publication I did not find satisfactory, although the idea still appealed to me very much. So I wrote it again (initially I thought I would change about half of the book, but as I was going along very few lines of the first version remained intact).

Challenges were dissolved differently in individual cases, there was never a strictly methodical approach, although work and experience generally offer solutions to minor problems (of course one has more of an ear for complicated meters and is more quick and able on tropes after



reading and writing literature for a long time). But mannerisms should be avoided, and if one has set ways to resolve problems one becomes predictable. In my case, the way to resolve those challenges was to try and make clear what was it that I wanted to say and why I did not like what I had written so far -part of what we call talent is, I think, the existence of a gut feeling that tells you something is wrong; another part is to implement this feeling—not hush it.

So far in this interview, I have consciously avoided to speak about my work as belonging to a specific genre; one could say the texts in *Segue* are prose pieces, some others, considering the rest of the book, might speak of prose poetry, or be more descriptive, pointing out references to works of a similar form (and there is still a lot of room for maneuver if terms, like postmodernism, are being called to help). Well, the work borders on different genres, and to say that is also a kind of classification. As far as *Z213: Exit* is concerned I wanted it as less “literary” as possible; what one might conventionally call tropes in this book, were according to me the only means of expression of the author of this diary (the book is somebody’s diary)—he cannot find any other way to say what he wants to say, perhaps he might want to express himself otherwise but he cannot. Bringing this process to light, speaking in spite of the norms and my ( or the character’s) ignorance, in defiance of what literature is, or should be: like *Woyzeck*’s effort to explain himself and Nature to his know-all Doctor by stuttering, struggling with words and snapping his fingers.

### **Dimitris Lyacos on the Web**

[www.lyacos.net](http://www.lyacos.net)

[www.famouspoetsandpoems.com/poets/dimitris\\_lyacos/poems/22681](http://www.famouspoetsandpoems.com/poets/dimitris_lyacos/poems/22681)

[tinyurl.com/6n7hmv](http://tinyurl.com/6n7hmv)

[www.poetrybay.com/fall2007/lyacos1.html](http://www.poetrybay.com/fall2007/lyacos1.html)