**Up on the Acropolis**

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Translated from the Hungarian by Ottilie Mulzet

The taxi drivers pestered him continuously in the horrendous crowd, no, no, leave me alone, he said at first, then he didn’t answer and, rebuffing them, tried to avoid them, in the meantime signifying with his glance no, no, only it was impossible either to avoid them or to get them to stop pushing up against him, they practically encircled you and droned this into your ear: Syntagma, and Acropolis, and Monastrikai, and Pireus, Agora, Plaka, and of course, hotel, hotel, and hotel, verri cheep and verri cheep, they shrieked and smiled, and that smile was the most horrendous of all, and they came from the back, then you changed directions with your suitcase, but then — zap! — you were already ploughing into them in front, because within a single split second they either shot out behind you or in front of you, the entire situation in the Aerodromia Eleftherios Venizelos was as if it were not a question of your arrival but a mistake, which the arriving person realized only when it was already too late, since he has arrived already, and has stepped into the horrendous crowd of the colossal waiting room, from everywhere groups or individuals were struggling to move in some direction or other, all in completely different directions, children screamed for their parents, and the parents screamed for the children not to go too far ahead or not remain too far behind, elderly couples with their lost gazes shuffled along always moving ahead, the leaders of school groups yelled at frightened pupils to stick together, and Japanese tour guides with their little flags and megaphones yelled at the frightened Japanese tourists to stay together, and sweat poured off of everyone, as the heat in the hangar was insufferable, it was summer, an infernal pandemonium, a madhouse unannounced in advance, as you attempted, with your suitcase, to fight toward the direction where the exit was expected to be, but even there outside it didn’t really come to an end: on the one hand because only then did you feel the meaning of heat in Athens in the summertime; on the other hand, as the taxi drivers, at least three or four of them, were still following right behind him and they just spoke and spoke and smiled and smiled and reached after his suitcase, by the time he was able to break free of this insanity he was a corpse; he sat down in a waiting taxi and said to the gum-chewing, bored-looking driver, who was reading a tabloid newspaper, in the near of Syntagma, Odos-Ermou-Odos Voulis, parakalo, at which point the driver looked at him as if to say who is this old geezer, then nodded, leaned back in the driver’s seat; he didn’t look where the taxi was going, although he had with him a rough sketch of the streets from one of his Greek acquaintances, so that he would not be ripped off in the taxi — or at least not too much, as one of his acquaintances from Athens explained in an e-mail, because they will anyway to a certain extent, let them, it’s the custom here, otherwise it will make them ill, but it wasn’t because of the e-mail; his strength was gone, and his nerves just couldn’t take it anymore; he was so worn out by the landing and then what came after it, as his suitcase had not been where it was supposed to be: completely by chance, as he was looking with a frightened expression for the Lost Luggage counter, his gaze happened upon a familiar object, circling around in solitude on a distant conveyor belt promising baggage from a Kiev flight four hours earlier, then he went on to the customs officials who, searching for hashish, took apart his unfortunate suitcase, and finally there was the unrestrained labyrinth of the waiting area, so that really it was enough, no one from his circle of acquaintances was waiting for him in the arrivals lounge, in vain did he loiter for a while in that frantic crowd, so that well, after one hour he set off, that is he would have set off but then the taxi drivers flung themselves at him, so that in a word now, sitting in the back seat of a taxi chosen by himself and utterly exhausted, he gaped out the window at the city that was almost completely devoid of people due to the early hour, and for a while he wasn’t even really looking where they were going, or watching the meter, he could only conclude when he saw that not even one of the street names written on the piece of paper coincided with those outside — and he began to suspect, for that matter, justifiably — that the taxi was not taking him by the most direct route, so that when the reading on the meter had already surpassed the sum in euros mentioned to him by his acquaintances as the absolute maximum he should pay, he tried somehow in English to make himself understood to the taxi driver, but at first it was as if the driver didn’t even hear him, he just turned to the right, then turned to the left, until at a red light he deigned to glance backward benevolently and jab at the street name on the piece of paper being extended to him, indicating where they were at that moment, and this was certainly not only very far from Syntagma but from the city center as well, so that he tried to assert himself and gestured that the whole thing wasn’t good at all, and he was overcome with anger, and he pointed at his watch and pointed at the name of Syntagma on his paper, but to no avail, the taxi driver phlegmatically chewed his chewing gum and nothing, nothing at all disturbed him and he clearly was the type that nothing ever would disturb, he just kept on heading in the direction he thought was right, and he reassured his passenger that everything was fine, don’t worry, be happy, he said toward the back seat from time to time, reassuringly, so that the passenger’s stomach had completely clenched into a stiff knot, when suddenly the driver braked at the edge of a busy intersection, opened the door and said — pointing around, with a sudden faint smile at the corners of his mouth — so here is Syntagma, or didn’t you want to come here? — he then held out to the driver the amount that had been decided by his acquaintances, but at this, as if suddenly awakening from slumber, the driver bellowed at him so unexpectedly, and began to shake him by the shoulders; hardly had a minute passed and already a small group of Greeks was standing around them; at last, with their assistance, a compromise was reached, and they agreed upon a price which was twice the true going rate, but he was fed up already, I spit upon Athens, he said in Hungarian to the Greeks loitering around him, but they just slapped him on the shoulders, everything was fine, perfect, come and have a drink, no way am I going to have a drink, he broke away from the circle, because of course he could not discern that these people surrounding him did not intend to fleece him, but out of sympathy for his hopeless skirmish with the taxi driver they genuinely wanted to invite him for a drink so that he could calm down, taxi drivers are just like that, you can’t argue with them, even if you bargain with them they always find a way to rip you off, especially so early in the morning, come on then, they said in Greek, and they pointed at the tables, set out beside the street, of a nearby restaurant, from where they had arisen just a few moments ago, but he was so terrified of them that he quickly grabbed his suitcase and set off on foot into the chaos of the intersection, just like that, diagonally into the traffic, which was a mistake, for not only did it increase the general chaos, although that didn’t cause any commotion, but it did put him in considerable danger, and he was not even conscious of the fact that once he had reached the other side he had directly and needlessly risked his life among the honking cars perhaps three times; to the other side then, with a suitcase, which although not heavy, thank God, nonetheless hindered him in further unconstrained movement, and particularly in planning these movements; nothing, that is to say, came into his mind as to what to do now, he should call his acquaintances to find out where they were already, so they could come and help him, but the taxi driver had cheated him to such an extent that his diminished reserves were not enough even for one phone call, so he just stood there for a while, and the group from a moment ago had already sat down again, and as from here they did not at all look like robbers, after a time he decided to go back to them and ask for directions, he even stepped off of the sidewalk, but a car really almost swept him away this time, so that he thought it wiser to look for some kind of official crossing, of course here too he had to be on his guard for he could not tell if the green light across the way was actually referring to him, then when after a while it emerged that indeed it was, he also had to grasp that the green light here was just a kind of theoretical yes to the crossing of the street, in practical terms it could be understood as green, yes, but only as long as this plan was not opposed by another, more powerful force, and opposed it was, whether by a truck rushing alongside him, or a bus that generated a whirlwind flinging him backward, whether by this or whether by that, but then, happily, other would-be pedestrians appeared on the scene as well, so that together at one point they initiated a common passage during a green light, well, that was successful, and there he stood on the terrace of the restaurant among the group of young people who were sipping away — nonchalantly and with a kind of serene indifference — at their drinks; they greeted him in a friendly manner and on every face the thought was plainly written that they had told him already that before cooking up any plans it would have been much better to have a drink with them; they asked him if he wanted a beer, or a kafes, or perhaps a raki, oh no, he protested, just an ellinikos kafes, okay, ellinikos kafes, they passed on the order to the waiter, and the conversation began, the Greeks really were young but not too young, not too far past the age of thirty, and they knew English pretty well, only their accent was peculiar, and he too could hardly deny where he came from because of his accent, so they understood each other well, so much so that suddenly he felt at once a kind of natural trust toward them, and he told his story briefly, who he was and why he had come here, that he had had rather enough of the world, or of himself, or both, so that he thought he would come to Athens, where he had never been before but which he had always longed to visit, so that it was a kind of farewell for him, but that he himself didn’t understand too clearly just what he was bidding farewell to here; the company listened, nodding their heads, and honored him with a long silence, then slowly a kind of discussion began, and his new friends wanted, in the first place, to dissuade him at all costs from . . . from everything, as it turned out, but mainly from the idea that he should call his acquaintances, because if they weren’t waiting for him at the airport, and they weren’t around here at the time agreed upon, for safety’s sake, at nine o’clock, at the intersection of Ermou and Voulis, and it was already past nine, wasn’t it, so there was really no rush, they said; however, they advised, he should remain with them, since fate had already brought him this way, believe us, even like this things will be fine; why, he asked, what were their plans, ah, our plans, they looked at each other and on their faces a kind of amusement was plainly visible, well, as for their plans, there weren’t any, that is to say that, well, their plan was to sit here and drink yet another beer, and with a kind of sincere grimace they indicated that they did not belong among those who make plans, to sit here was everything, they had been doing that since yesterday evening, and as long as their money lasted, this would be their plan, to drink another beer slowly and look around, said one oaf who introduced himself as Adonis; they were intelligent and sympathetic, yet still, as he took a sip of the ellinikos kafes, he was suddenly struck by the sense that if he let everything stay like this, he would never see anything of Athens, namely that when he had been speaking of why he was here, to know what Athens was like, he was greeted by an unmistakably loud silence, as if they wanted to say that to know anything at all, especially about Athens, well, that was totally useless; Yorgos, sitting beside him, who, however, called himself George, seemed to be entertained by the idea: still Athens, this Yorgos said, and he grew somber; you know, my friend, what Athens is like, it is a huge pile of stinking shit, that’s what it is, and he drank from his glass, and there was too much bitterness in the whole thing to ask why he had said that; fish cast out onto the shore, he thought later on, good-natured and pleasant idlers, he determined; still he had to acknowledge that in their midst he was feeling better and better, and something in him grew alarmed as well, that all the same it was dangerous, very dangerous to sit here on his very first morning and listen to them as they talked about the song “Guns of Brixton” and whether the Arcade Fire or the Clash version was better, then to be silent with them for a long while, and to look around for a long while, to look at the dense traffic coming from the direction of Syntagma and the Odos Voulis, to watch as the cars senselessly, but so senselessly, rushed here and there in the already dreadful heat and the dreadful stench, it was all too pleasant being here with them, and alluringly despondent, like a kind of sweet weight that pulls one down — if he didn’t move right away, he said to himself in fright, then he would remain here and everything would turn out completely differently than what he wished from the depths of his heart, so that suddenly he stood up and announced that he wanted to see at least the Acropolis, since childhood it had been one of his greatest desires to see the Acropolis one day, and now that he was getting old — ah, so at least this Acropolis, Adonis winked at him; the Acropolis, Yorgos looked at him as well, sourly, well you know after all, they said to him, after all you’re here for the first time, why not, although I think it’s really idiotic, said Yorgos, I think so too, said Adonis, but well, fine, go if you want to go so much, but wait, what about — a girl from the group, whose name was Ela, now advised him — this thing, and she pointed to his suitcase, you don’t have to take that the whole way, you can put it somewhere, if you don’t find us here, just wait, but where, and she looked around — at Maniopulos’s, Yorgos recommended; okay it’s nearby, and so it was, Maniopulos was a merchant or something like that, in a completely dilapidated little shop in the dilapidated street behind the restaurant, maybe it sold computer parts, it was not easy to determine, but it sold something like that, in any event the youth in the shop immediately said yes, and put the suitcase behind a kind of curtain, and gestured to him that everything was fine, he could come back for the suitcase anytime, when he was done, and with that they were already outside on the terrace, they were explaining the route to him, advising him that although it was hot, he should go on foot, because there wouldn’t be so many tourists, and then, he could see something of the Plaka, the old city, just keep on going that way, Yorgos pointed in one direction, and he started off toward the crossing, just keep going that way, although it would have been better, they immediately noted among themselves, if he had waited a few hours, that is to say until evening, as the sun up there will be scorching, dreadfully so, but he was already on the other side, and he began to make his way into the narrow alleyways of the Plaka, he was still waving to them, they waved back amiably, and even though he had felt so good in their midst — or exactly because he had felt so good in their midst — he now breathed a sigh of relief, at last now he was on the way, on the way to the Acropolis, because at least the Acropolis, he said to himself, and he thought of those very first murky pictures which he had preserved in his memory since childhood, and he felt joy that they had not been able to seduce him, although there was some murkiness in everything, even in this seduction, as even that was also murky if he thought about it, how those ancient pictures of the Acropolis never really had any contours, how they never even had any clarity, especially in regard to the proportions, that is he could never picture to himself how large the Acropolis actually was and how big its buildings were — how big, for instance, was the Propylaea, and how big was the Parthenon — one could not, that is, on the basis of descriptions or drawings or photographs, be sure of the dimensions, if one tried to judge the size of this temenos, as the Athenians called the district of their sacred buildings; it was impossible, and this was somehow a great problem, that one could not be sure of the proportions, it made the construction of the entire Acropolis in one’s mind nearly impossible; somehow everything depended upon the proportions, he always felt this, and he thought so now as well, as he went along the street; he bought a sandwich for an exorbitant sum, he drank a can of more or less chilled cola for an even more shameless price, but it didn’t matter, as the only thing that mattered was that he was getting ever closer to the Acropolis in the scorching heat, and that he was going to see the Temple of Nike, and he was going to see the Erechtheion, and of course, crowning it all, the unsurpassable Parthenon — and most of all he would be up on the summit of the Acropolis, for he had always wished for this, he wished for it now as well, as a farewell, he wanted to see it very much, as the Greeks had seen it, let’s say, 2439 years ago.

He went along the Voulis into the district of Plaka, and in reality only a few hundred tourists were wandering toward him, beside him, or leaving him behind, so he could have even described himself as lucky; then he progressed for a while along Flessa, at one point he got lost, and he was confused, and he had no idea if it was right to continue along the Odos Erechtheus; in any event he continued along that street and after the narrow alleyways of Stratonos and Thrasyllou he suddenly came upon a wide street with busy traffic called Dionysiou Areopagitou, from where he could already see the temenos high above, true, it had suddenly been visible at one point or another previously, when in the narrow alleyways now and then a gap opened up for a fleeting moment, but now on this Dionysiou Areopagitou he saw it for the first time in its entirety, and that also meant for the first time in his life — and from this point on, for a good while, nothing concerned him, he judged that he was close to his goal, that he was at the foot of the Acropolis; even to think that thought was beautiful, the sun was scorching dreadfully, the traffic was horrendous, it could have been around ten or eleven o’clock, he didn’t know exactly, his watch had stopped on the plane coming here as he had forgotten to have the battery changed, and now this already . . . what, he thought to himself, it’s not enough just to be here?! — and he trudged along in the scorching heat, but there were suspiciously few tourists headed this way, indeed, he was seeing ever fewer and fewer tourists, no matter, he was not dissuaded, for here at his right was the Acropolis, at one point he would arrive at the way up, and if he had to go around the entire thing, he would go around it, and that was that, who cares, he reassured himself happily, but he went along this street for really quite a long time, the air had a dreadful stench which he had to suck in, and the noise from the traffic was practically unbearable; and he had just decided to ask directions from the very next passerby, when suddenly he came upon a serpentine path, reinforced with limestone, zigzagging upward, and he saw up there, at the summit of the long upward-rising path, a kind of booth; he climbed up the path with difficulty and the booth was a ticket counter, but the sign on it did not say tamio; but upon it was written AKROPOLIS, which he saw as laughable, for it was as if they had written on the path leading up here, dromos, which was a path, as everyone knew, and here is the Acropolis, so what was the point, probably for the entrance fee, he thought, and that surely was the reason, for an entrance fee was collected, a particularly high entrance fee at that, at first it was twelve euros, then when he protested, gesticulating, it was six euros, at last he had his ticket, he could go in, and he set off, glancing upward to see that here was the Acropolis, but he couldn’t bear the light, he had to look down; but it wasn’t even such a simple matter as that, for he looked down to rest his eyes in some patch of darker shade down below along the path, and he couldn’t do it, as the path simply did not have any darker shades, the paving below his feet blinded him just as much as that from which he had quickly averted his gaze; the paving below was of white marble, that is to say, the same material from which the steps were made, and no blade of grass or weed whatsoever sprouted up, upward he went and he only knew that he was beside the Propylaea, in the new entranceway to the Acropolis, which had been built by Mnesicles, and he groped his way upward knowing that there on the left rose the so-called Pinacotheca of the Propylaea, and on the right was the garrison building, then high above it the Temple of Athena Nike, with its four wondrous columns; but he only knew this, he couldn’t see anything, he just went upward, squinting, for so he had resolved: fine, so here I am blinded, well then, after the steps I’ll find a spot underneath a tree or I’ll take cover in a building and have a rest, and then I’ll come back here, and I will examine the Propylaea more thoroughly, and so he stumbled on, but the path leading through the Propylaea not only did not improve things, but actually made them worse, for instead of soil, limestone covered everything; the entire temenos was built on a colossal snow-white limestone cliff, and so the path into it ran along a blinding limestone surface among cunning little pieces of limestone; the Acropolis, he stated to himself, his eyes dazzled, was therefore completely, in its entirety, set out on a mass of pure limestone on this bare mountain; this Acropolis, he thought, stupefied, but for a while he still did not dare to completely think about what it meant that the mountain was completely bare, that there was nothing, but nothing apart from the limestone cliff, and the famous temples on the limestone cliff, built from varying materials, but partially from Pentelikon white marble, he did not dare to think about it, because he could not really believe it, so that he just went on, he tried to keep his eyelids lowered so that he wouldn’t fall flat on his face, but so as to also not let in the dreadful scorching fire of the sun, because the sunlight truly proved to be merciless, although it didn’t bother him that his skull, his back, his arms, his legs, everything was burning, he somehow withstood this, but what completely astounded him, the grave import of which he was not at all aware, was the effect of the sunlight on the limestone, he was not prepared for this intense, ghastly brilliance, nor could he have been, and why, what kind of guidebook, what kind of art-historical treatise relates such information as watch out, the sunlight on the Acropolis is so strong that in particular, travelers with weak eyes should definitely take advance precautions, so that he, who consequently belonged to this group of travelers with weak eyes, had not taken any sort of advance precautions at all, with the result that now he could not take any preventive measures, how could he do so — he had nothing with him, just a suitcase, that’s it, it flashed through him suddenly, and arriving in front of the shrine of Artemis Brauronia, he decided that the suitcase here in his hand would save him, what luck that he had brought it with him — from which it already was clear just how much he did not, due to the fatigue, heat, and blindness, have his wits about him, as it only occurred to him that the suitcase was certainly not in his hand, but had remained down below in the city with the boy, Maniopulos, when he withdrew to the wall of the shrine to open it and take out a piece of clothing; the sun at this moment was right above his head; no kind of soothing corner, niche, roof, or recess could be seen anywhere, not right here, not further on, the light crashed down on him without obstruction, arrow-straight, vertically, so that there was no shade at all in the entire Acropolis, although he didn’t even know that at this point, and therefore he took out, as he had nothing else, a used paper napkin from his jeans pocket, folded it in several places and put it before his eyes, but to his misfortune even the white of the napkin was irritating, so that he pressed the palms of his hands onto his eyes and went forward like that, trusting that, well, sooner or later he would get somewhere, to some resting place, or anyplace where he could retreat and rest his eyes; and he went forward, he went further up on the Acropolis, that place that he had longed, since his childhood, to see the most, and where, as it soon became clear, there was now only him and a German couple in the distance, by the Parthenon, unlike himself, he thought, they of course had come totally prepared, both of them had tropical helmet-like sun visors, they wore wide, dark sunglasses, they had backpacks from which, just as he happened to glance over at them, they pulled out liter bottles of mineral water, as a result of which he felt a torturous thirst, but he could do nothing to quench it, for here — in contrast to his every hope — there was no refreshment stand, as usually was the case in tourist spots, or someone selling drinks or anything like that, there was simply nothing on the Acropolis, only the Acropolis, but by now he was suffering very much, he came to the place where Athena’s statue had stood and the path continued toward the Erechtheion, but like a blind man, he felt the path before him with his foot, as it was utterly impossible to look up by now, just as it was even to glance upward, tears rolled down from both of his eyes, they weren’t hurting yet then, they only really began to hurt when his tears had dried up; he had cried out, so to speak, everything, as he reached the caryatids of the Erechtheion, where he of course could not go in — particularly from here, from the southern side — or even touch the maidens of Karyai with his glance, as the balustrade was high, and thus the caryatids were unreachable, he looked around despairingly, pain stung his eyes, here and there on the rocky surface enormous pieces of cut stone lay, most likely the Dörpfeld Temple, or the remains of the altarpiece of Athena, who knew where they came from, he was in any event able to take in this much in a moment, and then he dared to open his eyes again, and it was as if some god high above took mercy on him for a short time, for he was led to the southwestern façade of the Erechtheion, behind the caryatids, and there he glimpsed a tree, a tree, my God; the blinded worshipper of the Acropolis hurried over there; just that when he got there, he threw his back against the trunk, and attempted to open his eyes; nothing had changed, for he could not bear to open his eyes even here; the tree was a small fig-tree, an almost completely dessicated tiny dwarf of a tree, its stalk-thin trunk with its branches above were so thin, holding up a flimsy crown like it was butterfly wings, through which the light could pass with no obstruction, and when he gazed at the ground at his feet — in disbelief, he didn’t even see the shadow of these tiny branches — he then understood that what he had come here for would remain forever unseen by him: not only, he thought bitterly, not only would he never know the scale of the dimensions of the Acropolis, but he was never even going to see the Acropolis, even though he was here at the Acropolis — the gods had not designated the little tree as a place of relief for him, but rather the northern façade of the Erechtheion, there, that is, to the extent that the sun had shifted up there in the heavens, so that the foreground lay in shadow, he ran over there, crazed; the German couple were there already, they were cheerful, the husband was just changing the film in his camera, the lady was eating a huge gyro, they were fat, their complexions almost bursting with health, the gods truly favored them, he noted to himself, growing sadder — sadder and ungrateful, for finally he had reached a spot where he could rest his eyes, tortured by the pain, and generally speaking, when he did open his eyes, it was true, apart from the lower column-stumps of the old Parthenon, he could see nothing at all of the so-called Acropolis that he had longed to see his entire life, because his back was turned to it; well, this is absurd after all, he thought, after he had pulled himself together, and he did not wish in any way to reconcile himself, the Germans set off toward the Parthenon to take pictures, he, however, stayed, for he knew what would happen if he stepped out of the relief-granting prostatis of the Erechtheion, maybe he should try to sleep, he thought, to wait while the sun completed its momentous journey high above, and down here the proportion of sun and shadow would be altered, yet immediately he knew it was a bad idea, for he would not be able to hold out without any water, it was this, precisely this, that he had not foreseen, he should have brought water here — he leaned back against the wall, and he thought of Callicrates and of Ictinos, who had built it, then of Pheidias, who with his enormous gilded ivory statue of Athena had given it meaning, and leaning back against the wall, he pictured himself stepping closer to the Parthenon, indeed, directly, standing there by the wondrous columns of the Parthenon, by the exquisite Doric and Ionic orders of the columns, and he thought about the spaces of the pronaos, the naos and the opistodomos, and he thought about how when all this was built, the temple was still the place of faith, it was the backdrop and the goal of the Panathenaea, and he exerted his throbbing brain to take it all in, to see it all at once, and thus to be able to preserve for himself, as a way of bidding farewell, the most beautiful architectural creation of the western world — and still then, he thought that actually he should weep, because he was here, and yet not here at all, he should weep, because he had attained what he had dreamed of, and yet had not attained it at all.

It was horrible to pick his way down from the Acropolis, horrible to admit that this whole Athens trip had, due to such a ridiculous, commonplace, ordinary detail, turned out to be an ignominious failure; he stumbled downward, shielding his eyes with both hands, and he would have been very happy to kick apart the ticket booth, but of course he didn’t kick anything apart, he only wandered, meandered slowly downward on the path in the merciless heat, he reached the traffic of Dionysiou Areopagitou below, and decided that he would head in the other direction around the Acropolis, which he didn’t even feel like looking up at anymore, although now he was recovered enough that his eyes down here could bear the light; he could of course have gone back in the same direction that he had arrived from, but he had no desire to, just as he had no desire for anything else from this point on, he was not interested in the National Museum, he was not interested in the Temple of Zeus, he was not interested in the Theater of Dionysus, and he was not interested in the Agora, because he was no longer interested in Athens, and because of that he was not even interested in those points along the way from which he could have had a view from down here of the Acropolis; I spit on the Acropolis, he rashly said to himself aloud, he said it, but it was only the sadness speaking in him, he knew that himself as well, it was sadness for all that was imperceptible here, for he now interpreted it like this, as at first he sought and found a profound symbolic significance in what had happened to him, and rightly so perhaps, so he could somehow endure it, so he could in some way comprehend the events of the past hours, that is his own farewell, the meaning of which was only now slowly beginning to take shape within him, and he only looked at the sidewalk beneath his feet, and everything hurt, chiefly his eyes were still hurting, but his feet were hurting a great deal as well, he had blisters on his heels from his shoes, at every step he had to try to place his weight on his right, and then his left foot, so that they would slide forward a little in the shoes, so his heels wouldn’t touch them, and his head was still hurting terribly, as he was hungry, and his stomach was also hurting terribly, he hadn’t had a sip of anything for hours, he proceeded in this direction on the narrow sidewalk of the Dionysiou Areopagitou, which seemed longer, indeed unbearably long, and he didn’t and didn’t look up, because up there — as he now began to call the Acropolis so that he wouldn’t have to utter the name itself — nothing more remained which, in the course of another attempt, whether tomorrow or tonight, he might see, he knew that it would be futile to return, he would never ever see the reality of the Acropolis, because he came here on the wrong day, because he was born in the wrong time, because he had been born, it was all wrong from the very beginning, he should have known, should have sensed, that today was not the day to begin anything, nor was tomorrow, there were no days before him now, as there had never even been any, just as there was not and never would be a day — as opposed to this one — in which he could have ascended successfully on that upward path of cunningly packed limestone, why had he even embarked upon this — the corners of his mouth were turned down — why was it so urgent, and he berated himself, and hung his head, and, utterly weary, he went on with his bleeding heels in the loathsome shoes along the foot of the Acropolis, and it took a very, very long time until circling it, he went back into a street where he was once before, early that morning, he had turned into it coming here, Stratonos was the name of the little street, then he continued into the Erechtheos, and from there it immediately took him out onto the Apollonos and across to Voulis at the Ermou intersection — and he already saw his companions from that morning on the other side, he hardly wanted to believe what he was seeing, but almost all of them were there, only the one girl, Ela, was missing, he could make out that much from here, from the other side, they noticed him as well, and they were waving at him already, clearly he had the effect on them, when they recognized him, like that of some kind of refreshment in a scorching heat, and it was unspeakably gratifying for him, after so much torture, after so much unnecessary torture up there, to return among them, for as he glimpsed them and his heart began to throb, finally it had somehow been resolved, what it was that made the entire company so attractive, it was, well, precisely the fact that they weren’t doing anything and didn’t want anything, and that they were good, he thought now, rather moved, in his exhausted state, as he looked at them, and waved across to them, so that, well, it seemed so obvious that the only sensible thing to do was to sit down with them, here in Athens, where this company had accepted him from the very first moment: to sit in their midst, to order an ellinikos kafes, and to become lost here, in Athens, what’s the point of wanting anything, so that now, after this dreadful and dreadfully laughable day, nothing seemed quite as ridiculous as when he thought back on how much he had wanted something here this morning, how ridiculous was this entire wanting, when he would have been so much happier staying among them, and drinking yet another ellinikos kafes, and watching the traffic, as the cars, the buses, and the trucks rushed by frenziedly here and there; he felt dead tired, so there was no question of what he was going to do from this point on, he was going to sit down among them, and do nothing, just like them, and eat something and drink something, then there could be another ice-cold ellinikos kafes, and then that sweet, slack, eternal melancholy, and he was going to take off his shoes and he was going to stretch out his legs, and after narrating what had happened to him up there — not sparing self-ironic observations — he himself would take part in the general mirth as to how could someone be such an idiot as to come to Athens in the summer, and then, on the very first day climb up to the Acropolis in the strongest sunshine, be amazed that he saw nothing of the Acropolis, someone like that deserves it, Yorgos was going to say amidst all the laughter, someone like that really demands the title of imbecile, Adonis would add, without a trace of offense, someone like him who on a scorching day goes up to the Acropolis and doesn’t even bring sunglasses — they would laugh at that for a while, he thought, here at the intersection: this adventurer of the Acropolis, and perhaps it would be at this point, namely, that he would say why he had set off without sunglasses, it was because the Acropolis in sunglasses has nothing to do with the Acropolis; they waved to him again to stop dilly-dallying, to come over already, he, however, from a feeling of joy that actually here he was a little bit at home, at home among his new friends, set off without a thought into the dense traffic toward the terrace on the other side, and was immediately, in the blink of an eye, struck down, and crushed to death on the inner lane by a fast-moving truck.