

MARK O'CONNOR

HOMER'S GRAVE, IOS

A barren island, said the guide. I looked:
a hill with the face of a broken Sphinx.
Looked again: under cloud was a rock-ship
sailing, thirty Colosseums wide.

History records no name, no tyrant's power
that scraped the soil from off these peaks
and built the tiered concentric slopes
vaster and lonelier than the Pyramids.
It was the work of Ceres, longer making
than Borobudur has lasted. More men have
laboured here than all the terraces could hold.
Even the soil their thighs crumbled to
the rains have washed away: left only
today's thin peasant remnant
lest the hills stir and take their shape again..

Olives, those crippled ents
survive but cannot bear. Each jar of milk
the centuries have squeezed from goat flesh
on these slopes has cost three jars of oil.
Ionian, Dorian, Turk
have drunk the valley dry. Burials here
demand a chisel, or the planted ones
spring up again, cannot sleep sound.
Even the heart from which the tendrils
of Greek song crept out has spilled
down some husbandman's dry slopes
to the salt accepting sea.