

Passage I:

To speak of the Greek experience is to speak about a half-dead language that still utters in life what is seemingly excluded from it and thus forbidden to be talked about: death. Death as anything that is out of this world, as something that will never return.

Still, along with an experience of death that recently waned as a worn-out academic fashion, the Greek experience is dead too. Nearly 2300 years of written words separating Homer from the fall of Byzantium equal 500 books on a library traded for money: "I am with the killed. Hence my deepest solitude. I do not feel this tremendous macho society, beyond from the fact that it is a ruthlessly consuming one. It is me who pays all the time." Let us do the math and see how much this dealing with the Greek experience is costing the poet and how much dealing with the Greek experience might cost us today.

Beyond the historical tragedies of modern Greece and away from any personal disappointments, the relation that this land holds with language and history is mediated through the Greek light—whose omnipresence is the very condition of its transcendence. All historical contradictions from Dionysus to Christ took place under this light; all those disseminated dialects were spoken beneath its warmth. To paraphrase Lévinas,⁶ light is both the condition of the world and of our withdrawal from it—a withdrawal towards the invisibility of God, of the dead, of meta-physics, resulting from the temptation that all is still here, behind this light the visibility of which they once evaded: "birds, the allurements of God."

Under that luminous sky, if Greeks can do anything at all, it is to envision a return that will never come. All they can do is write poetry—which is doing nothing; other than lending an ear to a disseminated language whispering a unity that cannot be promised, as an adulthood in defeat is ready to recognize. Trying "to trap the invisible in visibility" they forget that they have grown up and one day they die—with the promise of return.

Perhaps one of the most scandalous divides of our times has been the one between the living and the dead, the latent prohibition that the living should not be concerned with the dead based on the mere impossibility of the dead to be concerned with the living in the first place. What adds to this scandal is that this divide abuses anything that cannot return to us by subsuming it under the same futility. Hence death is no longer "loss" in the usual sense. It no more refers to the things we lost but to our "loss" as we insist to dwell on them. Death is a waste —of time.

It is this waste that we find in the insouciance of Greek expenditure; the waste in dealing with a language that most of its historical part is no longer spoken; the waste in translating a poet who is *ex definitio* untranslatable; the waste of his vision, his money, his life. The waste of dealing with anything that cannot return and that cannot bring in any returns. This ultimately is the value of the Greek experience, a monument to the reality of death and the importance of coming to grips with such a reality.

References:

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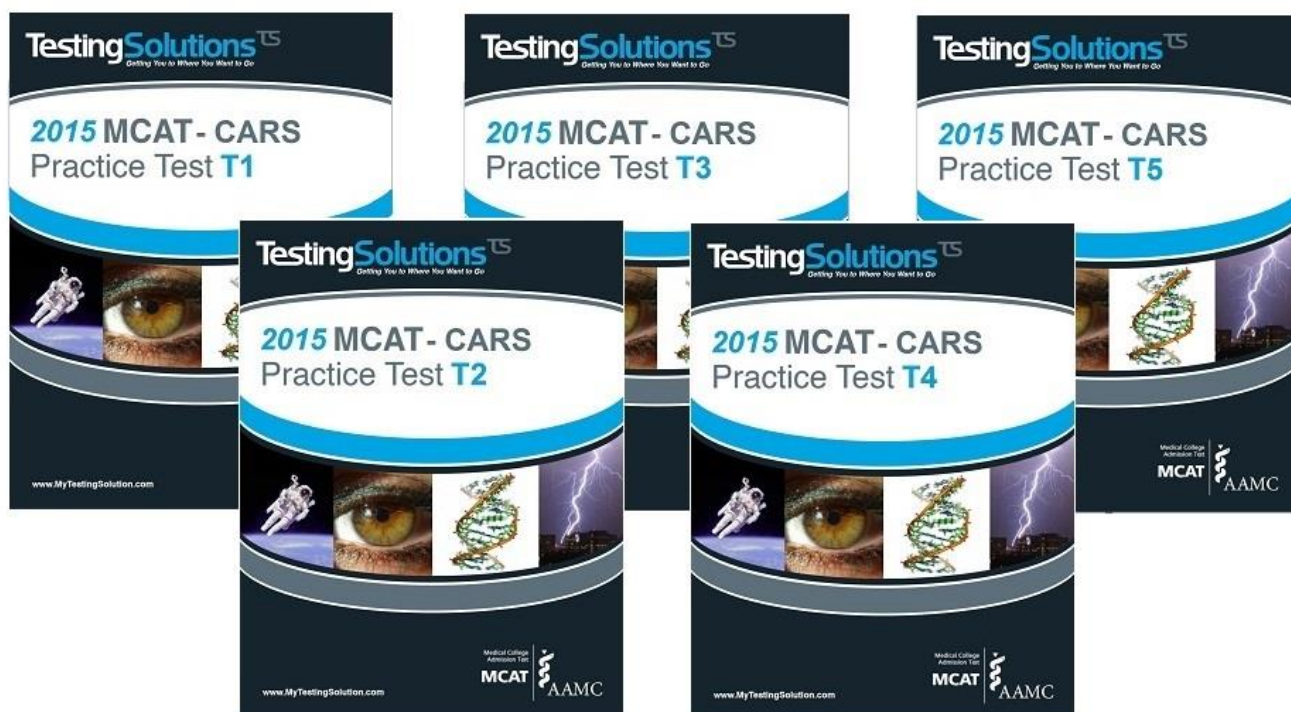
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Passage I -

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