



Scorched Shadows

For Y. G.

*Fair Greece! Sad relic of departed worth!
Immortal; though no more, though fallen, great!
Who shall lead the scattered children forth,
And long accustom'd bondage uncreate?¹*

We pace the shore as long shadows
mourn the coves of discontent.

This land of stone, its soul plundered,
classic homes raped by concrete slabs,
tiered apartment shells of unfulfilled promise.

Rusted ornate balcony railings

splattered with pigeon droppings –
their heart beat purrs dance
with the echoes of life that bounce
through valleys and ravines

defiled by rubble and dumped refuse
archaeological sites drowned in weeds
flanked by woodlands of cypress
and over bearing pines that foresee

the strike of the land developer-collusive
church and state – patronage rife,
wealthy socialists, dynastic governments,
civic disobedience.

The city of Athena, a gas cylinder ready to explode.

Irate protesters torch the dreams of idealists.

Pedlars flog dissent, cabbage shredders,

dolmatha rolls and bric a brac in Syntgama Square.

We pace the shore as long shadows mourn
the coves of discontent.

¹ Lord Byron, 'Childe Harolds Pilgrimage', Canto 2, LXX111, *The Poetical Works of Lord Byron* (London: Oxford University Press, 1912)

The foreign dispossessed
begrudgingly welcomed as labourers
in villages and towns where once no door was locked –
farmers exploit then apportion blame

criminals they decry,
scoff at their demands –
their right to work, to stay, to vote as citizens.
Graffiti on the road to Patra declares

‘Migrants – the earth’s damned.’

And in the streets below Lykavettos and
the Acropolis ambulances cull human debris
as police confront the hooded bikie gangs

with batons. An ancient culture,
complacent government and populace
awakened by shattered shop fronts
and exhaust pipe fumes

adding fuel to a polluted State that snubs
poverty and the disillusioned –
A land poised for dictatorship
to eradicate the protesting hordes?

We pace the shore as long shadows mourn
the coves of discontent.

‘Nothing works, all in ruins, poor stuff,’
a beggar shouts across Ermou Street as another
gesticulates and laughs –
‘This is Greece. The ship in one place, the sea in another!’

An unruly populace bleeds the Welfare State,
where professionals prostitute their skills, extort
payment. Corrugated shutters
protect the banks and retail traders.

The Temple of Zeus in view, we sip
coffee in the Royal Olympic lounge.

Police and ambulance sirens deafen
our talk, confirm our forebodings about the future,

and she, a seventy-year-old citizen, bemoans
her return, mourning her bankrupt birthright,
politically betrayed and disillusioned –
unlike the lotto sellers, she does not peddle hope.

We walk the shore as long shadows blacken this
sad relic of departed worth.²

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May 2009

² On the 5th September 2009 the Greek Prime Minister Costas Karamanlis, New Democracy, called an early election for October 4th 2009. George Papandreou, Pasok, is now Prime Minister.