



THE GREEK TRAGEDY

The European financial crisis in simple
words



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*My revenge is fraternity! No more
frontiers! The Rhine for everyone! Let us
be the same Republic, let us be the
United States of Europe, let us be the
continental federation, let us be
European liberty, let us be universal
peace! And now let us shake hands, for
we have done one another a service: you
have delivered me from my emperor and I
have delivered you from yours.*

Victor Hugo, March 1st 1871

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Introduction

What is the value of paradise if the mind cannot participate in its eternal peacefulness? And what is the value of wealth if it cannot lead to happiness?

But his questions were far more practical than spiritual, such as how he would pay for the pile of electricity bills or if he could ever be in the position to be released from his credit card debts and reactivate what once used to be his main means of payment. Lighting up a cigarette on his balcony he looked in front of him at the rising sun. The sky was once again clear and the sunrays were dancing on the sea. Nature was waking up in peace creating a paradise for its ever-worried inhabitants. How could he participate in this peace? His mind was only living questions, but no answers, temporarily getting hypnotized by the smell of smoke.

No, he didn't want to go back inside. A stack of sealed envelopes was piling up on the kitchen table. What is the purpose of opening them, only to feel sad, angry and miserable? They'd better remain closed; anyway he didn't have money to pay for bills any more.

Reaching the lighter in his pocket, his fingers stumbled upon a fifty cents coin. It was the change he received at the tobacco store and this was the only money he possessed right now.

Would he ever be able to stand on his feet again? The same was the question for his country. For a second he smiled. "No way" he thought. How could they ever believe that the country could rise again after it was brought to its knees? By now over half the shops in Athens had closed, construction activity had completely stopped and most of the qualified young Greeks had already fled on a one-way ticket to

northern Europe. Who would lead the growth in Greece? They were just dreaming. Maybe the same also applied for him. Maybe he was just dreaming of a normal life again.

His mind went back ten years to the year 2004. At that time his son was 8 years old and he was working as a corporate sales representative of a middle-sized private telecommunications provider. With an average monthly net salary of 1.500 Euros plus bonuses and supported by his wife's income he was able to provide enough funds for his family's daily expenses as well as for his son's education.

But now this was all gone. He was already unemployed for a year, living alone with his dog, trying to sustain the coldness of the winter and of his feelings. Only a couple of months after he lost his job the increasing arguments with his wife led them to separation. Within less than a year he found himself in debt, jobless, and kicked out. Moving out of his house in Athens he found shelter in what used to be his summer house in Loutraki, a small sea-side town near Athens. He had to get adjusted to a lonely life without regular income in a country with a wonderful climate but no opportunity.

In front of him the sun was warming the sky and coloring the earth. Would he be able to leave this colorful scenery and accept a blue-collar position in a cloudy grey country such as Germany or England?

A wave of anger and frustration rushed through his veins. They were kicking him out of his country. They had already kicked him out of his job, out of his family and out of his house. They blocked his credit cards; they emptied his bank account, his pockets and his future. They only cared about their own money, their own pocket, their own future, but who cared about Greece? They were playing a game of power, spraying the clear sky daily, leading the world to a new era, a

new age of slavery and globalization, a world of electronic money, surveillance and cameras, a world of obedience or unemployment, where one could either exist as part of the system or not exist at all. They started with Greece and their intention was to continue with the rest of the world.

He tightened his fist. He felt as a soldier in the front line of a universal battle. They didn't want Greece, they wanted the world. The clear morning sky got obstructed by white trails of airplane gases forming a grid. They were up there again spraying the sky above his head and he was down there with 50 cents in his pocket. Was this the fate of the world?

From wealth to poverty

Dear Sir / Madam,

My name is Manos. I received recently a reminder for my past due account. Considering my financial inability to pay for this bill I would like to explain a bit about myself.

At the age of 52 I lived a splendid past and now I am facing a hopeless future. The financial crisis of Greece has created a personal crisis in my life. After 30 years of hard work to build my life, I witnessed the collapse of my country, of my family and of myself. First I became unemployed then I divorced. The crisis of my country brought a crisis in me. I have a son who will finish high school soon, but I have no money to finance his studies like my father did for me or my grandfather did for my father. The future slipped from my hands. I was not always poor. I used to be wealthy. I was not always worthless...

I scrunched the paper and left it on the desk. Who would be interested in this? Nobody is keen on reading a depressive letter, just to feel sad or pity for me. Who would be interested in helping me in my despair, postponing a payment due date or giving me credit without an exact date of return? By now I had used the good will of all my friends and relatives. Only a handful of people were still answering my phone calls and the reason was obvious. Everybody wants to avoid negativity and nobody would be interested to read such a note, especially if this person was one of my plentiful creditors. There was no sense in sending such a note to anybody.

Sitting on the balcony, I watched the sea in front of me, but I had no way of touching it. Though so close, it seemed far away. I was once swimming in these waters together with my friends, my family and my colleagues. But now I was here alone, a mere observer, not a participant. The memories of

the past were still vibrant. I once had an ordinary life; I was not always jobless, not always hopeless. My life used to be splendid, I used to be wealthy, very wealthy, and I was enjoying it. Above all I used to love and be loved.

My mind went back to the end of my high school years when I met Kathy. I was already prepared to go to university and my parents had paved the way ahead for me. I was encouraged by my mother to study abroad, since British universities were valued in Greece higher than the Greek ones. I thus applied and was accepted by the City University in London.

Just months before I received the acceptance letter I met Kathy while visiting my father in the hospital where he was working. I had already plans to meet my friends directly after this visit, but I had to stay in the waiting room, since he was still dealing with an emergency. And there, opposite to me, was Kathy. She was young with curly long hair and her dark skin was shining as if it was made of fine silk. She was shy, looking at the ground, trying to hide her discomfort of sitting in silence in the waiting room with me. I was reading a magazine trying to look at her without being noticed. Of course she did. She smiled at me, but then quickly looked the other way. Did she like me too? After a while I decided to break the ice:

- Hello, my name is Manos. Is one of your relatives in the emergency room?

She looked relieved, as if she was waiting for me to start talking. I suddenly felt more relaxed.

- Oh... no, thanks for your interest! she replied in a low tone. I am actually waiting for my mother to finish. She works here as a nurse!