

The Exchange, January 1923

RHETT FORMAN

Word came down from Lausanne
And on the day that peace was made
The refugees took up their store
And marched out of Istanbul through Thrace
And into the Rhodopes. There the air blew cooler.
And when they saw the azure domes
Upon the Aegean Sea, they embraced
Their long forgotten countrymen.

Slowly the Mahometans left.
But in the public square the townsmen painted red
For their guest-friends and falsehearted priests to see
A phrase they had invented just for them:
ἀφήσετε ἀφήνομαι –

If you leave, I leave myself.

RHETT FORMAN is a PhD Literature student in the Institute of Philosophic Studies at the University of Dallas. He earned his BA at St. John's College and has also studied at the University of Costa Rica and at the University of New Orleans' Ezra Pound Center for Literature in Dorf Tirol, Italy. His research interests include Modernist poetry and liberty in the epic, while his creative work explores the interchange between mythology and history.

A note from the poet: At the end of the Greco-Turkish War, an agreement mandated the exchange of Christians and Muslims in order to secure national identity. The exchange, involving approximately two million people, came at great cost to the communities, property, and lives of the displaced.