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The Onlooker's Declamation

Robert Georgalas

I know the world. I do.

I have witnessed it parade on geometric screens,
have quick stepped by it on countless streets,
have wrestled with its angst in a thousand books.

True, racist slurs have never pierced my ears,
nor the pangs of childbirth racked my body,
nor the sting of cocaine dulled my gums,
but I know the world. I do.

I know its face, its veiny, bloodshot eyes,
its hastily reconstructed nose, its full, but tired mouth.

I know its scent as well as that of a lover's perfume.

And yes, I have never slept the night in a cardboard box,
insulated by rags, nor been prey to AIDS crawling through
my veins, nor spilled my soul on a psychiatrist's couch,
but I know the world. I do.

I am familiar with its mannerisms, cognizant of its games,
aware of its thoughts, in touch with its pulse.

What does it matter that I have not done combat with the
demons of divorce and suicide and incest and murder?

Of what consequence is it that I have never travelled the
lanes of hunger and poverty, desire and want?

I know the world. I do.

Behind the walls of my apartment, from the window of my car,
I have listened to it crackle and whisper and sing and
lie. I have watched it change clothes as often as a Parisian
fashion model (though its wardrobe seems more limited). Have
seen it bargain with hope and money and force and words.

No. I know the world.

From a respectful distance, I know the world.