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C. P. CAVAFY: Poets' Poet - 1863-1933. 38

[Lecture on the centenary of his birth -
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LADIES & GENTLEMEN.

I think it only fair to say that in this essay, ^{today} ~~now~~ thirty years after ^{CAVAFY'S} ~~the poet's~~ death, there is nothing which has not already appeared in some form or other ~~in the~~ in the many sketches, critiques, reviews and biographical and literary studies of CAVAFY. There is, ~~in other words~~, ^{in other words} very little of independent research ~~except~~ ^{except} for a ~~couple of~~ ^{some a couple of} suggestions and views by persons who had known him and haven't as yet rushed to print, which helped to fill up some insignificant lacunae in my knowledge of the poet. Much, of course, ^{about CAVAFY} ~~remains~~ to be published. The post-Wolfenden climate of toleration which is spreading, (if that is the appropriate word for climate) may help ~~in that direction~~. We can only hope. The centenary celebrations by stimulating interest will undoubtedly ^{do so} help.

The difficulty, however, is to start. One has to, somehow. Usually this dilemma is resolved by a platitude or an assertion. But when the subject is a poet of concentrated intensity - a cool, immaterial intensity which we still ^{feel it} ~~feel~~ to be growing in power ~~thirty years after the subject's death~~ - and a man

darting from ^{"one dark corner to another"} ~~shadow to shadow~~, the matter is not so easy. In the first place the effervescent artist has not yet settled into a definite pattern to be examined as an 'empirical fact' and in the second, the man persists in remaining ^{protected by darkness} shadowy - only one part of his world has been thoroughly unveiled, the most unattractive.

Also there is nothing about him, word or deed, upon which one can ^{fasten} focus and ^{in order to} gradually explore and record. Rainer Maria Rilke may state, as ^{that} he does: 'I am my own legislator and King; none is above me, not even god'. Kazantzakis may dramatise his passage through life as "a bloodstained line from cradle to grave" and proclaim himself 'free' because he fears nothing, expects nothing, believes in nothing. By the same token St. Anthony may feel himself supreme because he does not succumb ^{to women} and Francis of Assisi that he is above discomfort, illness or hunger. ^{because he fears God, expects salvation, believes in truth.} But at the other end of the scale ^{we hear the} fixed soul of Baudelaire crying out 'Anywhere out of the world'.

Meaningless or theatrical, these postures and utterances ^{however} have ^{we dismiss} the quality of drama. They attract ^{our} attention even while ^{we dismiss} their absurdity and theatricality, are being dismissed. They manage to ^{establish} create their own precarious foothold in history and enable even the onlooker to make that his point of departure is investigating them. Immoderate and outlandish behaviour is a kind of gimmick. It helps. So does advertising. And poets, prophets, heresiarchs... and raving lunatics are usually their own best public relations officers. They project ^{themselves} their visage upon the screen of popular imagination and stake their claim to the consideration of the future. But, CAVAFY, however, was

incapable of histrionics. Anything in the form of the big lie, the big catching lie, about himself would have been rejected by his fastidious mind as barbaric. Or if not barbaric as smattering too much of barnar behaviourism where the most vocal is usually the most noticeable. One can almost ^{with his customary cogency} hear him say: "Such things ^{is usually} don't ^{with his customary affection} appeal to me. They are cheap. For ^{the others,} ~~them~~ yes. Not for me"

He gives ~~us a glimpse of~~ THE BEST YOU CAN.

And if you cannot fashion your life

The way you like it at least

Try and do the best you can.

Do not cheapen it

By too much contact with the crowds

By too much to-ing and fo-ing and chatter.

Do not cheapen it

By dragging it constantly around

Parading and exposing it

To the daily, idiotic routine

Of handshakes and halloes

Till it becomes something strange and alien

To you, something of a burden.

But if he did not boast or indulge in ^{impressive} titanic ~~with~~ ^{scandals} ~~it~~ it does not mean that, as a poet, he thought any less of his ^{of his} ~~poet~~ ^{poet}. He could not, true, shout like Rilke, Kazantzaki, or Baudelaire ^{bear his soul like} ~~bearing his soul~~, he considered even Aeschylean Prometheus firesome and ... so virtuous (!) but, for himself he

could accept no peer. At least slavishly he imitated none. He believed in the daemionical power of his intellect. It had the ability, even early on ^{in life,} to tear through whatever were the layers of illusions to the bare bone of substance or to the hardest core of illusion. His achievement as an artist lay chiefly in the fact that he disciplined the frenzy of his mind and confined it into an art form as severe and complete as a chiselled, glittering marble tomb — at least at first acquaintance! Because after the first, there is invariably the second more intimate and more correct acquaintance.

"I never work from immediate or fresh impressions" he was fond of saying. "With me the impression, the experience must get old become something else, ^{become in some way} ~~something new~~ false, by itself without my ~~helping~~ ^{partly helping} it to become false" (1)

At the age of fifty he could ^{distill} ~~describe~~ a fresher and ~~fresher~~ reminiscence of his ^{the reverse passions of his youth} ~~juvenile perversity~~ which was ⁱⁿ youth, ^{soul} ~~so~~ ^{scaring}:

I never held back, never restrained myself.

I let go completely and went;

I went into the dazzling night,

And to enjoyment half real, half imagined
which obsessed my mind

Abandoned myself.

And I drank of the strongest wines
As only

The valiant of pleasure drink. (I WENT)

This is ^{a sample} ~~one~~ aspect of his art, ~~out of the many~~ ^{it has} ~~it~~ ^{over} ~~structures~~

idiosyncrasy

embodies ^{thing about it,} - a significant one. ~~Another~~ ^{equally significant,} in ^{the} viewpoint.

E. M. Forster in a delightful passage on CAVAFY in his book PHAROS and PHARILION published for the first time in 1923, describes him as a "Greek gentleman in a straw hat, standing absolutely motionless at a slight angle ~~to~~ the universe." This is an immortal phrase often quoted and ~~it is~~ ^{it in both} Forster and CAVAFY, and ~~both~~ ^{observer and observed rolled into one.} rolled into one observer and observed. It may be that E. M. Forster

simply described the way CAVAFY entered his field of vision. He always carried ~~and~~ walking stick - an expensive one! - and when still he had the habit of bending his knees forward arching his back and throwing his head backwards with the stick ~~as~~ the hind leg of the tripod. He ^{thus} ~~did stand~~ at an angle ^{to the Cartesian plane!}. ~~But the expression~~ ^{I believe Forster's}

^{reality} goes deeper. ^{CAVAFY} He ~~always~~, or more or less always, looked at things from a slightly different angle. ~~from the rest of us mortal.~~ This is not like saying that his view was jaunched or that he had a pet, ^{philosophical} ~~way~~ ^{way} of looking at things ~~... seeing them either up-side down or~~ ~~sidon-side up.~~ But like the animals who are ~~usually~~ more sure-footed ^{at night in comparison with us,} because they keep their eyes on the horizon ~~though~~ directly in front of them ~~as is~~ ^{as we do} the case with us, perhaps his angle of observation enabled him to see things a bit more clearly. In any case he saw in a unique way; neither through the prism of prejudice nor through the distorting mirrors of specialized theories, or ^{'regulated'} world-outlook.

His ^{oblique} glance fell on Demetrius. Not the christian saint but the most famous ~~post-Alexander~~ ^{Alexander's} Greek ^{warrior} ~~general~~ ^{from amongst} of the early third century. He was nicknamed the Poliorcetes

because he was adept at conquering cities. (He proved to be a great commander both by land and ~~on~~ the sea, he built massive warships, invented the first machine-guns shooting up to two hundred arrows simultaneously propelled by the contracting of robes made from women's hair); He was intrepid, handsome, generous and a great lover. Plutarch, with his precisely scholastic and unloving mind says that Demetrius justified the words of Plato "that great natures produce great vices as well as virtues". Describes ^{him} as "sumptuous in his way of living, overbearing in his manner". This ~~is~~ as it may. But what of CATAFY?

Does he take any one facet of the man to uphold, denigrate, moralise? ^{No!} He takes only one moment: the supreme. The moment when a man faces an ultimate decision and the way he reacts to it. And says:

When the Macedonians abandoned him,
 And showed their preference for Pyrrhus
 King Demetrius (magnanimous Demetrius)

Did not behave
 (So the saying goes)
 like a king at all.

He went off, discarded his robes of gold

And ^{threw away} ~~cast off~~ his purple royal dress.

Then ^{speedily} he dressed himself ^{in simple} hurriedly
 in ^{poor} simple clothes and ^{stole} got away quickly.

He behaved like the actors do;

When the show is over
 Change clothes and depart.

All of a sudden new light has ^{is} been shed on Demetrium. The ~~is sharply deluged, he becomes~~ conqueror ~~becomes~~ ^{conqueror} ~~frail~~ - he becomes a man. He is not made of ~~flamboyant, stager, but a man~~ the stuff of the bull-dozers of history ^{who are made of} who plough their way ~~end and remain~~ ^{to the end} ~~either~~ ^{either} ~~bulbozen, destructive,~~ ^{either} ~~smoothers of the way or~~ ^{efficient or} ~~just~~ ^{efficient or} ~~renders and invisible~~ forces. He engages our sympathy. We see him without awe, take his measure, and at the same time we see power for whom it is! ^{flamboyant, burlesque, but essentially stayer. take the away...} "The macedonians abandoned him..."

"Hitler or Stalin abandoned"... what then? We can speculate and maybe we can learn. So we take our own measure ^{too} CAVAFY helps. And I must add this now in case it is omitted later on: - An acceptable humanism, ^{but very rarely} ~~sometimes~~ ~~tinged~~ ~~with~~ ~~biblos~~ - but ~~very rarely~~ breathes through his work. We feel better knowing him.

Perhaps these two poems, the one ^{esoteric or} KAVAFIC the other Historical-Epigrammatic, in neither case is the description accurate - can be made the two poles between which his thoughts and moods oscillate. If so then we find an ^{approaching the way, understanding} indirect way of ~~getting~~ ^{the} ~~him~~ ^{man} and feel for his poetry. Basically CAVAFY was a ^{man of the world} ~~recluse~~ who led a 'closed' public life; a sort of mawkish boulevardier. He lived for practically all his life in Alexandria but inhabited ^{historical world} ~~an considerable segment of the historical world~~ ^{the pagan world of the Hellenistic Kingdom.} He was of his time and out it. What was immediately before him he saw through a window-pane. What was remote and buried, he saw with all its ^{and largely chaotic -} ~~what~~ ^{what} ~~receded~~ ^{receded} assumed individuality and content. His contemporary moods were vague but his founts realistic. And he wrote in an idiom, in a rhythm and

I believe his perhaps, his

a style all his own. His self was his supreme and, only referant. Society existed in so far as its conditions weighed upon him and its caprices wounded him. He had very little of what was original to say but he had an impercably original way of saying it. That, and a ^{self-control} ~~coolness~~ ^{which we feel it to be} ~~it to be~~ ^{settling into} ~~settling into~~ ^{because of, or, apparently, because of} ~~because of~~ ^{apparently} ~~apparently~~ ⁱⁿ ~~in his deep understanding~~

^{with strong passions} underneath even when, ^{perhaps I should say that in approaching, we find that} ~~his~~ ^{invariably commonplace} ~~subject matter~~ ^{is limited} ~~his~~ ^{and its poetry} ~~his~~ ^{language,} ~~his~~ ^{one can say,} ~~his~~ ^{pie-bald,} ~~his~~ ^{his} ~~his~~ ^{monotonously pedestrian.} ~~There are one's first reactions.~~ ~~They have been mine.~~ ~~what is it then that made this man~~ ~~shoot to the forefront of European poets thirty years after his~~ ~~death?~~ ~~if any one were to make a list of ten of the most pro-~~ ~~minent European poets of our century, even of half a dozen,~~ ~~Cavafy's~~ ^{name} ~~will be among them.~~ ~~Like Rilke, Mayakofsky and T.S. Elliot, Cavafy~~ ^{discovered} ~~opened~~ ^{new poetic vistas.} ~~That and something more...~~

W.H. Auden is on record, acknowledging the influence of ~~of~~ ~~Cavafy~~ on his own writing. The spirit of Cavafy permeates ~~or~~ ~~more~~ ~~accurately~~ ~~envelops~~ ~~like~~ ~~filmy~~ ~~climate~~ ~~the~~ ~~whole~~ ~~of~~ ~~Durrell's~~ ~~poetically~~ ~~beautiful~~ ~~Alexandrian~~ ~~quartet.~~ ~~Seferis~~ ^{praises} ~~praises~~ ~~him~~ ~~as~~ ~~the~~ ~~creator~~ ~~of~~ ~~a~~ ~~new~~ ~~poetic~~ ~~world~~ ~~and~~ ~~compares~~ ~~him~~ ~~here~~ ~~with~~ ~~the~~ ~~author~~ ~~of~~ ~~The~~ ~~Waste~~ ~~Land~~ ~~—~~ ~~It~~ ~~is~~ ~~a~~ ~~world~~ ~~which~~ ~~accordingly~~ ~~mirrors~~ ~~the~~ ~~ennui,~~ ~~hedonism~~ ~~and~~ ~~sophistication~~ ~~of~~ ~~modern~~ ~~man's~~ ~~re-~~ ~~discovery~~ ~~of~~ ~~mortality.~~ ~~His~~ ~~influence~~ ~~on~~ ~~contemporary~~ ~~thought~~ ~~has~~ ~~been~~ ~~enormous~~ ~~and~~ ~~is~~ ~~growing.~~

if what ~~were~~ ^{were} said earlier about his language, etc.

rhythm ~~his~~ inspiration and subject matter ~~were~~ true even to a ^{certain extent} degree, ~~the~~ question still remains. How ~~did he achieve~~ ^{are we to account for} ~~prominence~~ ^{the prominence} and ~~why~~ he has achieved?

"The world doesn't fear a new idea" says D.H. Lawrence. "It can pigeon-hole any idea. But it can't pigeon-hole a real new experience." The emphasis is on the real. And any one going to CAVAFY for the first time meets with a real new experience. He may not like it but ^{he} cannot ignore it for it is an EXPERIENCE.

How well do I remember the passionate arguments I had about CAVAFY with some of my contemporaries thirty years ago, at the time of ^{CAVAFY'S} death. There were some among them ^{some} who were his devotees. I was not one of them. CAVAFY didn't and couldn't speak to me. I liked more stirring ^{poetry} things, ~~what~~ ^{something that partook} of the elemental, ~~and~~ ^{which} spoke directly to me and produced that undefinable ^{emotion} ~~captured~~ which we call transport, whether ^{it was the poetry of} Solomos, Palamas, Sikelianos, the overwhelming verse of Shakespeare, the luminous ^{thought} flight of Shelley, the intoxication of Byron or the ^{movingly eloquent} ~~eloquent~~ ^{scaring} cries of Wilfred Owen rising from the bloody mud of Flanders ^{and} like apparitions pointing an accusing finger at killer-man — at us. I still love this poetry perhaps more now. But CAVAFY ^{appeared} ~~was~~ ^{by contrast}, prosaic, fastidious, withdrawn, ^{constricted and whatever} ~~comparatively~~ ~~to~~ ~~turn~~ universal meaning he could attain it was circumscribed by the unprepossessing ^{predominantly} ~~quality~~ ^{individual} quality of his verse and the ~~poetry~~ reality of his vision. I thought him affected, precious and a bit of an intellectual mountebank. I thought him, at best, a clever, Verre writer of epitaphs ~~and~~ or something similar ^{like inscriptions} ~~and even~~

or ~~semi poetic~~ little ^{poetic} homilies. I even questioned the fact of his being a poet at all. Such, of course, are the clear but often erroneous reactions of youth. But in order to have definite, ~~comprehensive~~ reactions ^{there must be something} you must have definite and unshuffled to react against. CAVAFY was there, sitting in his own little, closed world singing his personal themes in unmistakably ^{individual} ~~personal~~ tone and in his own ^{pleasant} voice. He could not ~~be~~ ^{be} ~~ignored~~ ^{ignored} ~~beautifully~~ ^{be} ~~even~~ ^{be} ~~speech~~ ^{ignored}.

Rejection was easy. But somehow the experience of his poetry was ~~irradicable~~ ^{could not} ~~It was an attraction~~ ^{something deep} could not be ignored. I returned to it years later. The changes I found in ~~himself~~ ^{me} were enormous. I returned to him again and again and the more I read him the more I found to read, and ~~use and ponder about~~ ^{and} ~~to~~ ^{to} enjoy and understand. Greek poetry ^{was} to me up to that point ^{was represented by} a colourful, mobile ^{phantasmagoria -} ~~something~~ - a ship in full sail on dark blue waters, an eagle wheeling in the sky caught ^{by} the last rays of the sun, a ~~coloured~~ ^{silver} balloon adrift, ~~all~~ ^{all} impressive and ~~remote~~ ^{rather}. Cavafy's poetry struck me ^{suddenly} ~~as~~ ^{as} something different: a mirror or rather a hall of mirrors where ^{one} we can see ^{himself} ourselves and what happens ^{to} be around ^{him} people or objects, in an endless series of reflections ^{vanishing into} ~~flowing into~~ a tremulous infinity - ^{himself} ourselves, but not quite ^{himself} ourselves, as there are ^{reflections} so many of them each ^{one} a bit different from the other.

With his new awareness CAVAFY'S poetry and art took ^{on} ^{as} ~~for~~ ~~me~~ ~~concerned~~ a new form and a new ^{significance} meaning. His austere style became ^{the} disciplined ^{art} work of a master craftsman who learned ~~it~~ ~~straight~~ ~~from~~ ~~Plato~~; his ^{plain} ~~pre~~ bold language the almost tortured search for the right word irrespective ^{of whether it was} ~~into what~~ ~~classified~~ ~~tier~~ of the ^{purist, domestic}, classicist or medieval,

(~~two~~ ^{two} ~~speaks~~ as many of you may know have several forms of language)

in order to express precisely what ~~the~~ ^{he} poet wanted, no more and no less; his style becomes ~~new~~ - what was thought graceless ^{was} only its overtrained, ~~over-mannered~~ ^{the} vigour and its inspiration drawn straight from the vitals of man and his history even if they are both highly selective aspects of the functions of the vitals. But ~~principally~~ ^{And} the cold exterior which was formerly so forbidding, and one must add arrogant dissolved into a warmth of beauty and humanity extending in endless vistas of perceptibly varying nuance and glitteringly rippling alternations of light and shade ^{in all directions}.

~~Then~~ ^{And} ~~the~~ man ^{then} emerges through his poetry not as the particularly complex and enigmatic personality he was thought to be, but in his individual reality fully developed - he emerges clearly, ^{and clearly} fully matured, permanent and ~~as sharp~~ ^{drawn like} drawn on a ^{pen and ink} portrait. Everything ^{about him} falls into place. We see ~~the artist~~ ^{recognise} ~~who~~ ^{the poet} ~~turns out~~ ^{writes} ~~exquisite~~ ^{who composes} sonnets, the man feeling for man, the thinker who not too well knows the condition of man and ponders not to illustrate. We catch his distinctly original tone of voice and in the perfect balance of his personal vision and imagery and their fusion with the precise word, the extent of the ^{new} poetic dimension.

Unfortunately it is impossible to ~~give~~ ^{transpose fully his} ~~the~~ ^{rich} imagery, and ^{give} the metaphors which in his work or to reproduce the effects of his style and word which in Greek are as studiously coloured and felicitously arranged as in a mosaic. A true artist, he knew the true value of his artistic medium. Poetry must not be trifled with if it is to remain, at its best, the queen of arts. Shown once a bulky tome by his contemporary Palamas ^{he} commented: "If one ^{mix up a lot of his verses and then} were to draw ~~accidentally~~ ^{few} a few of his verses out of a bag ^{so to speak} and read ~~them~~ ^{them}"

them out ~~troubled~~ he recognise them as his... So much work. such
 bulk!" ^{Perhaps he was right.} His view is expressed in the poem THE FIRST RUNG.
 of poetry

The young poet Eumenes to Theocritus
 Unburdened himself one day.

'For two long years I ceaselessly write
 And have completed but one single idyll.

It is my only finished work.

Alas, ~~it is tall, very tall,~~ I see it now how very tall
 Is poetry's ladder.

And from the first rung where now I stand
 poor me, I ~~shall~~ ^{shall} reach no higher."

Answered Theocritus:

"Your words are out of tune,
 Utter blasphemies.

If, as you say, you are on the first rung already
 You should feel proud and be content.

To rise thus high is not a little thing,
 So much achieved is indeed true glory.

Even this first rung is a long way up

~~A long way up from the common world.~~
 only when you become a citizen of rightfully the city of ideas
 To reach it you must ~~succeed~~ ~~become~~
 in your own right, and only then
 A citizen of the city of ideas.
 To enter that city is ~~difficult~~, ^{indeed} indeed

Enfranchisement exceptionally rare.

In her market square
~~The legislators~~ you find in its ~~board~~ market square

You find legislators

Whom no adventurer can delude.

To rise thus high is not a little thing
So much achieved is indeed true glory."

Even the underlying arrogance of the poem is not embarrassing and we forgive ~~even the~~ ^{also the} implied discrimination against the non-poets! After all it is not CAVAFY who is saying it... But Theokritus for CAVAFY. His method, however, even by this one example becomes clear. He is non-didactic. He doesn't eulogise. He is a pragmatist philosopher recording poetically a transient mood. He records it so accurately, so laconically that it becomes permanent. By stripping the whole dialogue of all the contingent or accidental details ^{which usually encumber life,} he shuts out reality and raises ~~the~~ ^{it} ~~the~~ ^{to} the dignity of ~~the~~ Platonic Idea. It is precisely this capacity of CAVAFY to project his own sensibility indirectly ~~and~~ through another character and give ~~to~~ it thus extraneous substance that brought him ^{primarily} to the notice of the poets and established ^{him} in the poetic conscience as the "poet's poet". It was through them and not, as it usually happens despite them, that he achieved the measure of international popularity he has achieved.

x x x

THE MAN

"He is old now, bent and spent,
Ravaged by time and excess.

These are the opening lines of his poem Very SELDOM. ^{It} ^{portrays} an old man preoccupied ^{with} his miserable state but ^{also} still ^{thinking} musing about the role he plays in the life of youth. He

is old but:-

" Those now young murmur his own verses.
 Before their sparkling eyes his own visions flicker.
 Their healthy, voluptuous minds
 Their shapely, well-knit ^{boon's} ~~boon's~~ flesh
 Are moved and stirred
 By his own view of beauty."

He wrote this when he was forty-eight. About some ^{one else} ~~body~~ but, as ~~regard~~ ^{regard} ~~himself~~, about himself. He was inaccurate both about the description of the old man and the inebriating effect of his poetry. A narcissist would only extol ~~he~~ ^{of} ~~looked~~ ~~ahead~~ here, but only of the mind. At that age he was still well preserved, ^{he} was slim and looked about ten years younger - excess hasn't begun to tell yet - and his poetry was almost completely unknown. But ^{confident of his work} ~~he~~ was staking his claim for a place in the continuing parade of youths. He loved youths and loved ^{the passion of} ~~life~~ with an intensity that only those ^{who} ~~have~~ not tasted it fully ⁴ ~~appear~~ ^{to} manage.

I do not propose to tell the story of his life. But something has to be said even if only to allow for a greater understanding of the man and for complete participation in his poetry. When we meet him as a young man cutting ~~quite~~ a neat ~~depp~~ figure in the cosmopolitan society of Alexandria a few years after the British occupation, he ~~is~~ ~~looks~~ ^{handsome} distinguished and appears promising. The future of Egypt and of himself is ~~surely~~ in making a go of things, appeared ~~quite~~ settled. But...

there is the wordiness of a "but" in both cases. His ^{air} ~~was~~ was aristocratic, his movements deliberate, ~~but~~ rather ^{constrained} ~~frigid~~, his conversation smooth and knowledgeable. He could use at least four languages fluently and his brain was well-stocked with ^{literature?} ~~historical~~ knowledge and the current trivia which serve so admirably at social functions. He was darkish with ^{longish hair, and} a fine head of hair with a wave in it. His nose ^{was} rather ~~long~~, his chin rather pointed and his mouth full and well-shaped. But the most striking feature were his eyes - large, mobile of magnificently brown colour, gazing upon the world with a mixture of wonder and calculation as if ^{if always} ~~always~~ ^{zealously} ~~zealously~~ to give a rational universe the lie ^{but only} when his interest was aroused otherwise, withdrawn behind his pince-nez glasses, disturbed, fugitive. ~~hardly~~ At the same time they covered up something and protected him from something. In old age this protectiveness and secretiveness of his eyes lent him a forbidding ^{sort} expression. Vulnerable in everything he ^{turned} made his eyes and the pursing of the lips, into a shield.

^{He} CAHAFF was born in Alexandria on April 17 1863. His father ^{born in Constantinople} settled in Egypt in 1850 and ^{built up} developed an important mercantile concern dealing in cotton, grain, and skins. This was part of a wider ^{export} financial business originally with its seat in Constantinople but later transferred to Egypt with branches in London, Manchester and Liverpool under the name of CAHAFF & Sons. The family was wealthy and important. It had no sensational pedigree although it had produced two or three bishops - but ⁱⁿ the orthodox as in the Catholic Church Bishops represent the dead end of a line, ^{because} ~~or~~ they must remain celibate and of necessity issueless - and at

least one Governor of ~~his~~ ^{city of} Rumianom (province) ^{of Jassy} (then under the Turks). CAVAFY's father did well for himself and ~~he~~ was ~~also~~ decorated by the late Khedive Ismail for his services in developing the export trade of his adopted country. But he lived in style - a merchant mogul always in the heart of affaires with an impressive establishment servants, carriages and what not, with nurses and governesses for ~~his~~ ^{the} sons which his devoted, aristocratic, prolific Constantinopolitan wife was producing regularly every two years. (none ^{made in all} ~~in all~~ of which one a girl, who died ^{within a day} in infancy). But when he died ~~on the poet~~ ^{he left} "very little" as the poet recorded later in his "Genealogy". He mentions ~~that~~ fact with regret. It is an implied criticism of his father. Naturally one cannot choose one's parents but neither ~~does~~ ^{have} one choose one's offspring. [Perhaps the poet's criticism might ~~have~~ ^{been} reciprocated by ~~the~~ father... if he only ~~had~~ ^{knew!} ~~known~~!]

The father died when young Constantine CAVAFY was eight years old. In the ~~the~~ ^{Two} following ^{later} years his mother left Egypt with ~~her~~ ^{her} seven sons and settled in England. At first, they ^{for nearly 1 1/2 years} stayed in London at no 15, Queanborough Terrace W.2. and then moved to Liverpool to a house in Balmoral Road. The business was flourishing but in 1877, ~~for~~ no reason that one can find readily explicable, the firm of CAVAFY & Sons was dissolved and two years later the mother with six of her sons returned to Egypt. ☹

C.P. CAVAFY spent the years from 9 to 16 in England. At home he was speaking English and French with his governesses and tutors, Greek with his mother and Italian (occasionally) with

his neighbour. In England he felt instantly at home - England has this unique and inexplicable fascination ^{for} new-comers - more so as he felt at home in English. Here he had his first formal schooling. He didn't particularly like school. He was one of many and the "many" for some reason he could not understand, were objectionable and intrusive. Having ^{had} private tuition, ^{where} ^{was} himself ^{was} the central and indispensable figure of all learning activity, naturally, and to say the word deliberately, he resented this new "dispensation of things" and tried to find compensation in precosity. He constantly demanded of his teachers more Greek and Latin. He wanted to learn history literature ~~he~~ ^{to} show ^{that} he was above the other children. It was a formative period and for himself decisive. He was no longer closeted ^{with} and fussed ^{over} by his mother (he was her younger child). School had demands on his time and so did ~~some~~ friends though he was not gregarious. ^{Thus} He was suddenly ^{pushed} on to the world and tried to find his balance. And as one of his biographers penetratingly remarks: "He spoke English like an English boy and that flattered his intelligence. He avoided contact with the many and that satisfied his egoism. He cultivated an outlook which prepared him to think of himself as an English aristocrat: i.e. ^{a man of leisure} ~~unemployed~~ but ~~with private means~~ ^{never short of money.} and silent ~~man~~ ^{cultivated but} ~~person~~ ^{but} without degrees or diplomas; ^{or} ~~the~~ withdrawn and silent ^{in his head!} ~~that~~ ^{became his ideal.} with a storehouse of wisdom."

By the time he returned to Egypt an Anglo-Greek boy of sixteen and a half, years old he was fashioned. The above observations were to apply to him more or less for the rest of his life. He was never rich from now on but never gave the impression,

of not being so. His well-bred manners remained impeccably patrician. He became a man of the widest culture ~~and~~ he could express ^{it} in several languages but never succeeded in having letters after his name. Eventually, of course, an imperishable word ~~was~~ was added: Poet.

While ~~he was~~ in Liverpool he noticed ~~something~~ the love and protectiveness of a ~~strong~~ vigorous boy for a younger ^{boy} boy. He was not now so close to his mother and tenderness was more reserved. Did he pine for a transference of emotions... He didn't know. He recorded it.

Back in Egypt he ~~was~~ enrolled in the "Hermes Lyceum" to study commerce but instead devoted most of his time to the classics. ~~But~~ Before he finished his studies the Egyptian anti-foreign but liberatory movement ^{which was} ~~connected~~ remained known ^{in history} as the Arabi Pasha rebellion - the first of a series of Egyptian nationalist uprisings - broke out. The CAVAFY family, like thousands of other Europeans, fled. This time they went to Constantinople to Mrs CAVAFY's father one of the pillars of the Greek community there. And while the Egyptian drama with its rebellion, religious fanaticism and excess was answered by the British cannonade and British take-over which became involuntarily the instrument of hammering a nation out of a geographical unit, C.P. CAVAFY was exploring Constantinople learning about his family, about this legendary imperial city about the Greek language, the great works of the ~~New~~ ^{new} Greece from Digenis Akritas to Kouranos' Erotokritos and down to his time, feeling the beat of history still marching on the shores of the Bosphorus as it marched ~~about~~ ~~unremit~~

unceasingly ~~tragedy~~ during the previous sixteen centuries. With his ^{perception} ~~sense~~ ^{of} the essential and the durable he saw ~~behind the trappings~~ ^{the crude Ottoman} power ~~melt away into the void~~ ^{for what it was} and ~~the significance~~ ^{the real} ~~resting on that~~ ^{of Constantinople} obscure ~~but communicable~~ ^{something more important} region ~~we call~~ ^{as} culture. It was the culture which grew up and matured after Alexander's ^{world} ~~take up~~ and went ~~on~~ ^{embellishing} ~~changing~~ ^{transforming} itself ~~embellishing~~ ~~itself~~ and standing for a thousand years the guardian of thought and of human values ~~fell~~ ^{up to} the Turkish conquest, when the Renaissance took over: - ~~It was~~ ^{the Hellenistic-Byzantine} ~~civilisation~~ ^{civilisation} ~~the~~ ^{It} ~~was still intact~~ ^{It} ~~culture which~~ held together and animated the many hundreds of thousands of Greeks who constituted the bulk of the population ^{of Constantinople at the time} with the Phanari and the Orthodox Patriarchate at the centre. Up to then Caraphy was a man without a country. Now he found one - ~~not~~ ^{not} a physical but a spiritual one - the Greek world or that part of it, which stretched from the first Ptolemies of Egypt and the Seleukids down to the crusades. He was to remain loyal to it.

To his British-trained mind ~~with~~ its ingrained love of poetry and literature ~~now~~ ^{now} ~~was~~ ^{added} ~~another~~ ^{a new} discipline - history - and another love - humanity. This was deepened by his own personal tragedy or what he chose to make ~~a tragedy~~ ^{a tragedy} ~~out of~~ ^{of} ~~a weakness~~ or according to other ^{of his} ~~a vice~~ - homosexuality. This tendency was there for years. He realised it ~~for some time~~ ^{at 20} ~~now~~ and fought against it. Now ~~he gave in to it~~ ^{he gave in to it} - to the act of fellatio and passive, ~~but~~ ⁱⁿ his case ardent, ~~homosexual~~ ^{homosexual} intercourse. He 'abandoned' himself completely to this passion. His family returned to Alexandria, his brothers first, then his mother. But he

stayed in his grandfather's home studying during the day and out into the ^{disreputable} district at night. It was not difficult to find what he was after. The East senses these ^{conditions} ~~situations~~ ^{quizzingly} and reacts to them ^{instantaneously} one way or another. Besides he was beautiful and ^{there was} a feminine delicacy about him. He ran risks and eventually discovered that what he thought ^a secret between himself and whoever happened to be the participant was becoming known. He was being "categorised" and pointed out in the streets.

He returned to Alexandria ^{or man now} ~~loaded with~~ ^{loaded with} his brief case ^{full of} manuscripts, among which there were verses, comment, translation etc. and himself ~~loaded with~~ remorse. For a while the change did him good. But soon he was back at his nocturnal wanderings in the maledorom quarters of the city. It is his tragic odyssey. He dared not acknowledge ^{it}, ~~but~~ ^{for} ~~it~~ weakness, it carried a stigma and tried hard, desperately hard to overcome it. He kept making resolutions; he wrote down meticulously his thoughts and his resolutions. He must control himself. He must stop! ^{we hear him telling himself} He succeeds. For a while he feels free, alive and a new man. But then comes the word: "~~have~~ Succumbed." It has a ring of finality about it. We feel the atmosphere becoming heavy. But the resolution recurs. Will power asserts itself again and again. It lasts days, weeks sometimes months but ^{at the end of each cycle} there is that fatal, mocking word "Succumbed!" ^{followed by our ~~blatant~~} ~~written down~~ with a weary acceptance of the inevitable. He did not try to justify it like Andre' Gide and definitely he did not consider it a social asset - it was, definitely not so in his

day. Since he wanted to be otherwise and tried hard, even to the point of having tutorials - so I understand - at the hands of an accomplished Italian "Lady" but ^{was} physiologically and psychologically ~~was~~ incapable of ~~attaining~~ he accepted it as part of his life. ~~Curious~~ with his passion ~~cured~~, "at least subdued, by age, he could recollect its essence and distill it ^{into} ~~into~~ poetry. Gone were the indignities, the extortions, the blackmails and ~~the~~ occasional brutalities which savaged his soul; only the evocation of fulfilled ^{pleasure} ~~desires~~ remained.

Return often, beloved sensation

Return and take me with you -

When the body's memory wakes again
And the old desire fires anew the blood;

When lips and skin remember

And hands feel as if they touch again.

Return often and take me at night

When lips and skin remember

In tranquility he recollects far off days. They ^{are} ~~are~~ so far off, they are hardly remembered. The title FAR BACK.

I should like to relate this memory

But it has faded now . . .

Hardly a print of it remains -

It lies far back in time

In the stream of ~~my~~ youth's first world.

The skin? . . . ~~As if of~~
~~It was like~~ jasmine-petals . . .
It was like

That August evening, - was it really August? -
When...

I dimly recollect the eyes ... those eyes
They were, I think, blue
Ah yes, blue; a deep sapphire blue.

Even in a far from perfect translation one can sense ^{the} ~~his~~ ~~her~~
intensity of feelings; the tremulous sensuality of his recollections
as they emerge from the crucible of memory. One has to go
a long way ^{to find} a similar quality of verse ... perhaps back to
Sappho, SAPPHO OF LESBOS. Both ^{in relation to most of the rest of us,} establish themselves in a different
kind of truth ^{which despite all its contradictions,} ~~to most of the rest of us~~ which is no less real ^{or}
it is artistically so ^{satisfying.} ~~transparent.~~

The more he was ^{guided} ~~driven~~ by passion to roam and search
at night and crying like Iphigeneia of Aeschylus -

Again the fevered spasm hath seized me
And the stroke of madness smite!

Again that fiery sting torments me.

The more he tried to excuse it, to justify it, ^{at} ~~even~~ least to himself.
He sought for precedent. Combed through Greek literature. What
were Orestes and Pylades, ^{the avengers} Achilles and Patroclus, ^{the warriors} Harmodios
and Aristogeiton the tyrannicides, ^{the artists} Phidias and Agorakritos, and so many others, if not lovers?
But were they? In further reading and research he found that this
could not be so. It was, ^{a convenient} ~~entirely~~ an assumption, nothing more. If it
was so why should Pericles have stopped the public cries
from broadcasting around that young Alcibiades had fled
^{with} ~~in~~ order a friend in order not to brand the boy a catamite?
And why should Aristophanes decry the practitioners of

this kind of love. And why the terms depicable, depraved and unspeakably shameful - should be applied to them: There was no solace there. The illusion, shared by many, that the classical Greek world was "based on its acceptance of homosexuality" as a ^{London} magazine editor stated some time ago, is not supported by any evidence. Pederasty and perversity, there were, as there are everywhere ~~and~~ at every time. They were not persecuted if based on consent but neither were they upheld let alone extolled or encouraged. To read in every recorded instance of ^{male} friendship homosexual relation is, of course, wrong. How can one have true friendship except with one's own sex. A heterosexual lover will find friendship with the opposite sex ~~always~~ disturbed and thrown off balance by ^{the} sex itself, always intruding, always there waiting, nervous expectant. Friendship in that case means union. Not so in the first case. So ~~we~~ ^{one} can say ^{that} ~~without~~ male friendship as ~~is~~ recorded in classical literature though it did not ^{it} ~~always~~ ^{necessarily} exclude ^{sexual} relationships in no way did it ~~always~~ ^{also} ~~imply~~ ^{imply} it.

CAVAFY realised that and his apologia was never written. He sought once again to escape from this condition by coming to Europe - Paris, London. He was thirty-five. Travel ^{and new interests, mostly cultural,} helped him to get control of himself. But not for long. He was soon back in Alexandria, ^{back} ~~to~~ his old haunts. He could not break his fatal bond with this city because he could not break it within himself. He tells us so in THE CITY.

" You said:

" I will go to another land, I will go to another sea.
Another city, better than this, must somewhere be found.

Alastos 00013(a)

Here my every effort ~~dooms~~ has ringed it round
 And my heart is - like a corpse - burst inside me.
 How long will my mind reside in this decay?
 Wherever I turn my eyes, wherever I turn my gaze
 The black ruins of my life confront me here.
 The maze
 Of years gone by, wasted, destroyed utterly."

You will find no new land, you will find no ^{new} other sea.
 The city will dog your footsteps. You will
~~visit~~ ^{visit} the same streets; the same neighbourhoods
 You will roam. In the same houses
 You will find yourself grow old. Wherever
 You go you will always, ~~to this~~ arrive to this city.
 As for that other place, the far away
 Place, hold no hope.
 For you, there is no ship, there is no road.
 As you have ruined your life in this little corner
~~of earth~~ ^{of earth} ~~corner~~ Here all over the world you have wrecked it completely.

A passionate cris de coeur: Yes! Also a cool statement of fact.
 The language struggles with its own nature to express this precise
 thought in poetic fantasy. It succeeds, ~~obviously~~. It quickens
 perception to the point of growth. We all realise - and we can
 blame no one else but ourselves - that whatever we do wherever
 we go we always carry with us our own ^{private} particular brand of
~~private~~ Hell. To know this is to understand better Cavafy's poetry. ^{Things}
 the reason why it has been ~~wanted~~ ^{wanted}

CAVAFY died in Alexandria on April ~~24~~²⁹ 1933. He lived exactly seventy years ^(The apparent 12 days difference is due to the changes of calendar) and ~~twelve days~~ his life was almost ~~but~~ not quite, equally divided between the 19th and 20th centuries. But he belonged to neither. Everything about him is not somehow what it seems or what it should be. He was

[He was ^{intellectually} ~~apparently~~ a virile man who lacked masculine virility. He was a Greek but he ~~did not~~ ^{he felt at} ~~himself~~ home with western Europeans. What went on in Greece did not particularly interest him except what concerned his art. Wars? What of them? Greece's more lasting contribution to the world was her thought, not her battles, he observed. Absurd of course. For without the effort to save or gain liberty there could be no free thought. He lived physically in Alexandria but he inhabited spiritually a ^{vast area} ~~large area~~ ^{and} ~~stretching~~ stretching from Rome to the Zagros mountains of Persia. Products of the 19th century he felt a throwback to an simpler, more cultured and better balanced earlier age — that of the Hellenistic Kingdoms. He was casual but his casualness was ^{the product of meticulous care. His criticisms appeared to be kindly — they were devastating.}

He was fascinated by history and, had he wished, he could have become a notable historian. But he chose creative and not re-creative and interpretative work and cast it in a more durable medium — verse; and good verse lives longer than stone monuments. He started writing poetry early. He found that he was not capable of easy composition and ^{that} the Greek language was not for him an ^{easy} ~~easy~~ ^{which he could} ~~handled~~ ^{handle}. Inspiration was difficult. Therefore he had to work, harder and harder, to discard, polish, destroy, correct, write and rewrite till he achieved what he thought was perfection. He ^{was} slow and

laborious ^{work effort} but could not be deflected. Most of his early work he destroyed or rejected. He was nearly forty by the time he ~~really~~ felt confident that he had perfected his art, found the themes suited to his mood, and the form which his language permitted them to be cast. Recognition was slow and grudging. He was an innovator. None felt sure ^{enough} about him to praise or condemn. But ^a few perceptive individuals began to notice him.

He could see no beauty in the sea, the colour of dawn or the budding rose. Not even in the arresting symmetry of a Grecian column. In any case these have been done and ^{self} ^{fact} ~~over~~ done by ^{other} poets. He ~~fixed~~ ^{more correctly in space} fixed on something else on the unexplored ^{things :- a)} inner workings of man and ~~that~~ ^{the} uncharted area where he comes into contact with the reality of his fantasies or, conversely, with ^{his own view or fantasy} ~~the fantasy~~ of reality; ~~it~~ on his own journey through the night when his barge winds ^{its} ~~stygian~~ ^{way} between forces now spoiled, glowing eyes now dull, vigorous bodies now obese and pin-point the fugitive memory ^{in a shaft of light} ^{imprisonment} (sometimes these memories appeared ^{on pages} like colourful quivering motes pinned there, still alive, still striving to free themselves from that inexorable ^{nothing upon} ~~imprisonment~~ ^{maybe more} ~~on the face~~ perpetual imprisonment); and lastly, and ~~more~~ ^{more} importantly on episodes from the footnote of history, the wry smile of one, the sour virtue of another, the fatuous ^{self} ~~support~~ ^{stance} of a third.

All ^{these have been} turned ~~out~~ into beautiful sonnets mostly short ones [Only a few very few ~~of his~~ ^{pages} ~~sonnets~~ extend to more than ^{one page} ~~in the first collected edition of his work.~~]

CAVAFY must be read not for his music or his rhythm and never, unless of course in public, aloud. He must be murmured.

or gently intoned. ~~And~~ Not once but many times over ... and in small segments. His treasures have to be unlocked and laid out carefully one by one. Each has its own individual brilliance when studied and held up to the light. Coming to him from other poets after a surfeit that is of poetry, we realize at once an ~~and~~ extraordinary quality. We cannot grasp his whole range at once. We have to do it gradually. He has not only to be read - as his entire output can be contained in an average volume of about two hundred pages, this represents no ^{great} difficulty - but felt, mused over and pondered over. And ~~like~~ ^{as with} rare, potent wine taken in moderation the pleasure is double - in sipping and in the warmth that follows - so with him. The vistas grow. What was commonplace, with better acquaintance, becomes profound. Meaning deepens, for CAVAFY is a supremely articulate artist who uses words very sparingly and just enough of them to convey his thoughts and sensation or to draw a portrait. Two or three lines, a couple of brush strokes with ~~words~~ and a world opens up or a personality emerges.

Half-part twelve. How the time has passed.

Half-part twelve. How the years have passed!

Commonplace? The question remains. But is it? Another question is superimposed. OR,

Lucky are those who believe,

And like the Emperor M^r. Manuel

End their days in the garment of faith.

Another puzzle. Significant or ~~whimsical~~ ^{just a whimsy?} Unanswered. We have to read him and ponder over him, to find out.

On the subject of his versification enough has been written already not to require adding to. It is irregular but ~~the~~^{its} irregularities are highly variable that never produce monotony. The point that principally emerges, however, is that Cavafy's singular mode of expression and his concentrated imagery require a certain readjustment of the reader's method of approaching poetry; also a modification of apprehension. We enter, with him, the sphere of poetry because of the poetic feeling in his work not because it conforms to any known pattern or form of that art. He sings for instance:

Honour to those who have an aim in life
 And opt to guard Thermopylae.
 From duty they will never stray;
 Honourable and upright in everything they do
~~But~~ ^{They are} kind and compassionate also.
 Generous when rich and when poor
 No less so; they do their best,
 Extend a hand to all they can;
 Truth always comes from their lips
 But bear no hatred for those who lie.

Greater honour still is their due
 When they foresee (and many of them do)
 That, traitor Ephialtes will at last appear
 And the Medes will march over them from the rear.

This is another example of Cavafy's work. It is, in my view a rounded, complete sonnet, one of least power and as

individual in taste as a thimbleful of absinthe.

What of the formative influences ... the masters behind him: Surely he must have patterned himself on some one? Again the subject has been discussed and investigated at length. But the conclusions ^{vary} are varied Browning and Swinburne have been mentioned, with some, though tenuous, justification. Also Oscar Wilde, Hopkins and Bridges and ~~also~~ the whole range of French poetry from Chénier and Audin Chénier down to Mallarmé excluding, perhaps two or three of the obvious romantics. It is true that his knowledge of English and French literature was very extensive and went deep. But so was ^{later on} his knowledge of Greek literature ~~from the~~ and history. Undoubtedly he must have been influenced by all these. Is there any dominant influence? I doubt it ... and we are not likely to know conclusively until his personal papers are published. My view, for all is worth, is that CAWLEY was not influenced by any single ~~particular~~ poet and thinker but by many. ^{I believe he} He ~~was~~ more driven, ^{shaped} and guided than influenced - in that order.

DRIVEN by his inner compulsion to express his raging feelings and tumultuous thoughts in a medium which corresponded to his personality - restrained, ~~polished~~, ^{tidy} ~~read~~; without vagueness ^{or} of loose ends. In other words the compulsion to express his individual self in his individual way.

SHAPED, I believe, primarily, by the place he lived - Alexandria. The canal, multinational city loaded over by Europeans whose ^(i.e. the European) interests were money, social politics and pleasure. It was ~~as far as the European world was concerned~~ ^{an artificial community amidst} ~~an artificial community amidst~~ ^{an suffering underprivileged and} ~~an alien and resentful~~ population. Inevitably rootless. ~~But~~ Behind this ^{actuality} ~~is~~ ^(i.e. Caawley)

saw however the capital city of two-thousand years earlier, the city of the Ptolemies, of Cleopatra, of the library and ^{the} Museum, ^{of} the city of thinkers, ^{philosophers, poets, the grammarians, the anthropologists,} and scientific investigators, ~~of~~ ^{where} were written Callimachus, Apollonius Rhodius, lived for some time Theocritus, all poets, ~~Zeno~~ Zenodotus who edited Homer, Euclid who fathered Geometry, Apollonius of Perga of the Conic Sections, Eratosthenes and Claudius Ptolemy geographers, the Egyptian priest Manetho, the Jewish writer Philo, the many other Jewish scholars who translated the Bible into Greek and for the first time made available the literature of one people to another. A city where cultures met and fused ^{in order to grow} ~~radiating~~ and which opened out into the vast ^{Hellenistic} world the Hellenistic, perhaps the only civilisation which created no inferior and superior, discriminated against none, on account of who he was, [where he came from what language he spoke or what god he worshipped - at least no absolute divisions on these lines] - and tried to live under the aegis of a culture - the Hellenic culture. That old Alexandria whose social structure was not very different to his own ^{but} was the leading city of this putative universal world, became his artistic home. In his own words (he was) "enfranchised" there.

GUIDED - perhaps the choice of word here is wrong. ~~to~~ Read and ~~to~~ hear inspired may be better. But the ^{world} ~~world~~ stops. Here, ~~a couple~~ of ~~short~~ ^{short} ~~verses~~ ^{verses} by Plato.

Thou wert the morning star among the living,
Ere thy fair light had fled;
Now, having died, thou art as Hesperus giving
New splendour to the dead (P. B. Shelley).

and

You are looking at the stars my star,

Oh! Were I the skies

To gaze upon you with ~~thousand~~ myriad eyes.

How eye from ASCLEPIADES Third century B.C.

Why hoard your virginity. There'll not be found

A man to love you when you're under the ground.

Love's for the living; for when we are dead

It's dust and ashes. ~~Come~~, let's go to bed.

And now

CAVAFI.

Our days to come stretch before us
like a row of little church candles alight —
golden, warm, straight little candles.

Our days past are all behind, a sad
row of burnt-out candles;

Those near us still wreathed in smoke —
Cold, melted, bent little candles.

I don't like to see them. Their sight pains me
And grieves their former light to remember.
I look ahead, my candles all alight and bright.

I don't want to turn, and see (and shudder)
How quickly the dark row lengthens
How quickly the burnt-out candles multiply.

There is a continuity ~~and extension~~ here. Perhaps a deepening
of the current also, for me, the connection between CAVAFI

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the ~~Byzantine, Hellenistic~~ and Classical Greek poetry is fairly obvious. And in certain particulars his is more in the ^{line of} ~~development from the classical than mainland-Greek~~ poetry, which has been influenced and its course altered by the post-medieval Greek folk poetry. There is ^{however} a vast difference, ~~though~~. The classical spirit is ~~high~~ buoyant, ^{comparative} soaring. It can flash like lightning, with stark ~~and~~ brilliance, can caress like gentle breeze, or spiral away into infinity. Coming out in Touch and fired with the oriental spirit during the Hellenistic age it became gentler and earthier; it accepted mortality. It played ~~around~~ ^{travels} CAVAFY tranquilizes this spirit of mortality ^{and gets above it by abstracting} ~~which was essentially defeat~~ fear ~~of~~ mental genuflection] from it. It is the spirit of autumnal power - vigorous, unshaken, unblinking, before decay. ^{ret. inf.} It is ~~always~~ in man, ⁱⁿ his moment of greatness.

Before reading CAVAFY him I want to say this: CAVAFY asked big questions. He did not expect big answer. In his mind's eye everything came down to recognisable human proportions. What if a man is great or powerful? We must see what he really is like. A Hollywood actress ^{has} ~~said~~ said that there is "no great man in his bath". I think she was right. CAVAFY did not see them ^{stripped and in their moment} ~~there, but as they were~~ of physical impotence. He saw them whole with their essential impotence. The Cartesian geometric plain tilts, one's angle of ~~vision~~ in relation to the universe (Forster, Phare) changes and what comes into focus is something different from what is commonly accepted. ^{Let us} take Julius Caesar. We know how Shaw ^{sees} ~~treats~~ him - a great, ruthless man of Shawian wit. And Shakespeare: like a massive monument, ~~or mountain~~

... under whose shadow of which ^{Rome} men lived in "awe" men scattered
 to find solace or a quiet grave, and this "perch Caesar" ^{comes to its} is like the
 instant collapse of ^{a skyscraper} an empire of power. Shakespeare, of course, knew too
 much, to ^{look or} show love for Caesar. How CAVAFY? He sees him as
 a self-important man with a retinue walking about the streets.
 The greater the number of attendants, the bigger the man.
 The greatness of power is usually measured by ^{its} attendance. The
 self-important man talks to the crowds or harangues them. Never
 listens to them. ~~They~~ ^{He is} are always busy. ~~They~~ ^{He cannot} cannot be bothered
 with trifles. But there is an Artemidorus. He has something
 important to say. The attendants, ~~perhaps~~ ^{the} attendants, push him
 aside. Vain, pompous, Caesar ^{made} his own prison himself ⁱⁿ this
 entourage. The earth-shaker who could go, see ~~or~~ look around and
 win a victory just by looking around, emerges a man no less
 silly, weak and arrogant than the rest. Caesar loses his ^{for us} awe,
 and once power whatever it is, loses its intrinsic ^{quality} value, its capacity to
 dazzle, it loses its potency. ~~It is~~ ^{It is} out down ~~or is~~ on the way out. Such
 Such view is liberatory. CAVAFY liberates. He helps in the shedding
 of illusion.

Before sitting down I am going to read his poem on
 Caesar The Ides of March, first in Greek and then in
 English.

THE IDES OF MARCH.

Soul! Beware of your moods for grandeur.

And if your ambitions you cannot escape or stifle
Pursue if ^{with reluctance and circumspection.}
~~with reluctance and circumspection enter their domain.~~

More careful and alert ~~always~~ ^{you must always} you ~~should~~ remain
the further you advance, the higher your path winds.

And when you reach the top, Caesar at last;

when, that is, you take on illustrious form
~~you become an illustrious man, renowned,~~
^{become a man renowned,}

then, above all, remember

while walking about the streets

- an august master upon whom all gaze -
followed by your attendants,

if someone from the crowd approaches,

some Artemidorus, holding a piece of paper,
mumbling fast "Read this quickly,

here is important news of great concern to you"
do not fail to stop; leave for another day

work and speeches; push aside

those in front of you, cut through the
bowing and ^{servanting} ~~saluting~~ chorus

(you can see them all later on); let even
the Senators wait

for you must read, without delay,

the serious warnings writ by Artemidorus.