

«...what these Ithakas mean.»
Readings in Cavafy

«... ἡ Ἰθάκες τί σημαίνουν.»
Αναγνώσεις στον Καβάφη

Ἔπος Καρδίας

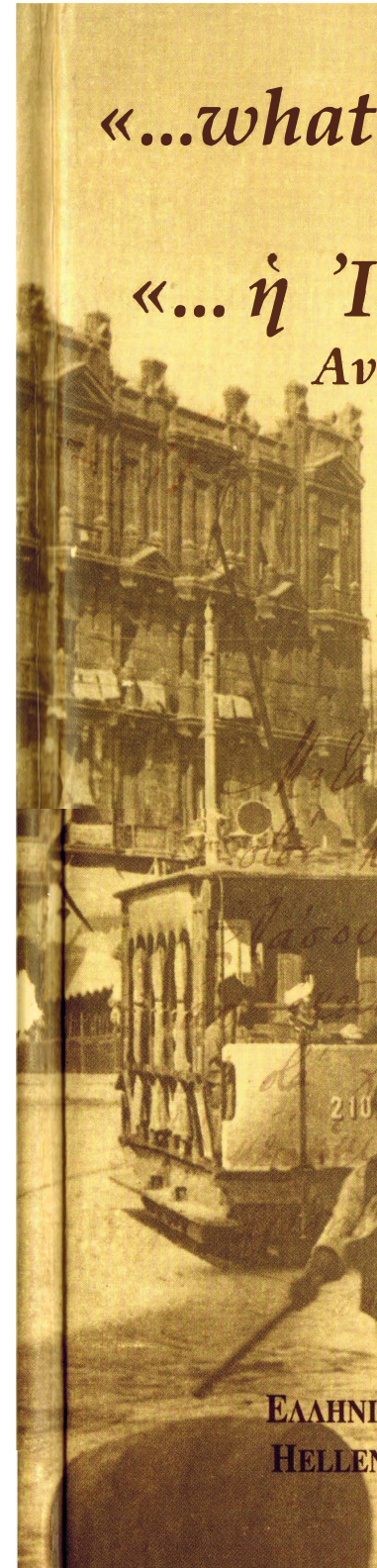
“Ὀρωιά

Μαλά σου το πάλι κρημνίσω αρσενικὸς με' μπε
στον καβουκὸν τὸν ἡλιῶν οὐκ ἔνι χαρὰν ἀνὰ
λαοῦ σου καὶ ἀκούω δὲν οἱ εἶσα βί
καὶ ἀνὰ κρημνίσω τὴν ἐρώσαν μου καρδιά
ἀν' ὄψεσ' ἐξ ὄψεσ' με' μὴ μὴν σου ἡλιῶ
ἀν' ὄψεσ' με' με' ἀνὰ γοντεῶ
καρδίας, φθαίρε νῆσοι
ἀνὰ τὸ ἔμπ
ἀνὰ



ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΟ ΛΟΓΟΤΕΧΝΙΚΟ ΚΑΙ ΙΣΤΟΡΙΚΟ ΑΡΧΕΙΟ
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Editors

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ΔΥΝΑΜΩΣΙΣ

Ὅποιος τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ ποθεῖ νὰ δυναμώσῃ
νὰ βγῆ ἀπ' τὸ σέβας κι' ἀπὸ τὴν ὑποταγή.
Ἄπὸ τοὺς νόμους μερικοὺς θὰ τοὺς φυλάξει,
ἀλλὰ τὸ περισσότερο θὰ παραβαίνει
καὶ νόμους κ' ἔθιμα κι' ἀπ' τὴν παραδεγμένη
καὶ τὴν ἀνεπαρκοῦσα εὐθύτητα θὰ βγῆ.
Ἄπὸ ταῖς ἡδοναῖς πολλὰ θὰ διδάχθῃ.
Τὴν καταστρεπτικὴν δὲν θὰ φοβάται πράξι·
τὸ σπίτι τὸ μισὸ πρέπει νὰ γκρεμισθῇ.
Ἔτσι θ' ἀναπτυχθῇ ἐνάρετα στὴν γνῶσι.

[1903]

GROWING IN SPIRIT

He who hopes to grow in spirit
will have to transcend obedience and respect.
He will hold to some laws
but he will mostly violate
both law and custom, and go beyond
the established, inadequate norm.
Sensual pleasures will have much to teach him.
He will not be afraid of the destructive act:
half the house will have to come down.
This way he will grow virtuously into wisdom.

Trans. Edmund Keeley and Philip Sherrard

ΟΧΙ ΓΙΑ ΔΗΜΟΣΙΕΥΣΙ.
ΑΛΛΑ ΜΠΟΡΕΙ ΝΑ ΜΕΝΕΙ
ΕΔΩ.

When we examine Cavafy's art and appeal, we should never overlook the fact that he writes in Greek—not ancient, medieval, or modern but plain Greek, the Greek of reflection and deliberation.

"Empowerment" is an eminent example of this language. Its ten lines incorporate an entire philosophical vocabulary: *dynamis, pneuma, pothos, parabasis, ethimon, paradeigma, euthyteta, hedone, didaskalia, phobia, katas-trophe, praxis, anaptyxis, arete, gnosis, etc.* This vocabulary draws on, and resonates with, the long history of Greek—the language of the Presocratics, the Epicureans, the Church Fathers, the Byzantine scholiasts, the Enlighteners, the Postmarxists. Despite the historical frequencies of its diction, the text does not advance an argument for continuity, linguistic or other. It constitutes a poetic meditation on the vernacular of philosophy.

Cavafy's Greek is not diachronic but precise or, to use his word, upright. It is able to name ideas and principles as they emerge in human consciousness and become issues for consideration. As such, it is a critical language: it assesses foundational claims. It is also able to recall and activate the history of those claims through various schools of thought, faith, and politics. In a sense, for those engaged in the Western tradition, this language needs no translation: its exact vocabulary operates on a shared level of abstraction. Cavafy can be always read in the original. In another sense, this language can sustain almost any translation: its exacting vocabulary in the end makes each new rendition its own.

For example, a contemporary rendition of "Empowerment" would produce a poem deal-

ing with knowledge, power, law, justice, subjection, transgression, paradigm, desire, and pleasure—a stunning array of notions and precepts debated in the postmodern world. And yet different renditions, equally faithful to the original, would produce a poem closer to Modernist, Victorian, classical, or other worldviews. This is not because the text is open to many interpretations but because it is composed in Greek—the philosophical idiom that, over the centuries, remains perfectly accessible and thus refuses to become a translation issue.

The twentieth century generated all kinds of extravagant, mystical claims regarding Greek by thinkers who approached it in original terms. Cavafy understands it very differently—as a capacity rather than a source. He illustrates his view in this poem on the violent power of virtuous knowledge. Greek, he proposes, is the capacity to think destructively and grow creatively. It is the admixture of goodness and excellence, merit and might, beauty and prowess found in *arete* and resulting in *dynamis*. In seeking the empowerment of *pneuma*, Cavafy restores the spirit to its Greek meaning: a cosmic wind breathing life.

Greek is a breeze of thought—the wind that blows philosophy into language.

EMPOWERMENT

*He who his [vital] spirit desires to
empower,
Must move beyond reverence and
subjection.
Some of the laws he will heed,
But mostly he will transgress*

*Laws and customs, and beyond the
paradigmatic
And inadequate uprightness he will move.
From pleasures, much he will be taught.
He will not fear the catastrophic praxis;
Half the house must be demolished.
Thus he will grow virtuously into
knowledge.*

VASSILIS LAMBROPOULOS holds the C. P. Cavafy Professorship in Classical Studies and Comparative Literature at the University of Michigan. His books are *Literature as National Institution* and *The Rise of Eurocentrism*. He has coedited *The Text and Its Margins: Post-Structuralist Approaches to Twentieth-Century Greek Literature*, *Twentieth-Century Literary Theory: An Introductory Anthology*, and a special issue of October, "The Humanities as Social Technology." He has also edited an issue of *South Atlantic Quarterly*, "Ethical Politics."