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| **Elytis, Odysseus (1911-1996)** |
| Odysseas Alepoudhelis |
| For me the Aegean is not merely a part of nature, but rather a kind of signature,’ Odysseus Elytis suggested in a 1972 interview with Ivar and Astrid Ivask, ‘I and my generation - and here I include Seferis - have attempted to find the true face of Greece. This was necessary because until then the true face of Greece was presented as Europeans saw Greece. In order to achieve this task we had to destroy the tradition of rationalism which lay heavily on the Western world. |
| For me the Aegean is not merely a part of nature, but rather a kind of signature,’ Odysseus Elytis suggested in a 1972 interview with Ivar and Astrid Ivask, ‘I and my generation - and here I include Seferis - have attempted to find the true face of Greece. This was necessary because until then the true face of Greece was presented as Europeans saw Greece.  File:ElytisOdysseus\_portrait.jpg  Figure 1Elytis Odysseus  Source: unknown  In order to achieve this task we had to destroy the tradition of rationalism which lay heavily on the Western world. Hence the great appeal of Surrealism for us the moment it appeared on the literary scene.’ (‘Odysseus Elytis on His Poetry’) Adapting Surrealism in a Greek way, the 1979 Nobel laureate formed ‘a kind of alphabet out of purely Greek elements’ with which to express himself, ‘a method of apprehending the world through the senses’ (‘Odysseus Elytis on His Poetry’).  Born Odysseas Alepoudhelis in Crete in 1911, of parents originally hailing from the island of Lesbos, Elytis moved with his family to Piraeus in 1914 and published his first poem in 1935 in the journal *Nea Grammata* founded by a circle of Greek Modernist writers and critics, including Giorgos Katsimbalis, George Seferis and George Theotokas. Alongside fellow poets Andreas Embirikos, Nikos Engonopoulos, Nikos Gatsos and Miltos Sahtouris, he experimented with Surrealism and produced poetry with the architectural symmetry of a ‘Euclidean linear drawing’ (1979 Swedish Academy Ceremony Speech). His first collection of poems, *Orientations* (1939), was succeeded by two collections, *Sun the First* (1943) and *Song Heroic and Mourning for the Lost Second Lieutenant of the Albanian Campaign* (1946) drawing on his wartime experience when he served as a second lieutenant on the Albanian front in the Second World War. 1959 was the year of the seminal *To Axion Esti*, which was set to music by Mikis Theodorakis in 1964, while both his writing and painting career (influenced by Max Ernst’s technique of collage as well as the style of Yves Tanguy and Oscar Domínguez) continued well into the 1990s; he produced seventeen poetry collections and two volumes of essays, the latter covering a period from 1938 to 1995. While in Paris in the late Forties, he met Pablo Picasso, Henri Matisse, Fernard, Léger, Alberto Giacometti, Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, artists that influenced his work, along with that of French poet Paul Éluard, with whose writing he had become acquainted early in his career and which he translated.  In his poetry he sought to create an analogy particular to Greece, one that would link the country’s geography to language, and so in his work he was interested in the Mediterranean as an alternative modernist space open to the metaphysics of light and what he called the ‘meteorism’ of objects and figures that always want to rise higher (‘Odysseus Elytis on His Poetry’). Elytis’s poems are marked by forms that correspond with the content of the poem while his theory of analogies was influenced by Charles Baudelaire, Gaston Bachelard and Freud. ‘I consider poetry a source of innocence full of revolutionary forces,’ he said, ‘It is my mission to direct these forces against a world my conscience cannot accept, precisely so as to bring that world through continual metamorphoses more in harmony with my dreams.’ (‘Odysseus Elytis on His Poetry’)  **List of Works**  Elytis, Odysseus (1997, 2004) *The Complete Poems*, Revised and Expanded Edition, trans Jeffrey Carson and Nikos Sarris, Baltimore, Maryland: The John Hopkins University Press.  [Elytis, Odysseus](http://www.ekebi.gr/frontoffice/portal.asp?cpage=NODE&cnode=470&page=10&author=186&act=Search) (2007) *The Axion Esti*, trans. [Edmund Keeley](http://www.ekebi.gr/frontoffice/portal.asp?cpage=NODE&cnode=470&page=10&author=33&act=Search) and George Savidis, London: [Anvil Press Poetry](http://www.ekebi.gr/frontoffice/portal.asp?cpage=NODE&cnode=470&page=10&publisher=Anvil+Press+Poetry&act=Search).  [Elytis, Odysseus](http://www.ekebi.gr/frontoffice/portal.asp?cpage=NODE&cnode=470&page=10&author=186&act=Search) (1999) *Carte Blanche: Selected Writings*, trans. David Connolly, Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers.  [Elytis, Odysseus](http://www.ekebi.gr/frontoffice/portal.asp?cpage=NODE&cnode=470&page=10&author=186&act=Search) (1998) *Eros, Eros, Eros: Selected and Last Poems*, trans Olga Broumas, Port Townsend: Copper Canyon Press.  [Elytis, Odysseus](http://www.ekebi.gr/frontoffice/portal.asp?cpage=NODE&cnode=470&page=10&author=186&act=Search) (1995) *Open Papers*, trans. Olga Broumas and T. Begley, Port Townsend, Washington: [Copper Canyon Press](http://www.ekebi.gr/frontoffice/portal.asp?cpage=NODE&cnode=470&page=10&publisher=Copper+Canyon+Press&act=Search).  **References**  ‘Award Ceremony Speech’, Nobelprize.org, <http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1979/presentation-speech.html>  Stabakis, Nikos, ed. (2008) [*Surrealism in Greece*](http://www.ekebi.gr/frontoffice/portal.asp?cpage=NODE&cnode=470&t=13924)*: An Anthology*, Austin: [University of Texas Press](http://www.ekebi.gr/frontoffice/portal.asp?cpage=NODE&cnode=470&page=10&publisher=University+of+Texas+Press&act=Search). |
| Further reading:  (Ivask)  (Ivask and Ivask)  (Pourgouris)  (Pourgouris, Mediterranean Modernisms: The Poetic Metaphysics of Odysseus Elytis) |