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Yannis Ritsos

ONE SKIT, THEN ANOTHER

I am watching an afternoon performance at a working-class theater in the open air. The stage lights mingle with the afternoon sun, giving things a yellowish tint. It smells vaguely of lemons and recent illness. Outside the theater, the sound of a motorcycle trails off into the distance, down a street blowing with dust. They're doing a satirical number: a big strapping fellow dressed as a woman is mincing around the stage. The audience loves it. So do I. The actor's every gesture becomes a glass that falls off its tray and rolls across the floor. We watch the glass closely. We too become a glass that rolls tinkling across the floor. It's going to break, it's going to break. But look, it didn't break. We laugh even harder. It didn't break. We didn't break. We're rolling on the ground, fragile as glass. The man beside me is laughing so noisily that I begin to suspect something. I watch him for a bit. I figure it out. He is laughing to punish the female part of his psyche, while spurring on the other, his male part. His face is hard and masculine, but when he waves his cigarette, his long, slender fingers sketch a woman's profile in the smoke. He's clapping harder than his hands would seem to allow. His laughter gets louder. I'm laughing too. I listen to my laughter. Yes, it's as loud as his. I look around warily. What should I do? Try to keep from laughing? The people around me would notice. But if I laugh, there might be someone sitting nearby looking me over, attributing the same things to me as I did to the first man. I look at my fingers: they are long and even more slender than his. I get up to leave. Behind me, great gusts of laughter sweep through the audience. What if they're laughing at me? "Ariosto," I tell myself, "keep your head. Put on your best scowl and turn around to find out." At last I turn to look. Everyone's craning toward the stage, laughing. No one's even noticed me. I sit down again in one of the back rows. I no longer feel like laughing. I think of old Tiresias after death, among the jovial and unjust gods. I hear a glass falling off its tray and shattering. And I am the one who falls off the tray, and also the one who picks up the pieces so the others don't step on them.

Translated from the Greek by **Martin McKinsey**