



THE LONGEST NIGHT

Chronicle of a Dead City

by Petros Haris

The nine short stories in *The Longest Night* recreate the Second World War atmosphere in Greece in general and Athens in particular during the grim years of the German Occupation of that country. Eight of the stories focus on the fate of Athens, and, as the subtitle of the volume suggests, it amounts to a “chronicle of a dead city” which opens with a description of the German troops entering Athens and ends with an account of their inglorious departure. It is the story of the suffering endured by the Greek people, especially those residing in Athens, and their struggle to regain their freedom.

The Longest Night is a quiet, also subtle contribution to the field of “antiwar literature.” For, as the author himself puts it, “Protesting against the facts of war in a high-pitched or shrill voice does not always serve the interests of literature; by doing so, one may, indeed, give magnitude or heroic scale to such facts but at the same time deprive them of the drama and truth of living reality.” Thus, one learns as much, maybe more, about the ugliness and futility of war by observing the reaction of the “oppressed” toward their oppressors than by cataloging the latter’s atrocities. For oppressors and oppressed are equally victims of the larger impersonal forces of war, as it is symbolized by the case of the young enemy soldier about to depart from Athens for a more tragic destiny—Stalingrad.

Petros Haris was born in 1902 in Athens, Greece, where he still lives and works, devoting his life to literary and cultural pursuits. His literary activity began in earnest in 1924 with the publication of his short stories under the title *The Last Night on Earth*, and he soon emerged as a leading short story writer. In 1978 he published *Days of Rage*, a novel dealing with the Civil War in Greece. He has enjoyed a unique position in the world of modern Greek letters through the publication of the literary journal *Nea Estia*, which he has been editing since 1933. *The Longest Night* is his first book-length work to appear in English. An English edition of his *Days of Rage* is scheduled for publication soon.

Theodore Sampson was born in Greece but moved to Canada, where he was also educated, receiving his doctorate in English literature and language at the Université de Montréal (1970). In 1975 he resettled in Greece, where he works as a teacher and translator. His publications include *Five Canadian Poets in Greece* (1973) and *Modern Greek Short Stories* (1981).