

Persephone's Nightmare¹

Clayton Miles Lehmann
University of South Dakota, USA
clehmann@usd.edu



There where the pennyroyal sprouted and wild mint
and the earth sent forth the first of her cyclamen
now villagers haggle for cement
and birds fall dead into the kiln.

There where the initiates joined hands
devoutly before entering the sanctuary
now tourists toss their cigarette ends
and they go to see the brand new refinery.

There where the sea became a blessing
and a benediction was in the rustic sheep's bleat
now to the shipyards trucks are hauling
empty shapes iron children and metal plate.

Sleep in the earth's embrace
Persephone
and never retrace
your way to the world's balcony.

¹ Translated from the original Greek of Nikos Gatsos (1911-1992). In this song, which he wrote for Manos Hatzidakis to set to music in 1976, Gatsos evokes the landscape of Eleusis, just west of Athens. In antiquity the devotees of Demeter and Persephone came to this sacred destination for initiation into the mysteries of rebirth and regeneration; it has now become an industrial wasteland.