

AUTHOR'S FOREWORD

When I set out to write about some recent summers that I spent sailing in Greek waters, and began to put in order certain thoughts that occurred to me in relation to this country, I reflected that if you don't look on writing as an art similar to the ancient arts which preceded it, such as the art of painting, or the potter's wheel, or the jeweller's craft, which arrive at a result which is of some ultimate use to us in our lives, then nothing remains but a falsehood, or else a vain attempt to talk about life, not in its own words — for life doesn't speak — but in yours, and by writing about it to somehow live it over again, apart from the one and only time that you actually can and do live it; for life itself writes nothing, it erases everything that is written about it, and simply, irreplaceably *lives*, like the inaccessible 'well of water springing up' in St John's Gospel. Thus, the observations which follow are not intended to portray anything. Life is what we live, it is a fruit that we eat, and when you write about it you are, at most, chewing over its peel. Life is not work, whereas writing is. All work includes materials and labour — you reckon on so much for one and so much for the other, and thereby get an idea of what the work is worth. The art of writing uses language as its material. It has become difficult these days not to adulterate one's materials, and it is even more difficult not to inflate the charge for the labour. I look on writing as an art which I struggle to get right in so far as I am able, so that it can be somehow useful to us in our life — as the goldsmith's piece of jewellery is useful, or

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a pot, or a painting — without troubling myself any further as to whether this usefulness will gain a more universal acceptance, or whether the written works will be regarded as 'works not demonstrably useful', as Papadiamándis* put it.

The few observations collected in this volume owe their existence to the fact that I was lucky enough to be invited to accompany some good friends of mine on their trips, and used the opportunity to experience and record what follows in the form in which it was dictated to me, either by my tiny notebooks or by the circumstances. Certain enlargements, or digressions, that I make on some of the themes came later, since they required a more detached treatment. There are thus some anachronisms in the text (in a notebook from 1974 I may refer to a book published in 1980, or to a recent event in an entry which predates it). This changes nothing; for as Aristotle says in his *Poetics*, 'poetry is more philosophical and a higher thing than history'.

Even though, to all appearances, they do not resemble my other writings — which are essays for the most part — I publish these observations today in case they prove to be of use in a more general sense (unlike a purely personal experience), more relevant and more unmistakably linked to this beloved island-strewn land of our fathers.

I take the years in turn from the beginning, starting the entries with each day's journey; all the digressions were first written when we were out at sea, with the wake of the boat unfurling behind us.