

University of Michigan
Department of Classical Studies

Convivium



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LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

On September 1, 2001, I took over as the Interim Chair of Classical Studies, and so one of my earliest acts involved coordinating the Department's response to the World Trade Center disaster. It was, of course, a traumatizing event that deeply challenged the common values we hold dear as classicists. We were obliged to consider the fragility of things that we too easily regard, in more placid times, unquestioned and enduring: not only human life, although the losses of 9/11 were undeniably horrific, but also the civility that binds us together as a nation and as a culture. One part of the Department's mission is to communicate, especially to our students and through them to the world, a sense of classic fortitude in the presence of turmoil.

Fortunately, nothing in the year that followed was to rival the sheer emotion of that day. The danger was that events of such public magnitude would overwhelm our smaller endeavor. In the end, though, we had plenty to cheer about as well. Vassilis Lambropoulos delivered his inaugural lecture as the C.P. Cavafy Professor of Modern Greek Studies (a slightly abbreviated version of this lecture is reprinted in this newsletter); Sabine MacCormack was named one of the first five Mellon Distinguished Achievement Scholars; and Sue

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Alcock, our current MacArthur Fellow, became the John H. D'Arms Collegiate Professor of Classical Archaeology and Classics.

Now, as the summer slips away, we are eagerly awaiting the first Platsis Symposium, which will take place in late September. This symposium was established by George and Barbara Platsis as part of our rapidly expanding program in Modern Greek. Successive annual symposiums will explore the vitality of ancient Greek ideas within the modern world. The first symposium, described in more detail later in this newsletter, has an extremely timely theme: the lasting significance of Greek concepts of war in relation to Greek democracy, against the backdrop of modern anti-democratic terrorism.

Fall term will also see the inauguration of a new Ph.D. program in ancient history. This program, jointly run by Classical Studies and History, consolidates Michigan's considerable strengths in historical subjects by bringing together not only historians and classicists, but also archaeologists, art historians, and experts on the ancient Near East, in what we believe will be a bold new educational format. Ray Van Dam of History, the first Director of the Program, describes the new program later in the newsletter.

More or less simultaneously with the release of this newsletter, we will be launching a new department website, which I invite you to visit for further information about the Department and our upcoming activities. The address will remain the same: <http://www.umich.edu/~classics/> Both this website and the newsletter would not have been possible without the ingenuity and dedication of our office staff.

Finally, let me mention the death of two close friends and former colleagues, both of whom are likely to be well known to most in the Michigan community. Gerda Seligson, Professor Emerita of Latin, passed away on June 1, 2002, after a remarkable academic life that took her from the great classical seminars of pre-Nazi Berlin first to London and finally to Ann Arbor, where she was the redoubtable champion of our linguistically based methods for teaching elementary Latin.

John D'Arms, Professor Emeritus of Classical Studies, was the former Chair of this Department, Dean of the Rackham Graduate School, and Vice Provost of the University. John retired in 1997 in order to take up the Presidency of the American Council of Learned Societies, where he served until his death on January 22, 2002. John's life was remarkable for his ability to keep an on-going balance between scholarship and academic service: detailed studies of Roman social life, but at the same time also a commitment to the constant renewal of our field and the Humanities in general.

Both Gerda and John are deeply missed, and the Department has established funds honoring each of them. The Seligson fund is used to award prizes to outstanding graduating seniors in Greek; our D'Arms fund underwrites the travel plans of graduate students who need to go abroad while researching their dissertations. You can support one or both of these funds by sending the Department a check made out to "The University of Michigan." Be sure to clearly designate where you want the money to go.

It has been a great privilege serving as Interim Chair of this Department, and, of course, I still have several months to go. But I will take this opportunity to thank my colleagues and the College for their support during this transitional period. Like all of us, I eagerly await our new Chair, Richard Janko, an internationally honored scholar in Greek literature, who will take over from me on January 1 of next year. This past January, Richard received the APA's highest honor, the Goodwin Award of Merit, for his book *Philodemus: On Poems, Vol. I*. Richard and his wife Michèle Hannoosh, an expert on nineteenth-century French literature who will be joining the Department of Romance Languages and Literatures, are very welcome additions to our community.

Bruce W. Frier

Modern as Opposed to What?

The C.P. Cavafy Professorship Inaugural Address

By Prof. Vassilios Lambropoulos

September 28, 2001

Since the endowed Chair we are officially inaugurating today has been designated as a "Professorship in Modern Greek Studies," I thought it would be appropriate to devote my lecture to this designation, and specifically to the adjective that qualifies Greek: "modern." I know that many of you have been intrigued by the title of the lecture, so let me proceed quickly and answer my question. What is "Modern" opposed to? If we take a look at the college course listings across the country, we will discover that there are two kinds of classes offered in Hellenic language and culture. "Modern Greek" and "Greek." There are no courses designated as Ancient Greek.

So the opposite of Modern is Greek. What is not Modern Greek is plainly Greek. Greek as such, the real thing, as it were, is always ancient; the other Greek, the different, perhaps inferior, certainly less Greek, is Modern Greek. No other field in the University has the unenviable distinction of being distinguished, discriminated against, singled out by this qualifying adjective, "Modern," which, better than any other word, characterizes our world. Come to think of it, I have the dubious advantage of teaching in the most modern of fields. Nothing is more modern than Greek because nothing is more ancient. To do Modern Greek is by definition to study and measure the Modern against its liberating and forbidding model, the Greek. One might conclude that we speak Modern Greek every time we discuss modernity in terms of its classical background.

In order to understand better what it means to measure the Modern against the Greek, against the model of the classical, let's spend some time looking at the writer honored by this

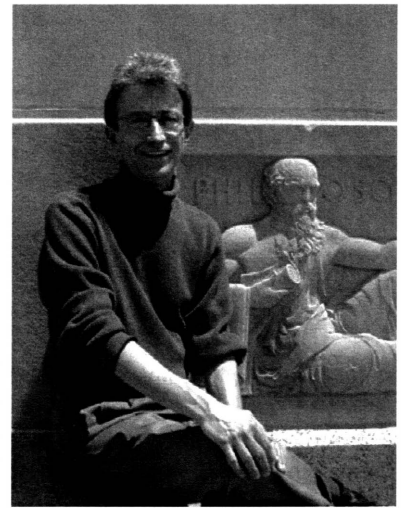


Professorship, the Greek poet Constantine P. Cavafy. At first glance, Cavafy (at left), who lived between 1863-1933, does not seem to be the typical Greek poet. He was born and died in Alexandria, Egypt, and never lived in Greece. He earned his living as a civil servant in the Egyptian Ministry of Public Works. He insisted that he was not "Greek" but "Hellenic." The language of much of his

formal education was English. He is even rumored to have spoken Greek with an English accent. He circulated only 154 short poems, which he never collected in a book.

Throughout his life, Cavafy looked at his identity from a critical distance. As part of this process, in his poetry he

reflects constantly on the dialectical tension between Hellenism and modernity. One of his favorite and more dazzling techniques was the incorporation of excerpts of older works, real or invented, into his own. In around 50 of his poems, Cavafy uses real or fictitious quotations in the title, motto, or body of the text. His sources range from Homer to Julian the Apostate, from history to epistles, and from official decrees to inscriptions.



Recall his poem "Young Men of Sidon (A.D. 400)," which cites the epigram on Aeschylus' tomb. Aeschylus died in 456 BC. The complete epigram reads as follows: "In this tomb lies Aeschylus, son of Euphorion, an Athenian, who died in wheat-bearing Gela [in Sicily]. The Marathonian grove may proclaim his renowned valor, and the long-haired Medes [i.e., the Persians], who knew it well." With each reading of the poem, the epigram is delivered through five voices—in turn, its classical author, the actor at a social gathering in A.D. 400, the young intellectual listening to the actor some eight centuries after the tragedian's death, then Cavafy writing in 1920, and finally each reader of Cavafy's poem.

The poem begins with a performance: an actor is entertaining a small group of young Sidonians. In his first performative move, he recites Hellenistic epigrams by Meleager, Krinagoras, and Rhianos. This choice seems to fit perfectly with the aesthetic, physical, and chronological horizons of the environment. But then he makes another move, a bold one, when he shifts back more than two centuries before the Hellenistic poets he had just selected to recite the Aeschylian epitaph. Appropriately enough, this performative choice is accompanied by a marked change in delivery, as he stresses, "maybe more than he should have," certain words in the text.

At this point, whether by design or chance, the actor's performance acquires an agonistic character, at least for one member of the audience. We don't know whether it is because it appears to be challenging the taste, the morality, or the conduct of its listeners. The point, however, is that "a vivacious young man" jumps up and accepts the challenge, joining the agon and offering his view of the epigram. The kid's passion for *grammata* is clear, and predictably his maturity has been debated repeatedly by critics. The stark contrast between the old tragedian and the intemperate youth is still shocking to many people.

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What is even more shocking is that not only does the youth explain with great conviction the meaning of the epigram, but he even corrects it by counter-proposing his own epigram to an artist's life, thus adding a strong creative dimension to his own performance and making the actor's performance appear like a pale imitation of an already weak original. We hear his voice clearly: Don't count as a major achievement your place among the herd of an Athenian army; instead, claim your own unique feats eponymously.

The contest is not so easily won, however, since Cavafy is undermining the Sidonian's victory with the date he gives in the poem's title. How valid is the young man's critique of Aeschylus and his own improvised epigram when all this intelligence is exhibited at a private, privileged, perfumed gathering of immature youths at the end of the ancient era in the rich Hellenized Phoenician port of Sidon? Where is the space for a young man to display and distinguish himself? What audience is there to appreciate his virtuosity and make it memorable? If the goal is, in Cavafy's word, *mneme*, perhaps Aeschylus was right to ignore his victories at theater contests and record on his tomb his participation in a more glorious contention, the Athenian victory in Marathon in 490 BC. His polis gave him the opportunity to appear in battle before both Greeks and Persians and to show in deed who he was. Can Sidon, the commercial metropolis, do the same for its young intellectuals in A.D. 400?

By thus situating his ancient quotation, by having Aeschylus cited on the site of Sidon, Cavafy declared a contest with the young man. Whether he can win, depends on us. If we view the poem as a study of agon which directs us to engage in a performative understanding of the past, we can in our turn read it in an appropriately agonistic manner that honors the ethics of appearance and the achievements of virtuosity. We see the high stakes mentioned in one of the two Aeschylean passages whose emphatic delivery irritated the Sidonian youth; *alke d'eudokimon*. *Alke* means "strength displayed in action." All the participants in this diachronic contest must seek the "renowned valor" that can be achieved only through great virtuosity in public action.

Action embodies freedom and is located in the realm of public appearance, the realm of the world. The actuality of free

ΝΕΟΙ ΤΗΣ ΣΙΔΩΝΟΣ (400 Μ.Χ.)

Ο ηθοποιός που έφεραν για να τους διασκεδάσει απήγγειλε και μερικά επιγράμματα εκλεκτά.

Η αίθουσα άνοιξε στον κήπο επάνω·
κ' είχε μιαν ελαφρά ευωδία ανθέων
που ενώνονταν με τα μυρωδικά
των πέντε αρωματισμένων Σιδωνίων νέων.

Διαβάσθηκαν Μελέαγρος, και Κριναγόρας, και
Ριανός.

Μα σαν απήγγειλεν ο ηθοποιός,
»Αισχύλον Ευφορίωνος Αθηναίων τόδε κεύθει →
(τονίζοντας, ίσως υπέρ το δέον
το «αλκήν δ' ευδόκιμον», το «Μαραθώνιον
άλσος»),
πετάχθηκεν ευθύς ένα παιδί ζωηρό,
φανατικό για γράμματα, και φώναξε·

»Α δεν μ' αρέσει το τετράστιχον αυτό.
Εκφράσεις τοιούτου είδους μοιάζουν κάπως
σαν λιποψυχίες.

Δώσε – κηρύττω – στο έργον σου όλην την
δύναμι σου,
όλην την μέριμνα, και πάλι το έργον σου
θυμήσου
μες στην δοκιμασίαν, ή όταν η ώρα σου πια
γέρνει.

Έτσι από σένα περιμένω κι απαιτώ.
Κι όχι απ' τον νου σου ολότελα να βγάλεις
της Τραγωδίας τον Λόγο τον λαμπρό –
τί Αγαμέμνονα, τί Προμηθέα θαυμαστό,
τί Ορέστου, τί Κασσάνδρας παρουσίες,
τί Επτά επί Θήβας – και για μνήμη σου να
βάλεις

μόνο που μες στων στρατιωτών τες τάξεις, τον
σώρο
πολέμησες και σύ τον Δάτι και τον Αρταφέρνη.»
(92; 1920)

Translated by Edmund Keeley and Phillip Sherrard; used by permission

YOUNG MEN OF SIDON (A.D. 400)

The actor they'd brought in to entertain them also recited a few choice epigrams.

The room opened out on the garden
and a delicate odor of flowers
mingled with the scent
of the five perfumed young Sidonians.

There were readings from Meleager, Krinagoras,
Rhianos.

But when the actor recited
"Here lies Aeschylus, the Athenian, son of
Euphorion"

(stressing maybe more than he should have
"his renowned valor" and "sacred Marathonian
grove")

a vivacious young man, mad about literature,
suddenly jumped up and said:

"I don't like that quatrain at all.
Sentiments of that kind seem somehow weak.

Give, I say, all your strength to your work,
make it your total concern. And don't forget
your work

even in times of stress or when you begin to
decline.

This is what I expect, what I demand of you —
and not that you completely dismiss from your
mind

the magnificent art of your tragedies —
your Agamemnon, your marvelous Prometheus,
your representations of Orestes and Cassandra,
your Seven Against Thebes - merely to set down
for your memorial

that as an ordinary soldier, one of the herd,
you too fought against Datis and Artaphernis."

action consists in performance. In autonomous action, the performing act makes human freedom appear. Thus action is the self-presentation of freedom in the world through performance. Performance is showmanship—it shows the man, it shows who he is. This performance is evaluated according to its virtuosity. Virtuosity is not pure skill but mastery that resonates with virtù, with virtue. Performance carries with it a fundamental accountability to the world itself. If action is performance, then performance is virtuosity judged according to the greatness of its achievement. Consequently, performance should be understood in agonistic, not aesthetic, terms. Performance is agonistic appearance in public, and virtuosity is a great public performance.

As we can see, in this short poem Cavafy has posited in very dramatic terms the question of modernity: What does it mean to be modern, not in the sense of living today but in the sense of living in the shadow of antiquity—in the sense of measuring your time and your work against something that appears unsurpassingly classical? What can you say about Aeschylus in A.D. 400, when you are a perfumed Greek-speaking youth living in post-classical Sidon? What can you say about Aeschylus in A.D. 1920, when you are a middle-aged Greek-speaking civil servant living in modern Alexandria?

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And how can you say it when your language is still that of Aeschylus, that is, Greek, only modern?

This is the question of modern Greek, the question of modernity that has been preoccupying us in various manifestations for centuries now: What does it mean to be modern when the opposite of “Modern” is Greek? Leaving Cavafy aside for a moment, listen to the voice of another Egyptian, the Jewish writer André Aciman, who teaches Comparative Literature at the City University Graduate Center. On September 11, 2001, he is ruminating on the collapse of the World Trade Center in New York as he and his twin boys join the human stream headed uptown on Broadway. While they are trying to flee the disaster, his mind travels back to two moments in history. The first one is painfully personal: “Holding each boy by his hand, I remembered an identical moment on such a walk with my mother as we hurried home during a sudden blackout in Egypt in 1956 during the Suez crisis. I wanted to think of how she had handled the moment, wanted to think of the layers of ironies involved now, as I remembered that the same anti-Western and anti-Semitic forces that finally ruined our lives in Egypt would, once again, wearing the vestments of anti-Americanism and anti-Zionism, touch my life once more” (NY Times, 9/16/2001). But our author cannot focus on that 1956 incident because images of the present catastrophe are racing before his eyes.

He continues to walk uptown with his kids and hundreds of thousands of people. And as he is trying desperately to make sense of what is going on around him, he travels back to an earlier moment in history, and returns to the Persian Wars, the time of Aeschylus: “As I walk with my children, my mind turns back to another blackout reported, not by the networks, but by Herodotus, when the Athenians emptied their city and massed in all manner of ships and boats, while the Persians who had invaded the abandoned city put the Acropolis to the torch, burning what Athens was most proud of, because in burning it they were torching something in the Athenian soul as well. Those who saw the fire watched in silence and horror, no less helpless than those who watched the repeated images of the airplane boring into the second tower, of the collapsing towers, of the billowing smoke that spelled the end.”

The morning after, when a French tourist asks the author where the two towers stood, he helps Aciman complete his mental trip to Athens. This is how his article ends: “For an instant, I imagined myself in ancient Greece, asking an Athenian the question the Frenchman had put to me. Where would the temple have stood? Pointing to the Acropolis, the man would have indicated a smoldering mound overlooking his town. And yet, I find something heartening in this. After the Persian invaders had left Attica, the Athenians rebuilt their temple and made it the marvel which still stands on the Acropolis today. We can and must always rebuild our monuments. As for the barbarians, we know what happened to them.”

Using Herodotus, even in the midst of devastation and panic, in order to make sense of the present when your own personal history is not enough—this is what it means to be modern. Using

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Modern Poet, Ancient Artifacts in the Kelsey Museum By Prof. Artemis Leontis

What is a modern poet doing in an archaeological museum? This would be a justified reaction to the invitation to visit “Cavafy’s World: Ancient Passions,” an unusual exhibit on the life and work of the eminent Greek poet Constantine P. Cavafy, held at the Kelsey Museum of Archaeology from February 21 to August 31, 2002. Co-curator Lauren A. Talalay and I faced the task of communicating to a broad audience our answer to this question: our sense that divergent eras, materials, and sensibilities can combine in startling ways that stimulate the imagination. Carefully pairing Cavafy’s poems with select artifacts, we tried to show that this particular modern poet and this wonderful museum collection are especially well suited to each other.

Some poems and objects formed obvious pairs. A set of Bactrian coins with Indic writing on one side, Greek on the other, perfectly supplemented Cavafy’s poem “Coins,” a thoughtful commentary of such objects. And the funerary stele dedicated in Greek to one “Ammon” matched almost too literally Cavafy’s “For Ammon,” a poem instructing the versifier of Greek funerary inscriptions how to address the dead Ammon.

In most cases, however, poems and artifacts met tangentially, inviting visitors to listen carefully to the dialogue that ensued between them. Here is one of my favorite examples.

Visitors will have observed a small case containing three of the Kelsey Museum’s most treasured pieces: a finely crafted gold necklace with a pair of gold earrings identified as Greco-Roman and a gilded mummy portrait, all remarkably preserved. Mummy portraits have been prized since their discovery in Egypt for their expressive faces, strong presence, vivid colors, beautiful execution, and miraculous preservation. This one from Karanis, Egypt, of the 2nd century AD shows a lovely woman wearing a heavy set of gold jewelry. Next to these, the manuscript of a poem:

FOR THE SHOP

*He wrapped them up carefully, neatly,
in expensive green silk.
Roses of rubies, lilies of pearl,
violets of amethyst: beautiful according to his taste,
to his desires — not as he saw them in nature
or studied them. He’ll leave them in the safe,
examples of his bold, his skillful work.
Whenever a customer comes into the shop,
he brings out other things to sell— first class ornaments:
bracelets, chains, necklaces, rings.*

(translated by Edmund Keeley and Philip Sherrard)

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classical Marathon, Hellenistic Sidon, and 20th century Alexandria to make sense of the present, as Cavafy did—this is what it means to be Modern Greek. Aciman wants modern monuments that compare with the Acropolis and even compete with it. He tries to comprehend the disaster and to remain modern first by thinking of his own history, and failing, and then by thinking of the Greeks and trying to envision an acropolis of the future in New York. To make sense as monuments, the Towers and any future buildings in New York must be compared to the Acropolis. This attitude is an appropriately agonistic and performative one, like those of the Sidonian youth and the Alexandrian poet. As we saw, through its own virtuosity, Cavafy's poem offers a counter-model both to the Modernist interpretive approach to antiquity and to the Post-modern formalist play with it. By simultaneously quoting an ancient and a Hellenistic (that is, belated) source; by focusing on reading not as a task but as a display of virtuosity; by treating memory as fame, rather than responsibility; by emphasizing the performative dimension of doing and understanding, it proposes and exemplifies an agonistic approach—one inspired by the ethics of worldly virtuosity. Such an approach does not assign itself the secondary role of serving the ancients or the ascetic vocation of revealing their hidden depths. Instead of a scribal or archaeological disposition, it adopts a dramatic one that views understanding as a public performance. By so doing, it responds to Nietzsche's challenge that the Classics should not be imitated or superseded but surpassed by action.

There is an interesting difference, though, between the two Egyptian authors I have been discussing. Aciman cites the ancients in translation. To him, they are a monument. Cavafy cites them in the original. To him, they are living interlocutors. He can still perform Aeschylus in Greek. To him, Greek is a direct source of both reverence and empowerment.

In its Greek original, the use of the ancient quote is very different from the interpolation of Greek fragments in, say, Pound, Joyce, or Heidegger. Aeschylus, the Hellenistic actor, the Sidonian youth, Cavafy as well as his Greek readers all speak and read and write the same language. To the contemporary Greek, the ancient citation does not have an effect of alienation, defamiliarization, or learnedness but rather the impact of recognition: he recognizes these words, whose delivery spans some 25 centuries, as his own words—he recalls them to mind and knows them anew. Thus to him their performative use operates as renewal and transmission as well. A virtuosic performance like Cavafy's keeps the language alive, functional, dynamic—capable of producing a poem like this one which, come to think of it, would be linguistically quite accessible to Aeschylus himself. Through it, the Athenian, the Sidonian, and the Alexandrian wordsmiths converse.

This on-going conversation makes the traditional distinction between Ancients and Moderns rather impossible

to sustain in the case of the Greeks who, at least by virtue of their language, cannot be made to fit into either category. Here one is tempted to resort to Derridean terminology and call the Greeks the “supplement” of modernity, the force that cannot be contained by the opposition of modernity to antiquity precisely because this force still writes Greek, it still uses words that Derrida has made famous such as *grammatology*, *abyss*, *polemos*, *philia*, *pharmakon*, *ousia*, *hymen*, *tympan*, *parergon*, and *aporia*. Alternatively, one is tempted to take advantage of post-colonial approaches and characterize the Erasmian pronunciation (which still prevails in classics) as a voice of imperial command, one that colonized and disciplined the speech of those who were still speaking Greek and were never consulted about their views (or should I say their vowels?) on the matter. Both these explanations (the deconstructionist and the post-colonial one) would claim some victim status for post-classical Greek and its speakers but would not take us far enough. The situation is more complicated and cannot be settled with dialectical oppositions of any kind.

The question I have raised in this talk, which honors the first endowed chair in Modern Greek on our campus, is the following: if Modern is the opposite of Greek, is then Modern



Greek a contradiction in terms? How can a field, a culture, an identity be simultaneously Modern and Greek, present and ancient? The work of Cavafy provides several intriguing answers. There is a performative quality, an agonistic practice that distinguishes Greeks from both the Ancients and the Moderns—the plain fact that they have been speaking Greek. That is a quality

that has been familiar to many eminent translators of ancient texts since, sooner or later, in trying to render them in an accessible idiom, they begin noticing people who communicate every day in Greek. Thus there is some important cultural and intellectual work performed by Greeks today that often goes unrecognized, which is that, through their masterful rhetorical action, they keep the language of Aeschylus, Meleager, and Cavafy potent and creative. Not that they are not haunted by their own sense of modernity or the nostalgia for a glorious era. But the critical difference is that they do not depend on the mediation of translation; in other words, there are no Greeks in their lives—they *are* the Greeks.

Because of certain ethnic stereotypes, and because of its Mediterranean origins, Hellenism until recently was portrayed as a “shame” culture. Today though, we notice an interesting shift in scholarship toward a performative approach, which seems to make much more sense. Although shame is certainly an element in the Greek social fabric, its importance appears much less decisive. To raise a crudely empirical question, when we think of Greeks we know, is shame their first quality that comes to mind? Not very likely! On the contrary, what is the feature that has distinguished 20th century Greeks, that has made people like Nikos Kazantzakis, Maria Callas, Dimitri Mitropoulos, Melina Mercouri, Aristotle Onassis, Andreas

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Papandreou, Cornelius Castoriadis, or Mikis Theodorakis world-famous? What is it that has made them appear “larger than life”? I submit to you that it is the pursuit of free action, public performance—agonistic display of excellence. If you recall how Zorba, in the book and the film, constantly fashions his character or how the Cephallonians, in the book and the film *Corelli's Mandolin*, stage their surrender to the Italians outside their City Hall, you will see exactly what I mean.

Thus with the help of the defiant Greek villagers, the help of Cavafy's verses, and the help of all those who worked so hard to endow this Chair and give a great name to the Greeks, we can begin to understand the meaning of “Modern Greek” better. “Modern Greek” refers to a double tension that is the hallmark of Hellenism. First, the syncretism of ancient and new, classical and belated, old and modern—the mixture of diverse traditions, beliefs, and idioms. Second, the agonistic pursuit of excellence in public action, the simultaneous pursuit of freedom *and* competition. Because of this creative tension, the only way to be Greek is to be modern, and the only way to be modern is to be Greek—to seek immortal fame not through any ancients or past glories but through your own virtuosic strength which shows who you are for everybody to see and admire. We may therefore conclude that, far from being opposites, as they may first appear, “Modern” and “Greek” are the two sides of the same coin, the twin conditions of the same performance.

**Read the full text at
www.umich.edu/~classics/**

**The Cavafy Professorship was
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Ancient Poetry, Modern Poetry Discussing Cavafy

by Prof. Ruth Scodel

On March 15-16, the department, along with the Cavafy Chair and the interdisciplinary program Contexts for Classics, sponsored a conference called “Greek at a Slight Angle: Cavafy and Classical Poetry.” Many classicists are admirers of Cavafy's poetry, and scholars of modern Greek are fully aware of how carefully and extensively Cavafy read ancient texts, but this was the first formal discussion of Cavafy by a group of classicists. Since there are so many scholars of Hellenistic poetry in the Midwest, and Hellenistic poetry was so important to Cavafy, the conference especially considered both how reading Hellenistic poetry illuminates Cavafy, and how Cavafy's reading can help us notice new aspects of ancient texts.

The Gerald F. Else Lecture in the Humanities began the program as Daniel Mendelsohn showed how Cavafy resolved his poetic and personal crisis of how to speak openly about homosexual desire by turning to the Hellenic (and particularly Hellenistic) past and “giving voice” to the beautiful dead of ancient times. In his earlier poems, Cavafy presents the dead as mute, passive, objects. But as Cavafy's self-confidence as a poet of homosexual desire grew, he presented them as speaking subjects—particularly in the “Tombstone” poems purporting to be the inscriptions on Hellenistic and late Antique grave monuments, in which the beautiful dead finally speak for themselves.

The eight papers on the following day were both varied and coherent, offering different approaches to related themes and repeatedly turning to the same poems—not always the most famous ones. Ahuvia Kahane looked at “On the Outskirts of Antioch,” linking the poem with an anecdote of Cavafy's own death. David Kutzko returned to one of the “Tombstone”

poems, “In the Month of Athyr,” as he examined Cavafy's view of Herodas' fragmentariness. He also showed how Cavafy's joke on the “wounded” meter of Herodas points to Herodas' own self-reflexive allusion to his meter in *Mimiambi* 1.66-67. Benjamin Acosta-Hughes also treated “In the Month of Athyr” in comparing how Callimachus and Cavafy treat memories of objects, poetic voices, and bodies. Stephanie Winder looked at the unreliable speaker in Callimachus and in Cavafy's “If Dead Indeed”—a poem that was also central to Mary Depew's paper on Cavafy's and Callimachus' aesthetics. The speakers revealed rich affinities between Cavafy and Callimachus, even though Cavafy never explicitly names that earlier poet.

In my talk I treated “Young Men of Sidon”—the topic of Lambropoulos' inaugural lecture (see p.4)—arguing that the famous epitaph celebrating Aeschylus only as a warrior at Marathon was based on an anti-democratic tradition, but came to be read as an expression of simple patriotism. In the world represented by Cavafy's poem, where it is performed along with other epigrams, its patriotism is just another aesthetic attitude. Patricia Rosenmeyer showed how Cavafy moved away from the ancient convention of the “locus amoenus” as the setting for love poetry. The poem “For the Shop,” (see p. 5), is typical of Cavafy in replacing real flowers with jewels. Kathryn Gutzwiler showed similarities in how Meleager and Cavafy imagine poetry as a medium for capturing transient beauty. The day as a whole was exemplary for showing how much such comparative study can enrich our reading, and we expect that the publication of the papers will attract readers from a variety of fields.