



A Thing of Beauty: Travels in Mythical and Modern Greece

Peter Fiennes

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Musings on the myths of ancient Greece are intertwined with contemplations on climate change and Covid-19 in Peter Fiennes's travelogue *A Thing of Beauty*.

As climate change set the world on fire and Covid-19 emerged, Fiennes traveled through Greece with ancient Greek travel writer Pausanias and Lord Byron as his guides. He made his way away from pandemic-deserted resorts, climbing winding foot paths to forgotten temples and balancing on the edges of deep sacred water wells, all the while expressing his amazement at the unforgiving Greek landscape that created a resonant civilization of contradictions.

The purpose of the trip was to find hope and to search for beauty; these elusive terms are explored in depth, but the book provides no definite answers about them. In the end, it is the journey that matters. History, myths, and legends weave with musing present-day observations. A rushed visit to a museum blends information about legends and myths with the hurried chase through the exhibit, while a visit to a sacred site evokes thoughts of humanity's impact on the environment, resulting in insightful comparisons between modern and ancient societies that are moving and profound. People encountered along the way are captured in precise terms, as with an eccentric Athenian taxi driver who speaks English with a Dutch accent and yells about motorcyclists who refuse to wear their helmets.

With the flavor of an educated train of thoughts, this is a rambling, sometimes chaotic travelogue, though one that still manages to keep with its story. Only the chapters featuring environmental activists who protested the Greek government have the flavor of reportage; in breaking with the book's established conversational style, they establish two parallel narratives.

A Thing of Beauty is an entertaining, erudite travelogue through Greece, both ancient and modern.

ERIKA HARLITZ KERN (November / December 2021)

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