

# Another Country

## Day 1: Familiar Surroundings

I join the demonstration:  
students protesting education reforms.  
(It is not staged, I tell myself, just  
to help this American feel at home.)

But you don't have to worry.  
I step from the march  
when it reaches Syntagma Square—  
shortly before the Greek police  
launch their tear gas.

## Day 2: Acropolis Avoids Apocalypse?

I ascend, not knowing quite how  
I feel about the restoration.  
(Cranes and metal scaffolding  
are visible from below.)  
I do, however, decide that it would be nice  
if other visitors shouted less, showed  
a bit more reverence for this hilltop.

I turn off my hearing aids,  
enjoy the simulation of solitude.

Yes, it has been tried before,  
and this time is, in part,  
to correct the bunglings of the past.  
Who can argue with repairing damage  
done by exploding Turkish gun powder  
stored here in the 17th century? Or  
rebuilding the Temple of Athena Nike,  
torn down by the same Turks  
so they might station a cannon  
on its foundations?  
(I begin to understand why the Greeks  
fought so hard for their independence.)  
And of course acid rain  
is our modern contribution to decay.

But what should we think about earthquakes?  
And how long ago did cliff-dwelling plants  
begin nesting in these stone walls?  
Yet they, too, are listed among the enemy  
by the Committee for Preservation.

There is, I admit, a certain elegance  
to the patchwork of new marble infused  
to keep the old from crumbling.  
Still, I ask: doesn't the awe of a ruin  
come from its survival, as a ruin?  
(and offer you, for example,  
the Temple of Olympian Zeus, visible  
just East and a little South,  
beyond Hadrian's Arch, where  
one pillar has simply been left  
as it fell during the gale  
in 1852, now a set of round,  
fluted, toppled dominoes.)

I descend not knowing quite how  
I feel about the restoration.  
I do, however, decide that the ancient Athenians  
did not make use of cranes or metal scaffolding  
when they first constructed this edifice.

### **Day 3: Hydra**

I regret that I cannot take the slow ferry  
back to Piraeus. The three hours thirty minutes  
sailing the Aegean would be pleasant, but  
the only boat today leaves at one p.m.,  
too early for me to depart.  
The last Flying Dolphin is at 4:25,  
takes less than half the time.  
So I will be cocooned again  
inside the hydrofoil (might as well  
have come here in a bus).

Still the island is as promised,  
not yet the tourist season.  
I can leave my hearing aids turned on,  
still enjoy the stimulation of solitude.

Uphill, through the south end of town,  
I find the path that takes me

past the Profiti Ilias monastery,  
loops around Mt. Pyrgos  
to a view high above Limnioniza Bay,  
then, descending, joins the switch-back road  
returning to the harbor. Four hours in all  
without spying another soul traveling on foot—  
though a few do pass me riding donkeys.

And so this turns out to be the day  
I realize that the braying of donkeys  
is louder than I had ever imagined, also  
that perhaps the secret to remaining youthful  
is simply to keep pushing both mind  
and body just a bit further  
than one has any reasonable  
right to expect.

#### **Day 4: Archeology Museum**

1.

I examine the "frying pan vessels" displayed  
in these cases. They are made of clay,  
decorated with incised grooves inlaid  
by white, were discovered in many graves  
dated between 2800 and 2300 BC  
throughout the Cycladic archipelago.

We know, therefore, that they must  
have been important to this culture.  
Some human beings once  
could have explained why, but they  
have all been dead for thousands of years.

2.

Judging by the statues,  
crafted with such care in every  
anatomical detail, it seems  
there must have been a tragic  
epidemic in Ancient Greece:  
so many men walking around  
with penises that were broken off.

Steve Bloom  
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