

Excerpts from At the Edge of Everything: Collected Poems

written by George Caffentzis, Silvia Federici | July 23, 2025



NP editor's note: *At the Edge of Everything* was reviewed for New Politics by Kevin Van Meter and is available through Common Notions Press.

"[George] Caffentzis' poetry is generated from the experience of the different worlds that have shaped his life: the world of the Greek community of which he was part, of his childhood trips to Greece, of his father and uncles' Cube Steak diner in Brooklyn, of the radical groups he later joined, and later his years teaching in Nigeria. Throughout them runs the desire for a different world and staunch refusal to compromise with the injustices of the past and the present."

- Silvia Federici, from the Preface, September 2024

To the Cube Steak

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place of many encounters

drunken sailors looking for a fight

my father and I in the cellar

mixing whiskey with water

and packing the bribe for the precinct

ensuring the cops would come

when the sailors pulled the knives.

Uncle Spiro in the corner

cursing the priests and the politicians

“No politics in this place”

screams my mother.

“Here we can only have

Food and drinks.”

To George, from Silvia

[January 2024]

Osiris Among the Dragonflies

Wives, Comrades, Enemies and Children

Scattered,

All scattered

As crumbs along the Nile.

And finally by the sea in Maine

Alone,

I hear the Taygetus stream

Still flowing

Down,

Through gleaming rocks

Dark pools and still,

Not knowing that they wait,

Are dragonflies,

Bluer than memory,

Hovering over the rush.

[1991]

Going to Nigeria

(for John)

On a hot May night
you too tense to study the Law
and I too sick with Posthumous Notes,
we walked by Jamaica Pond,
firefly fragrant in the lamppost light,
trying to breathe a calm
off the black water.

As we walked
there slowly rose,
a dry stench of fear
fear of others
twisting every bend.

We are all now citizens in Murder.

Another spring is passed.

The burning smell
of Harmattan begins.

The fear lingers.

[1984]

Self-Portrait

Coffee bottom
Lemon rind and
Flecks of glass
Smashed
on the taverna floor,
Pissing in my pants

And dancing

Dancing with nothing

But coffee bottom

And now you say

I'm somber.

My prick is crooked

After so many erections

Squashed in my pants:

Rising from you

At the alarm

And stuffed down

To go to jobs

To unemployment halls

To this and that,

And so you say

I'm somber.

Never homeless,

At the bottom of every cup,

So bitter you will drink only

When you've forgotten me,

Distracted

And ready for the

Accidental.

So finally

You call me somber.

[1978]

A Tale of Memory and Forgetting

I.

I thought memory was dust to me,
each move making a cloud
so I could hardly see
what was before me.

The dust will get so dense
one day,
there'll be no point in motion.

Nothing seen, smelled, tasted or touched
but more motes and moments of my old self.

Then it will be time to die.

I now watch the waves
off Mt. Desert Isle
through the spindrift
of ten thousand fragments
of memory.

Not just other seas,
but the black water
of the Niger Delta creeks,
and the cicadas
rasping in the heat
of the summer fields near Sparta.

Is there no small rain of oblivion,
no cloud burst of forgetting
to drench myself in?

A forgetting so strong

I'll not even remember this poem.

Will I ever be fresh again?

II.

And then,

just as I made the wish,

these faces rose

like steam whirls

from the dry earth

at the break of Harmattan

to question me.

My mother was first,

angry beyond words and action,

She wanted to know

why I,

want to forget her?

Other dead shimmer,

my father among them,

far in the distance of my flesh,

demanding an explanation.

Are they to be forever

erased from me?

Lovers smile from different directions,

confirmed again

in their estimation

that men like me

never stop being children,

especially as they become old.

But beyond them all

far back on the horizon

huge clouds are forming
from the smoke
of the students bodies' at Lubumbashi,
killed and burned,
from the cold fog
enveloping the bare toes of women
walking through the stone streets
of San Cristóbal at dawn,
from the gazes of eyes
on death row
heavy clouds,
accumulating pain, hatred and desire,
Roll down
dark with rain
to wash away
even this age.

[2006]

Poem for Sol Yurich

Thebes is nothing like you envisioned it, Sol.
I barely noticed it as the train passed it.
Thebes is now a small town in a plain of wheat
and grapes;
The IMFers of Tirisias' time and our own
Would think nothing of it
While you have grown wide in death
Reaching to the horizon and filling every molecule
In between.
Speak to me, Sol

About Thebes, Oedipus and the burning of the

Bank of America,

Speak to me. . .

So I can hear

the dry liberating bitterness of your voice

once more

Until you too step

Beyond the edge of things.

[June 1, 2013]