

POETRY

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THE DEAD

Do not tell your name to the dead
so they do not take it.
Wild and sullen they are, the dead
they do not forgive their demise
they ask why incessantly
envious, they cry and complain
as they recognize shadows and cherished visions.
It's no use upsetting them
it's no use pitying them, either.
As they begin their journey to the underworld
let them find their shadow and accept it
let them put out their candle and rest.

Do not tell your name to the dead so they do not take it.
They will shout it; they will whistle and gasp it,
they will thrash it against deserted houses' walls
like winter hammering doors and windows,
they will turn it inside out, tear it apart.
And others will sadly circle round the blood
wanting to drink and then not
without eyes gazing past regrets
hurting you with claws and teeth.
And others far away will sit forlorn,
loves important, great, and forever finished
hurting you with their silence and absence
filling your innermost part with sorrow.
If they come again, asking and asking
Do not tell your name to the dead so they do not take it.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

George N. Pavlakis, MD, PhD, studied regulation and optimization of gene expression and developed methods applied widely in biotechnology; the molecular biology and virology of HIV and other viruses; vaccine methods focusing on nucleic acid technologies; and cancer immunotherapy focusing on the role of cytokines, resulting in the clinical development of IL-15 cytokine.

He has also published (in Greek) a collection of poems as well as memoirs from the years of students' resistance against the Greek military dictatorship (1967-1974). The poem is part of the published collection (Fairy Tales of the Past) and suggests Odysseus's Nekyia, by Homer, where Odysseus goes to the underworld to meet Prophet Teiresias*. Following instructions, Odysseus sacrifices an animal and is surrounded by many blood-thirsty ghosts, including his mother's.

English translation by the author.

For the Greek Version, see George Pavlakis, "Fairy Tales of the Past" (Γιώργος Παυλάκης, "Περασμένα Παραμυθία"), Kastaniotis Publications S.A., Athens 2023. www.kastaniotis.com

*From Odysseus Ch 11, 92:

Son of Laertes, seed of Zeus, Odysseus, most inventive
how is it then, wretched man, you left the sun and light
and came here, looking for the dead and this unhappy place?
move from the pit, and hold your sharp sword away,
so that I drink the blood and speak the truth to you

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FOOTNOTES

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