

“GREEK SHADOWS” BY MARC AMFREVILLE
BOOK REVIEW

Marc Amfreville’s first novel is in my view a short ode to the healing power of love and our evergoing search for our inner self that starts at the beginning of adulthood and ends when we die. Two aspects of the human condition that in my view are nothing but interrelated. Healing in Amfreville’s story is somatic and psychic, internal and intersubjective, painful and relieving, all at the same time, exactly as it is in real life. The author’s writing is cinematic and as you read the novel you will most likely feel that you are watching an emotionally vibrating and psychologically profound movie. The characters of the story are some of the friends we all had in our youth regardless of the generation we belong to, and personally I felt as if I were a member of their gang, sharing their adventures in Greece during the dark times of the junta, in the end of the 60’s, and later in Paris where they return. A period that was a milestone not only in the history of France and Greece where the story takes place, but of the whole world as it was marked by the battle for peace, gender equality and the right of individuals and nations to self-determination and freedom. I wonder if things are much different today and this makes me think that although the novel refers to a distant era, the story it tells is a timeless one.

The hero of the book, Lucas, a French young man who is a student and activist with the International Amnesty, is a transcendent character since I automatically related to his experience, his traumas and his quest for love and identity (according to Psychoanalysis our personality is formed mainly through our identification with the people that we loved in our childhood), despite being a woman of a younger generation. How far does one go for love? Does love have, or should have, any limits? How can pain tie us up with another human being to the point that we become one with them? And lastly, what motivates us to go on after we have suffered a great loss, be it the loss of ourself as we knew him until then, of our object of love or even in some cases our human dignity? I loved it that in Amfreville’s universe the stronger one helps the weaker one in so many different ways, but also and perhaps mostly, I loved the fact that these two positions often alternate from one minute to the next, from one end of a relationship to the other and sometimes even in the same person as ourself is constituted of different facets and layers which are often in conflict. Something that happens in life all the time without us always being conscious of it. Maybe even rarely so.

The position of the shadow in the psychological sense is prominent in the book and that is why it is also the main word of the title. The shadow is our alter ego, the fleeting imprint our body leaves when projected onto the ground, and ultimately our "self" that we are never able to embrace. And let's not forget that in the shadows, those things that we fear or we are ashamed of are always hidden. The verse of Pindar, a great poet of ancient Greece, which he wrote in an epinician ode for a young wrestler, comes to mind: *“σκιᾶς ὄναρ ἄνθρωπος”* (Man is a dream of a shadow), emphasizing the ephemeral nature of human existence. Immediately after, he provides the condition where the ephemeral is cancelled, saying, *“But when he is found by divine glory, bright radiance embraces him.”* I think that the two main characters of the book are in search of this radiance, battling with their shadows in which they simultaneously seek comfort and an antidote to their *“ερημιά”* (the condition of profound loneliness that etymologically has its roots in the Greek word for “desert”), an idiomatic word that the author seems to understand very well despite being French. What do they ultimately achieve? This is something that every reader must answer for him(her)self.