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Pages on C.P. Cavafy

CONTENTS

SECTION ONE: PAGES ON CAVAFY

SECTION TWO: GRAECO-AUSTRALIANA

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THE CITY OF IDEAS:
CAVAFY AS A PHILOSOPHER OF HISTORY

THE CANVAS OF WORLD HISTORY

Constantine Cavafy was a British national with a Greek passport living in colonial Egypt. He was born in Constantinople, raised in London and Liverpool, and lived most of his adult life in Alexandria moving amongst Greek, Italian, British and French diaspora communities there. That abrupt summation of his life captures the essentials of his poetics as well. Cavafy doesn't fit into the story of modern national Greek letters at all. He didn't see any particular value in the national literary culture that helped chisel a small nation-state out of the ruins of the Ottoman Empire. For most of his life, Cavafy avoided going to Athens.[1] He wrote an article arguing for the return of the Parthenon marbles from Britain to Greece. But there is no indication that he was ever interested in Modern Greek nationalism.

Cavafy's world of imaginary significations rotated around Hellenism. This Hellenism was not a euphemism for Greek national preoccupations but an integral driver of world history.[2] The lynchpin of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Hellenism was not the peripheral nation building that occurred at the tail end of the Ottoman Empire, but rather the world domain of the British Empire. Whatever nations are, they are not – ever – world historic. In contrast, empires born of cities, federations, or constitutions often are. From the days of Shaftesbury onwards, the British Empire used the resources of Hellenism to think through the most compelling questions of historical responsibility, artistic form, and political destiny. It is from this world-historic context that Cavafy's poetics emerge.[3]

Cavafy was partly educated in England, and spent most of his adult life in an Egypt that was British controlled. His world was trans-national and imperial. This was true in the most practical sense. The Cavafy family business – which was a thriving concern until the death of his father – was based in Liverpool and London, Alexandria and Cairo.[4]

The Cavafy family was typical of the elite Greek mercantile families that had abandoned the Ottoman Empire in the nineteenth century – not for Greece, but for the world trade emporium administered by the British. These families belonged to a much broader class of transnationals in the Eastern Mediterranean. Their identifications and experiences were international rather than national. These transnationals were not stereotypical immigrants. They did not come to coastal Egypt directly from France, Italy, or Greece. Rather they transferred from already established international communities in the diaspora-thick cities of Constantinople and Smyrna.[5] They moved from one international community to another, and ended up in Alexandria because of the pushes of geopolitics and the pulls of international trade. The movement of mercantile Greeks from Constantinople to Alexandria was a sub-set of these structural shifts. The shifts in part were caused by, and in part were the cause of, the waning power of the Ottoman Empire in the Eastern Mediterranean, and its temporary replacement by British power.

Modern Alexandria's fortunes began to rise when the independent-minded and Albanian-born Muhammad 'Ali was appointed viceroy and pasha of Egypt by the Ottomans in 1805. He began a program of modernisation in which Alexandria, long sidelined as an historical relic, had a central role. Muhammad 'Ali restored Alexandria's access to the Nile. He built the forty-five mile long al-Mahmudiyah Canal (1818–1820) and new docks at Alexandria, as well as an industrialised arsenal (1828–33). A key part of his strategy to revive Alexandria was to encourage the settlement of foreign traders. To do this, the traditional Ottoman device of capitulations was employed. Foreigners were extended certain legal privileges. Europeans and Americans were exempted from tax. Foreigners were given the right to be tried in their own consular courts. In 1875, Mixed Courts were established to deal with disputes between foreigners and Egyptians, and between different foreign nationalities. These devices encouraged a large foreign community to settle in Alexandria, and turned it into a thriving centre.

Thus Alexandria was reborn – as a centre for the cotton trade. Cotton production started in Egypt in the 1820s. By the 1840s a large market had developed for Alexandrine cotton in Europe. Typical of a portal city, banking and other commercial services developed on the back of this trade. Alexandria boomed in the 1860s due to the American Civil War, which ended the cotton trade across the Atlantic for years. Later, the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 turned Alexandria into the chief staging post for trade between Europe and India. The British reluctantly established a Protectorate over Egypt in 1882 by force of arms, in order to put down a nationalist revolt. Had that revolt been successful, it would almost certainly have ended in some kind of ethno-nationalist terror, repatriation of foreigners, or genocide – the fate suffered by virtually all ex-Ottoman territories. British rule lasted till 1922.

Thus, for a time, Cavafy's Alexandria was a portal in an imperial system that stretched from Liverpool to Sydney. This was not just a system of trade and power. It was also a literary, symbolic and intellectual world whose circuits of commercial and political traffic brought figures like the novelist E.M. Forster to Alexandria. This was a world in which art and world-historical conflict coincided. Forster met Cavafy while the former was working for Red Cross in Alexandria during World War One. Forster convinced T.S. Eliot to publish several of Cavafy's poems in *The Criterion* in 1924. There is no indication that Cavafy was ever flattered by this attention. Cavafy was not a colonial. He was decidedly unmoved by metropolitan attention, and was reserved about publication opportunities in England. Only the work mattered, and quite evidently none of his sponsors ever found for him a translator who could replicate the artisan-like meticulousness of Cavafy's work in the original. Lawrence Durrell came to Alexandria during World War Two – after Cavafy's death but close enough in time to reconstruct something of the poet's world in *The Alexandria Quartet*. This was a world that, for a fleeting time in the decade before World War One, had been a major centre of Greek letters. It was a world in which Cavafy had been a major figure. It was Forster, Durrell, and even at a distance Eliot, who were drawn to Cavafy – not the other way round.

There is no doubt that Cavafy belongs in such company though.[6] It is not just that his talent is as great as any of these others. Indeed, he exceeds all of them.

He belongs in their company in part because, like the others, he is the product of the same circuits of traffic – between Boston and London, Edinburgh and Melbourne, Liverpool and Alexandria – that shaped a distinctive modernist culture. Strikingly, some of the most interesting figures of this constellation came from outside metropolitan England. This includes not just Cavafy but intellectuals like the philosopher John Anderson (1893–1962). In the liberal imperial atmosphere of Sydney of the 1930s and 1940s, Anderson created a body of work as audacious as Cavafy's. Both were modernists, both employed classics for daring ends, and both belonged to a littoral world of coming and going that stretched along an enormous maritime periphery punctuated by ports of empire. In this atmosphere, ethno-nationalism and national identity was weak. Eliot was an American who became an Englishman. Cavafy, schooled in English, wrote in Greek, and liked to think of himself as a Hellene not a Greek. Anderson was a Scot who became the quintessential sceptical Australian philosopher. If there are strong ties in a portal empire, it is to cities, not states or nations, and especially not to nation-states.[7]

Cavafy exceeds the company of Forster and his cohort because he is intellectually and philosophically much more sophisticated than any of them. He is a philosophical poet of enormous ability, comparable with Dante and Lucretius. Cavafy leaves far behind the sentimental Neoplatonism of his chum Forster, not to mention the pseudo-philosophical

tinctures of Durrell – and great as he is, Eliot is not a philosophical poet. Without ever lecturing his readers, or relying on pained analogies, Cavafy paints a vast philosophy of history canvas. In a generic sense, the resulting work was Epicurean in character. Plato aside, it was Epicurus who introduced antiquity to a philosophy of history through his theory of the social contract. Lucretius, his follower, elaborated a marvellous theory of the developmental history of the human species. Cavafy's poetics, though, does not have a simple unmediated relationship with Epicurean antiquity. It supposes rather the intercession of the Stoic and Epicurean philosophies of the Enlightenment, and most particularly the Stoic-Epicurean history of Edward Gibbon, a work that Cavafy knew well.[8]

Gibbon drew an enormous portrait of civilised states on the periphery of the Eurasian landmass. His key idea was that over the historical long-term these states are repeatedly challenged, and sometimes conquered, by nomadic, patrimonial, dictatorial, or theocratic states from the Eurasian heartland. Gibbon's definition of civilisation was Epicurean.[9] The civilised state was one whose ideational core, or intuitive sense of ultimate good, was summed up in the image of friends walking in the epicurean garden, conversing, eating, enjoying music, free from mental anguish and bodily pain. Gibbon's history of Rome from Augustus to the fall of Constantinople to the Ottomans was a rationale for a British Empire animated by an ethos of Epicurus Britannicus and conditioned by a stoical steadfastness and sense of order and design.[10]

Cavafy's Alexandria was one of the brilliant inter-mundane Epicurean places that this Empire opened-up. Cavafy's genius was not just to capture this city and its pleasures in words, but also to understand why it is that such places come and go in history. As with Gibbon, this was no triumphal vision of history. Cavafy understood not only the heights to which the Epicurean utopia could propel a state, but also the eventual decline and fall of such states, and the Stoic forbearance required at their end.

THE PHILOSOPHICAL POET

Cavafy rarely expressed any views on contemporary politics. Indeed, he spent a lifetime correcting the impression that his poem *Those who Fought for the Achaian League* – "brave men you who fought and died so nobly" – was a comment on the slaughter of Greeks by Turks in Asia Minor in 1922.[11] His view of the world was detached. The Stoic-Epicurean that he was, Cavafy invested no passion in the events of his time. His poetry was not a literature of engagement. He made no melodramatic political declarations or gestures. He was only interested in the un-emotive, precise, reserved creation of an imaginary world. Yet, at the very same time, this imaginary world was filled with political and historical and civic figures.

In the broadest sense, Cavafy's small-p politics was a politics of world history measured in centuries. Through poetic miniatures, it comprehended a huge narrative in which Hellenism was a driving force. Cavafy's politics is a philosophy of history with political overtones. He had little obvious interest in contemporary political events. Of course, like anyone else, he had to deal with the consequences of these events. He left Alexandria during the period of British bombardment (1882). He also had to cope with the ambiguous status of being a Greek passport holder and a British subject working in an Egyptian bureaucracy.[12] But he was not the kind of personality who would have succeeded at political journalism – a game he briefly flirted with. However, Cavafy understood history, and he understood the large-scale political significance of history.[13]

Cavafy is a philosophical poet.[14] As a philosophical poet, he is a philosopher of history. At first glance, it might seem that Cavafy is a philosopher of history in fragments. He creates exquisite vignettes of disparate ancient days populated with obscure but fascinating characters. Yet, there is a coherent scheme of interpretation underlying his historical poems. Cavafy is an Epicurean philosopher of history with a stoic sense of forbearance. The maxim common to both the Stoic and Epicurean is: do not fear death. In the Epicurean philosophy of history, setting aside the fear of death means accepting that nothing is forever.

All societies have beginnings and ends. History (world history) is the nature (*phusis*) of growth and decay. Epicurus (341–270 BCE) conceived of nature this way: the universe is infinite. It is composed of void and atoms. Irrespective of their size, weight or shape, atoms follow predetermined paths at the same speeds. They obey the laws (*nomoi*) of nature. Thus, the infinite is regular, homogeneous, and characterless. It would remain so except for the peculiar spontaneous capacity of atoms to "swerve" (*parenclisis*) off their paths from time to time, causing them to collide.[15] Such collisions lead to the combination and arrangement of atoms. They form visible web-like or shell-like structures, and eventually feature-filled worlds. But whatever has a beginning in this manner also has an end. We cannot conceive of the creativity of *phusis*, unless we also suppose that what is created in this way is destroyed in the course of time. Any arrangement of atoms, including a world, experiences the impact of collisions from the outside. After a time, a world becomes less and less able to sustain itself in the face of such battering. It collapses.

Cavafy was aware that, on one level, history is like a great chess-game – in which kings and empires, cultures and peoples come and go. It is an arena of beginning and expansion, death and annihilation, new challengers and better armies. On another level, though, history is an arena of renaissance. For out of the characterless infinite universe, an infinite number of separate worlds forms.[16] Some are like ours, some are different, some appear between existing worlds, and some come into being where previous worlds have

passed away. The fact that at least some of these are like our own points to the fact of renaissance. The capacity to create similar worlds underscores something crucial to Cavafy's philosophy of history. Most of his poems are set in periods of decline. Yet there is a strong sense running through the totality of his work that something survives the death of worlds. Once a society is extinguished, it cannot be resurrected. Nothing is more absurd than attempts to do so. But, in a minority of cases, there is something that survives the death of a society. This something is not social but creative. It is the knowledge of composition and creation. It is the knowledge of swerve, collision, arrangement, formation, and world creation.

In a manner of speaking, this knowledge is inter-mundane – it belongs, along with the happy Epicurean gods, in between social worlds. It belongs to a time and a place – a nowhere – that survives the rise and fall of kingdoms, and outlasts the comings and goings of peoples. It is a time out of time, and a place out of place. Cavafy called it the "city of ideas":

> And it's a hard, unusual thing
> to be enrolled as a citizen of that city.
> Its councils are full of Legislators
> no charlatan can fool.[17]

The city of ideas has a peculiar nature. Because it arises in between social worlds, it is epi-social or quasi-universal. Thus it has some of the characteristics of the protean universe. It generates worlds. It is a space in which the rules, norms and laws of the social world are suspended (like Rabelais' Epicurean Abbey of Thélême: "All [the life of the members of the community] was spent not in laws, statutes, or rules, but according to their own free will and pleasure.")[18] What matters in such inter-mundane places is freedom from anxiety and pain, and the kinetic pleasures of eroticism, taste, music, and conversation, or casting an eye over beautiful paintings and buildings, and walking with friends in the garden. Such inter-mundane places might be free of normal social rules, but, as Cavafy well understood, they are not free of artistic and mental discipline. They suppose Stoic or Platonic powers of composition and design. Without these powers, such places descend into decadence. When they maintain their own discipline, they can be places where all-too-rare social creation can occur.

Such places exist. It was Karl Marx who observed that the trading nations of ancient times existed like the gods of Epicurus in the "intermediate worlds" of the universe.[19] These strange intermediate worlds are neither protean universal voids nor are they socially regulated worlds lacking autonomous inventiveness. These strange places have

existed not only in antiquity. In their most common guise, as portal cities, they have emerged repeatedly in post-classical history – from Constantinople to Venice, and from Amsterdam to London.[20] Cavafy's Alexandria was one of a number of great nineteenth-century portals – ranging from Odessa to New York and Chicago. As intermediate worlds, portals combine the creative force of the universal void with the contingent nature of worlds subject to decay and dissolution. They are places where the creative *phusis* of history meets the mortality of society.

Before such places existed – first, as Marx said, amongst the trading nations of antiquity – history as the generator of mortal societies lacked a self-reflexive vantage point from which the works of history, and their civilising qualities, could be judged and understood, and even subjected to collective design. The works of history thus appeared as heteronomous forces – as acts of interfering gods or thoughtless nature. History was enacted "behind the backs of men".

The archaic Greeks themselves had once been part of history as the interminable chess game of pillage, invasion, conquest, and defence. Like so many other peoples, they appeared first in history as nomadic invaders. They came from somewhere in the Eurasian landmass. They came in waves, and they destroyed the Mycenean kingdom. It is possible – though we'll never know for sure – that some disastrous war between Mycenea and Troy – the staple of Greek epic and tragedy – opened the floodgates to the invaders. Whatever the case, these invaders were only doing what the proto Greek-speaking Myceneans had once done to the Minoans. Yet the ultimate achievement of these invaders was markedly different from that of their predecessors.

These invaders created a kind of political order that was to become an enduring model for a new type of state.[21] This new type of state was to exert a countervailing power on the maritime periphery of the Eurasian landmass. The post-archaic Greeks defined Eurasian political and social forms as barbaric. They also defined the civilisation of the littoral city in opposition to such barbarism. They were to develop a distinctive notion of the state to accompany this distinctive notion of civilisation. This kind of state was as much represented by the British in Cavafy's Alexandria as it was by the empire that Alexander the Great built. These states were to play the historical role as a buffer, and counter, to Eurasian land power. Sometimes they were successful in this; sometimes not. In the West, for example, Rome – after centuries of wars against the barbarians – was over-run. In the East, the residue of the Roman Empire – Byzantium – resisted for much longer, though it also eventually succumbed to the Ottomans.

The first barbarians were the Persians – defeated by the Athenians and their allies in the naval battle of Salamis (480 BCE). Xerxes' Persians were one of an endless number of land armies, and landed tribes and states and empires, which have occupied, and have

attempted to expand outwards from, the Eurasian landmass. In today's geographical terms, this landmass reaches from China through Central Asia and Russia into Europe and the Middle East.[22] Barbarism, as a mental category, came into being when the typical landed power of the Eurasian heartland for the first time was successfully resisted by another kind of power. This second kind of power afterwards was to have a long – and more or less continuous, if radically shifting, history – along the maritime periphery of the Eurasian landmass. Today, its existence remains decisive in world politics and history.[23]

   What Xerxes' Persians confronted was a littoral state. In its history, the littoral state type often has assumed imperial form. In their most buoyant and resilient periods, these littoral empires limit the influence of landed, tribal, patrimonial, and theocratic power. They do so because politically they are constitutions, or commonwealths, or else are modelled after cities; socially, they have a decisive maritime or mercantile component. Most important of all, they contain inter-mundane spaces. In cities like Alexandria and Antioch emerge post-social places and spaces that hover precariously between various social worlds, and that enable those courageous enough to wander amongst the happy Epicurean gods to unlock the powers of creation.

   World politics in one sense can be described as a contest between the allure of the Epicurean utopia and the Eurasian promise of courtly position. For individuals this is an invidious choice. As Cavafy put it, Artaxerxes, king of Persia, might give you a place at his court and offer you:

>   …satrapies and things like that –
>   But this is a strange seduction, because these are
>   things that you don't want at all,
>   though, in despair, you accept them just the same.[24]

   Various motives play a role in this acceptance. Cavafy points to the fact that, in the war with the Persians, many Greeks – like Dimaratos the king of Sparta – sided with the barbarians. Frustrated ambition was a key reason for this. Dimaratos was typical – his co-ruler had manoeuvred him from power:

>   As a result, he serves Xerxes assiduously.
>   Along with the great Persian army,
>   he'll make it back to Sparta too;
>   and once he's king again, how quickly
>   he'll throw him out, how thoroughly
>   he'll shame that schemer Leotycchidis.[25]

This story repeats itself through history. Edward VII the English monarch was only one of the many in the twentieth century whose sense of ambition and resentment propelled them to choose the barbarians. A very large minority of Western intellectuals actively sided with Eurasian state politics – from Nazism to Stalinism and Maoism to Iranian theocrats and nationalist dictators of various stripes. Cavafy indicates how self-defeating this choice is. For the one who makes such a choice always ends up

> …longing for something else, aching for other things:
> praise from the Demos and the Sophists,
> that hard-won, that priceless acclaim –
> the Agora, the Theatre, the Crowns of Laurel.
> You can't get any of these from Artaxerxes,
> you'll never find any of these in the satrapy,
> and without them, what kind of life will you live?[26]

The choice is tragic and pathetic at the same time.[27] It is a choice of perpetual self-mutilation.

STOIC-EPICUREANISM

Cavafy was well acquainted with the masterful eighteenth-century historical account of the long struggle between civilisation and barbarism – Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776–1788). Thus, Cavafy also knew that the causes of the decline of civilising states on the Eurasian periphery – be they based on the Black Sea, the Mediterranean Sea, or the North Sea – were as much internal as external. They faltered as much because of a loss of their own dynamism as because of the invaders' strength.

The periphery states from the beginning were very odd. They were defined in terms of cities rather than territory. They were called Athens, or Rome, or Byzantium. Their modern equivalents – the Dutch, British, and American Empires – were equally odd. They defined themselves not as states but as constitutions, unions, or federations. One of the characteristics of the collective frame of mind of these states is the long-term influence of Stoic-Epicureanism on them. This is evident, for example, in the case of the English state from the time of the English Renaissance. Shakespeare's work is filled with Stoic-Epicurean motifs. The influence of this ethos on statecraft is real and palpable, and distinctive. It results in a politics that is neither realist nor idealist, and an ethics that revolves around intellectual pleasure, and in a temperament that is cool and resistant to moralising.

The key principles of Stoic-Epicureanism are spelt out in Cavafy's portraits of historic Greek kings and queens. The first principle is that the greatest thing we have to fear is fear itself. Like the Stoics and the Epicureans, Cavafy knows that fear destroys states:

> Engulfed by fear and suspicion,
> mind agitated, eyes alarmed,
> we try desperately to invent ways out,
> plan how to avoid
> the obvious danger that threatens us so terribly.
> Yet we're mistaken, that's not the danger ahead:
> the news was wrong.
> (or we didn't hear it, didn't get it right).
> Another disaster, one we never imagined,
> suddenly, violently, descends upon us,
> and finding us unprepared – there's no time now –
> sweeps us away.[28]

So the Stoic and the Epicurean counsel: be cautious of suspicious rulers – and suspicious citizens – who think that they can master all of the contingencies of the world. They do foolish and dangerous things, protecting themselves against imaginary enemies, while not seeing the real enemy staring them in the face. The Stoic-Epicurean is one who supposes that the world is an uncertain place, governed by a fortune that we cannot control. Sometimes this requires us to take the advice offered to the second-century BCE Pontos king "Mithridatis, glorious and powerful, / ruler of great cities, / master of strong armies and fleets," who, on a march to Sinopi, dispatched one of his officers to a remote part of the country to consult a soothsayer.[29] Mithridatis wanted to know "how much more property, / how much more power, he'd accumulate in the future." The soothsayer consulted the portents, and troubled, advised the officer that he was not entirely sure,

> but I think the king should be content with what he has.
> Anything more will prove dangerous.
> Remember, officer, to tell him that:
> for God's sake to be satisfied with what he has.[30]

Poor Mithridatis. He took no heed of the warning, and was murdered by his wife who disapproved of his expansionist policies.

The classic realist posture in statecraft is to accumulate as much wealth and power against possible enemies – the greater the accumulation, the greater the state.[31] The Stoic-Epicurean is sceptical of this, understanding that the very fear that drives such accumulation paralyses both the will to act when it is most needed and the ability to recognise one's real enemies. The admired ruler rules like Anna Dalassini. She was the mother of the eleventh-century Byzantine Emperor Alexis I Komninos, and governed in his place while he was at war. He honoured her in a royal decree. There was much praise of her works and her manners, but the protagonist of Cavafy's poem about her takes note of one thing in particular:

> Here I offer one phrase only,
> A phrase that is beautiful, sublime:
> "She never uttered those cold words 'mine' and 'thine'."[32]

The words 'mine' and 'thine' are the basis of all realist statecraft, and its self-defeating behaviours. As Hobbes depicted it, human beings who are driven by passion – most particularly, the passion of fear – accumulate riches and power in the hope of quelling their fears.[33] The things and offices that they become passionately attached to blight the very emotional intelligence they need to avoid catastrophe. Their passions destroy them.

The Stoic-Epicurean advises dispassion – on the model of Kratisiklia, the Spartan queen, who is to go to Alexandria as a hostage to the Ptolemaic king, Ptolemy IV. Her hostage is the price demanded for the survival of Sparta.[34] In public she hides her sorrow and her grief, and walks in dignified silence. There is little that human beings control. But one of those things that they can control, when everything else is prey to fortune, is their emotions:

> "…let no one see us
> weeping or behaving in any way unworthy of Sparta.
> At least this is still in our power;
> what lies ahead is in the hands of the gods."[35]

To walk in dignified silence is the gesture of a Stoic-Epicurean politics. It is a model of autonomy, and the very opposite of heteronomy. Abasement of the body is based on the belief that if we bow or scrape to the powerful, they will bow and scrape to the gods, and fortune will be mastered. Well, it won't be. The gods (should they intervene in human affairs) are unpredictable, and fortune is fickle. So we are best off to address fortune with dignity rather than grovelling. If we go under, as we all probably will, let us do

it standing upright. Kratisiklia will die at the hands of Ptolemy IV's successor. When she left Sparta, she would have had a premonition of that, or, at the very least, a sense that, as hostage to fortune, she would never return to her home city. The Stoic-Epicurean addresses fortune, fate, and tragic necessity with a shrug: so be it. We cannot change the course of the world, but we can control our emotional response to it. This is quite the opposite not just of the realist but also of the idealist.

The idealist is the reformer who thinks that to change institutions changes the course of the world. The reformer confuses meddling with creation. The Greeks, schooled in tragedy, knew that this was absurd. Poor Oedipus spends his life (after he hears the oracle) doing things to avoid his fate, which snares him anyway. In a similar deluded way, the reformers *In A Large Greek Colony, 200 BC* probe everywhere:

> question the smallest detail,
> and right away think up radical changes
> that demand immediate execution.[36]

But the colonists are sceptical. Everything has been analysed and diagnosed, and the reformers have found an endless number of things to eliminate. They have made their reports, and have gone away, taking their consultants' fees with them. But the colonists wonder, even though things aren't what they should be,

> Maybe the moment hasn't arrived yet.
> Let's not be too hasty: haste is a dangerous thing.
> Untimely measures bring repentance.
> Certainly, and unhappily, many things in the Colony are
>   absurd.
> But is there anything human without some fault?
> And after all, you see, we do move forward.

Reform is the chimera of world-making. The colony doubtlessly had a brilliant beginning, or some dazzling period of growth. But now it is in decline. The colonists are smart enough to understand that more laws and measures will not reverse their decline. Indeed, these will only speed it up. More laws simply reflect the colonists' pathetic fear of the end of their world.

All things end. Sometimes, though rarely, similar things arise again. Sometimes they arise again (though even less rarely) in the same place. But laws and reforms can't and won't bring this about. The illusion that they can causes the most absurd consequences.

It was for this reason that Cavafy was so contemptuous of Julian the Apostate. Julian was the classic deluded reformer. He attempted to revive paganism as the official religion of Rome after Christianity had already risen to a commanding position in the Empire. The overriding theme that Cavafy's repeated caustic strikes at Julian is *don't look back*. When social worlds die, attempts to reverse these deaths bring to the surface the worst kinds of ideology based on the fear of death. These ideologies are moralising, priggish, superstitious, rule-obsessed, and neurotic. The vacuous Julian "condemns" Christianity.[37] The Christians laugh at this moralising and its retrograde attempt to hold back the inevitable. The Christian world had already all but replaced Pagan Rome. As if to prove the point, Julian didn't even believe in his own system. A halo of light was enough to spook him:

> the young Julian for a moment lost his nerve:
> an impulse from his pious years came back
> and he crossed himself.[38]

The chinked armour of such weak beliefs is didacticism and preachy instruction about moral improvement. How pointlessly excessive then his moralising:

> his childish fear of the theatre,
> his graceless prudery, his ridiculous beard.[39]

How typical of the reformer to think that "a new religious system" could reverse a tottering world. How un-Greek.[40]

If all things end, it takes time to adjust to this. Even if all social worlds end, those who have invested in them are usually reluctant to let go of them. They begin by resisting – as Hellenistic societies did when the power of Rome swelled in the Eastern Mediterranean. Such opposition though was doomed, and even those who resisted knew it was doomed. "…as was to be expected / the terrible defeat came swiftly, at Pydna."[41] The trauma of this defeat – the last stand of the Achaian League in 146 BCE – was registered in the melancholy and grief of those left behind to watch:

> …deeply distressed, as they unload,
> ships with booty taken from the Peloponnese.[42]

For a young pleasure-loving man from Greek Southern Italy standing on the shore – as for all other Greeks – the lesson was sobering and unnerving. It was meant to be. The

Romans had a severe way of driving home their point. Corinth was razed, its men-folk killed, and the city's women and children sold into slavery. The lesson was clear to all. So, by 31 BCE, the Greeks in Asia Minor had learnt to be calculating observers of power plays in the Roman world. Whether Antony triumphed at Actium, or Octavius, the Greeks had congratulations ready for whichever victor.[43]

Nor was Rome the last conqueror that the Greeks would see. In 641 CE, in Alexandria, after the amazingly long duration of Rome and the New Rome of Byzantium, the Arabs arrive, and the *phusis* of renewal and decline begins again, starting with a handful of Greeks turning to the city of ideas in the midst of war-damaged Alexandria:

> In the evenings we meet on the sea front,
> the five of us (all, naturally, under fictitious names)
> and some of the few other Greeks
> still left in the city.
> Sometimes we discuss church affairs
> (the people here seem to lean towards Rome)
> and sometimes literature.
> The other day we read some lines by Nonnos:
> what imagery, what rhythm, what diction and harmony![44]

THE DEATH OF THE GREEKS

Cavafy's historical poems constantly return to states and cultures that are dying – the Spartans who make the best deal they can with Ptolemaic power, the Hellenistic monarchs who must go to Rome, or the residue of Greeks left in Arab Alexandria. A romantic interpretation of this would be to say that a handful of cultures and peoples defy the conquering leviathans, cheat annihilation, and live to fight and prosper another day. But Cavafy was not a romantic, and was acutely aware that there are no cultures or peoples that cheat the oblivion of death. This is a crucial matter. Cultures and peoples must face and accept death.[45] History is filled with a vast number of extinct societies. The sources of meaning – the imaginary signifiers – of any particular society are not inexhaustible. Even a thousand years of Rome, and the partial assimilation by the Romans of the barbarian invaders, gave way in the end to something else. The argument for the inevitability of extinction has nothing to do with a romantic fixation on death, or a morbid preoccupation with the twilight of societies. Rather Cavafy is aware that death is a condition of re-naissance, or re-birth, some time in the future – the making of some similar or analogous world in the same place or another place.

Re-naissance, or re-birth, does not mean the continued life of a society. If we were to travel back in time to fifth-century Athens, we would find it to be totally alien – even if we happened to be an enthusiastic and informed admirer of its works. What we admire is not Athenian society. Indeed we may have grave misgivings about many of its policies or institutions. Rather what we admire is its intellectual spirit and its *phusis* of creation. Cultures and peoples don't survive forever in history. There is absolutely nothing immortal about them. However, an odd handful of societies – and it is a very small number – create a kind of objectivated knowledge of creation that is perpetuated seemingly indefinitely. The habits and mores of the Greeks of the fifth century BCE didn't survive Alexander, but a universalistic poetic mind did – the mind of the Ionian physicists, itinerant sophists, Southern Italian Pythagoreans, Homeric bards, and Athenian academics and tragedy play writers.

It was a nineteenth-century romantic myth, begun by Herder, that history is the history of cultures and peoples. But Alexander the Great had confounded this notion long ago:

> We the Alexandrians, the Antiochians,
> the Selefkians, and the countless
> other Greeks of Egypt and Syria,
> and those in Media, and Persia, and all the rest:
> with our far-flung supremacy,
> our flexible policy of judicious integration,
> and our Common Greek Language
> which we carried as far as Bactria, as far as the Indians.[46]

Integration under Alexander meant the integration of a vast panorama of societies. Judiciousness meant the deployment of the intellect – and its devices of reason, wit, and beautiful form – to achieve this. We can never go back to an Alexandrine society, or a medieval society, or even a society in the more recent past. When we try – even in imagination – we are rattled by its alien qualities. While we may suffer the romantic delusion, and be enchanted by historical societies, when any serious thought is given to "living like them", we immediately pine for "all mod cons". We do not belong in the past. Yet taking the past seriously is not stupid. Even if we cannot and would not go back – even if we know that time's arrow does move forward remorselessly – nevertheless the intellect of a handful of societies like that of the Alexandrine age still has much to teach us about the judiciousness and formative power of the intellect. It still has much to teach us about the creative force of inter-mundane spaces.

Both in his poetics and in his philosophical approach, Cavafy is a modernist, not a romantic. For him, history is the history of the intellect. More specifically, it is the history

of emotional intelligence. He even shies away from the staples of nineteenth-century Romantic Hellenism, like the adoration of Periclean Athens or the fascination with the archaic power of Homeric gods. His philosophic attitude is cool and dispassionate. Cavafy knows that it is a Stoic and Epicurean emotional intelligence that allowed "Greekness" to survive in the guise of Hellenism – "mankind has no quality more precious: / everything beyond that belongs to the gods"[47] – whereas other cultures and peoples, engulfed by fear and suspicion, disappeared long ago.

Of course, there is a necessary price to be paid for survival. The Greeks only survived the corrosion and pillorying of history as Hellenes. They only survived by their death. Their ethnicity long along was dissolved by inter-marriage into Latin, Turkish, Slavic, Indian, Austro-Hungarian, and many other communities. As Cavafy noted, this peculiar life through death created a history of unease amongst "Greeks" about the social-type "Greekness" of Greece. This unease was observable even in antiquity. Cavafy imagines a conversation amongst homeward-bound Cypriot, Syrian and Egyptian Greeks returning from Greece.[48] One of them turns to his companions and remarks:

> didn't you too feel happier
> the further we got from Greece?
> What's the point of fooling ourselves?
> That wouldn't be properly Greek, would it?
>
> It's time we admitted the truth:
> we're Greeks also – what else are we?-
> but with Asiatic tastes and feelings,
> tastes and feelings
> sometimes alien to Hellenism.[49]

What this points to is a terrible knot of conflicting sensibilities. A person could feel socially Greek, and yet socially not-Greek, and measure all of that against the intellectual yardstick of Hellenism whose very existence both supposed the achievement of the Greeks and at the same time the radical over-determination of that achievement in Hellenism. There was a very curious paradox at the heart of all of this.

The success of Hellenism – spread like butter across all of the cultures and peoples of the Hellenistic Empire – supposed that Hellenism was not just, or even primarily, the ideology of Greeks. For many of the rulers of the Empire, despite their showy exteriors, and despite attempts to hide it, a bit of Arabia or Media would peep out now and then. In

one of Cavafy's poems, set in the Mesopotamian kingdom of Osroini, the narrator tells us about Remon who has been killed in a tavern fight. Remon's friends, who are mourning him, are a motley crew: "We're a mixture here: Syrians, immigrant Greeks, Armenians, Medes."[50] But when they need a common metaphor for their friend's death, "our thoughts went back to Plato's Charmidis" – the dialogue named after Plato's uncle who was killed in a political fight.

Here we see at work the peculiar relationship between culture and civilisation. Culture is ontogenetic in nature. It spreads through socialisation (one is born into a Jewish or Gentile, Greek or Christian, Slav or Hungarian family), acculturation (confessional or national schooling), and marriage. Civilisation in contrast is dispersed through multinational "empire", the universal knowledge of art and science, and the bonds of love and friendship. Cavafy's poems are filled with the rulers and merchants of multinational empires, with actors and scholars, and with friends and lovers. Civilisation has a curiously dissolving effect on peoples and cultures. Take the case of the Jews. The long-term effect of Hellenisation on Jewish communities was Christianity. Christianity stopped being just a Jewish sect when Hellenised Jews – most notably Paul – began to think of it as a religion for *both* Jews and Gentiles. Places like Antioch and Alexandria – where the fusion of Jew and Gentile took off – were strange inter-mundane places.

It wasn't that they were simply places where different social worlds collided. War is just as likely to be the product of such collisions as anything. Rather their inter-mundane character was Epicurean. It meant that the pleasure of conversation and eating at the same table was also a moral good. Such pleasures induced the need for a religion in which the food taboos of the Jews were set aside. Let us not forget that the Last Supper becomes one of the key scenes of the Christian story. For Jews and Gentiles to share a common table – and friendship – was a version of the Epicurean utopia. In its more sophisticated forms, this utopia extended to all intellectual pleasures, not just those of table talk and companionship. It extended to art and learning and theatre as well. Hellenism's function was not to attack Judaism, but to pose the question of how inter-mundane pleasures could be experienced? This was a very subversive question.[51]

Take the case of poor Ianthis. He really wanted to do right by his heritage and the synagogue:

"My most valuable days are those
when I give up the pursuit of sensuous beauty,
when I desert the elegant and severe cult of Hellenism,
with its over-riding devotion
to perfectly shaped, corruptible white limbs,

and become the man I would want to remain forever:
son of the Jews, the holy Jews."
…
But he didn't remain anything of the kind.
The Hedonism and Art of Alexandria
kept him as their dedicated son.[52]

Ianthis' experience was repeated on the scale of the Jewish state. The Asmonaean (Maccabean) monarchs, Alexander and Alexandra Jannaios, may have disliked political subservience to Hellenised monarchs, and were happy to gain equal political status with the Selefkids, but – for all of their agitations for independence – the attractions of Hellenism remained:

Good Jews, pure Jews, devoted Jews above all.
But as circumstances require,
also skilled in speaking Greek,
even on familiar terms with Greeks and Hellenised monarchs –
as equals, though, let that be understood.[53]

Hellenism was inter-mundane. It allowed, indeed encouraged, all sorts of peoples to live in two, or even three, worlds at once. So a group of Egyptians would ask their friend Raphael to write an epitaph in Greek for the poet Ammonis:

Your Greek is always elegant and musical.
But we want all your craftsmanship now.
Our sorrow and our love move into a foreign language.
Pour your Egyptian feeling into the Greek you use.[54]

The inter-mundane power of Hellenism was its sense of structure. It was a power to create elegantly, musically, with impersonal taste and lucidly drawn line. One could live socially as an Egyptian, subject to the statecraft of Byzantium (the poem is set in the period just before the appearance of Islam),[55] and mentally as a Hellene.

Hellenism is an intellectual discipline. It is not acquired naturally, as one acquires a culture growing up as a Syrian, or an Egyptian, or a Greek. It is actually very difficult to fail as a child to acquire the norms and rules of a culture. But Hellenism is a different matter. Aristomenis, in *A Prince From Western Libya*, instinctively knows this.[56] He spent ten days in Alexandria in embarrassed silence:

He bought Greek books,
especially history and philosophy.
Above all he was a man of few words.
It got around that he must be a profound thinker,
and men like that naturally don't speak very much.

He wasn't a profound thinker or anything at all –
just a piddling, laughable man.
He assumed a Greek name, dressed like the Greeks,
learned to behave more or less like a Greek;
and all the time he was terrified he'd spoil
his reasonably good image
by coming out with barbaric howlers in Greek
and the Alexandrians, in their usual way,
would start to make fun of him, vile people that they are.

The Alexandrians sound a bit like bad English public school masters testing their charges. There is an element of cruelty, and haughty superiority, in their attitude. The prince says only a few words, because he does not want to be shown up for his poor pronunciation and syntax. But, from this account, it is evident that even more foolish than the Libyan are the Alexandrians who cannot clearly distinguish between cultural norm and universal intellect. Thus the prince is at risk of being ridiculed because of the way he sounds, rather than because his expression lacks the syntactical discipline for the kind of thought that eventually leads to history and philosophy. The Alexandrine sophisticates are fooled by cultural appearances. They confuse "Greekness" and Hellenism.

UNIVERSALITY AND EXHAUSTION

Cavafy was at great pains to describe just how politically complicated Hellenisation was. In the voice of a politick official, he recounts the subtleties of inscribing coinage in some formerly barbarian kingdom in the east of the Roman Empire. This official wants to avoid censure by the Roman proconsul but at the same time wants to invoke Hellenic themes and assert a certain spiritual independence by claiming the mantle of "philhellene". So he cautions:

Now don't try to be clever
with your "where are the Greeks?" and "what Hellenism

here behind Zagros, out beyond Phraata?"
Since so many others more barbarian than ourselves
choose to inscribe it, we'll inscribe it too.
And besides, don't forget that sometimes
sophists do come to us from Syria,
and versifiers, and other triflers of that kind.
So we're not, I think, un-Hellenised.[57]

In Cavafy's own empire – the British Empire – Hellenism was similarly a dual force of integration and independence. It both permitted identification with the universality of a littoral empire, but without too-close identification with the state machinery of that empire and its proconsuls. It did not suppose the perpetual revolt of those seeking national authenticity, but neither did it suppose supine abasement. Neither the Romans nor the British were Greek but both owed much directly and indirectly to Hellenism. This was a very handy distinction for anyone wanting to play the centre off against itself.

Of course, this was also a tricky distinction. One had to admit clearly that Hellenism was not a state, but a state of mind – yet, at the same time, that Hellenism possessed a certain power superior to any state. Cavafy understood this awkward paradox in these terms: while the Selefkids might have become servants of Rome – kings turned beggars before the Senate of Rome – beauty remained the unconquerable realm of Hellenism, to which power in the ordinary proconsul sense could be bent.[58] It was a universal power in the sense that it was a power of the Epicurean universe. It was a power of creation. From the swerve of the atom, came collision; from collision came combination; from combination came lattice-like and web-like structures, and from those structures came worlds that began and ended, not least of all the great littoral empires.

While the universalising impulse of Hellenism was a powerful phenomenon, it was also one that could be reversed. Take the case of Orthodox Christianity. "Greek" intellectual leadership of the Orthodox Church gave it a multinational cast, and ensured that it would spread amongst disparate cultures and peoples.[59] "Greek" here meant the "Greek" of Hellenism – something defined not by ethnicity and culture but by the intellectual acquisition of an inter-mundane rationality. Byzantium fostered periods of remarkable intellectual liveliness, represented in figures like Leo the Mathematician, Photios, and Arethas in the ninth century and in the "Macedonian Renaissance" of the tenth century. In the following century of the Byzantine Empire, however, we see Hellenism in decline. It loses the sure sense of itself being a universal intellectual force, and increasingly becomes identified with a culture and a people. Thus it is against this background – of a

palpable and creeping sense of decline – that a Byzantine nobleman in exile in the early eleventh century entertains himself:

> writing six- and eight-line verses,
> to amuse myself poeticising myths
> of Hermes and Apollo and Dionysos,
> or the heroes of Thessaly and the Peloponnese;
> and to compose the most strict iambics,
> such as – if you'll allow me to say so –
> the scholars of Constantinople don't know how to compose.
> It may be just this strictness that provokes their disapproval.[60]

Without the power of inter-mundane composition, almost invisibly the Empire slides downwards into farcical plotting and intrigues.[61] We see the dynamic nature of Hellenism at such times virtually disappear. It is then that the barbarians become a solution:

> Why don't our distinguished orators turn up as usual
> to make their speeches, say what they have to say?
>
> Because the barbarians are coming today
> and they're bored by rhetoric and public speaking.[62]

If the city of ideas becomes tired and exhausted – bored with itself – then the barbarians seem to offer a way out of the pernicious decline. Or at least there seems no point in resisting them.

In the periods of waning, even if resistance does happen, it is often misdirected. When the denizens of cities and regimes based on the city of ideas maintain the power of their intellect and the coolness of their emotional intelligence, they can act with boldness, strength, and resolution. But, if the source of that power and that resolution begins to fade, they think they are fine:

> But when the big crisis comes,
> our boldness and resolution vanish;
> our spirit falters, paralysed,
> and we scurry around the walls
> trying to save ourselves by running away.[63]

Fear is the greatest enemy of states. The fear that paralyses the intellect is the greatest enemy of the inhabitants of the city of ideas in its many variants.

The greatest fear of the denizens of the city of ideas in its twilight is the fear of repetition – the endless return of the same. This is the very eternal return on which the Stoics founded their knowledge. Yet in a decadent world,

> One monotonous day follows another
> identically monotonous. The same things
> will happen to us again and again,
> the same moments come and go.[64]

Under these circumstances, the world starts to look like Epicurus' characterless infinite universe of atoms and void – with its stupefying regularity and the undeviating behaviour of its elements. Monotony is the feeling and the condition that besets the city of ideas in crisis. Plato, in his great vision of the city of ideas, imagined its forms as eternal. But Epicurus knew that no world was forever. All the worlds that the formative power of creation gives shape to are perishable. All that the formative power of ideas can do is to begin its work again. All of the great periods of renaissance – which is also to say, all of the great periods of modernity – suppose something similar, *viz.* that the return of the same or the similar is *not* monotonous. The problem of all regimes modelled on the city of ideas is that they have enormous difficulty over the long term maintaining their interest in ideas.

Ideas are the power to give form. Such powers exhaust those who handle them. They grow listless and bored with them. The worst offenders are always the intellectuals. They are the first to go soft. Why such boredom? Perhaps, like the poet from Edessa, the strain of tussling with ideas eventually wears them out:

> eighty-three poems in all. But so much writing,
> so much versifying, the intense strain
> of phrasing in Greek, has worn the poet out,
> and now everything has gone stale.[65]

Initially audiences – like the *Young Men of Sidon (AD 400)* – will resist the ennui of the literati. They will protest:

> …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.[66]

But eventually the audiences, like the poets, also fall into decline. They become bored and listless, and indifferent.

Staleness is the ultimate price paid for aspiring to live in the city of ideas. (The aspiration, after all, is a kind of *hubris*.) In the end the inhabitants of this city stop bothering with the intense strain of creation – an intense strain brought on by the discipline of the forms that they work with. They stop bothering with phrasing things properly. They lose interest in the structure, the *phusis*, of the phrase. They think that expression – pouting and emoting – will suffice. But then they quickly lose interest in expression – because it is not very interesting to begin with. So they look around in quiet desperation for a solution. Perhaps the barbarians *are* a solution?

Bored with the monotony of their own uninspired efforts at rhetoric and philosophy, the souls of the dying city of ideas begin to shift their intellectual allegiance to the barbarians. In these moments, the inter-mundane world of happy gods, sensual beauty, and devoted friends seems very, very far away.

NOTES

1 He went to Athens in 1901 and 1903 for pleasure, and in 1905 because his brother Alexander was dying of typhoid. Cavafy's friends took him to Athens in 1932 for treatment for throat cancer. On Cavafy's life, see Robert Liddell, *Cavafy: A Critical Biography* (London: Duckworth, 1974). See also "Cavafy's Life" in Artemis Leontis, Lauren E. Talalay, and Keith Taylor (eds) *What These Ithakas Mean: Readings In Cavafy* (Athens: Hellenic Literary and Historical Archive, 2002), pp. 27–41.

2 For a brief overview of internationalist Hellenism in art and philosophy in the twentieth century, see "The Roar of Whispers: Cosmopolitanism and Neohellenism" in *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 15:2 (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), pp. 274–281.

3 Perhaps the most obvious twentieth-century literary figure of comparison would be Derek Walcott whose poetics straddled the Caribbean and the world empires of Britain and the United States. The best point of philosophical comparison would be the Scots-Australian philosopher John Anderson, who commanded Sydney intellectual life from the 1930s through the 1950s. See John Anderson, *Studies in Empirical Philosophy* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1962) and *Art and Reality: John Anderson On Literature and Aesthetics* (eds) Janet Anderson, Graham Cullum, and Kimon Lycos (Sydney: Hale and Iremonger, 1982). Anderson produced a philosophy that might be best described as Syndicalist Marxism meets Stoic-Epicureanism by way of Heraclitus, Trotsky, and James Joyce. He was the Challis Professor of Philosophy at the University of Sydney, 1927–1958.

4   The Cavafy family story is a microcosm of the historical leap that a significant number of elite Greek mercantile families took – across the line that divided the Ottoman and British empires. An ancestor, John Cavafy (1705–1762), had been a governor of Jassy in Moldavia. Constantine's grandfather, another John (1779–1844), was a merchant of substance in Constantinople. These characters belonged to the distinctively Ottoman world of Phanariot families who had gained influence through state service or who else had been crucial for the conduct of Mediterranean and Black Sea trade on behalf of the Ottomans. John's son George, however, took a boundary-crossing step when he went to work for a London firm in 1827, and brought his younger brother Peter John (Cavafy's father) to London in 1836. In 1849, the brothers struck out by themselves, and established a family business. That same year, Peter John returned briefly to Constantinople, and married the daughter (Hariklia, anglicised as Harriet) of a distinguished Phanariot Greek family of Chiot origin involved in the diamond trade. The married pair returned to England and became naturalised British subjects. They lived in Liverpool till 1854 and then moved to Alexandria. There, Peter John established himself as a very successful businessman. His arm of the family firm traded in wheat, cotton, and corn. The firm had offices in Alexandria, London, Liverpool, and Cairo.

Constantine was born in Alexandria in 1863. In 1870, his father died. Peter John had made a lot of money in life and had spent a lot. What remained of the family fortune at the time of Constantine's father's death was squandered in bad speculations, leaving Constantine and his mother in a state of gilded poverty. Hariklia and her sons returned to Liverpool in 1872, and then in 1877 returned to Alexandria.

5   Liddell, *Cavafy*, p. 23.

6   Richard Howard's judgment is unimpeachable: "[Cavafy] is the first Greek poet since Euripides we read with that kind demonic self-recognition." Quoted in Jane Lagoudis Pinchin, *Alexandria Still: Forster, Durrell, and Cavafy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), p. 101.

7   In this vein, in the Introduction to the 1960s edition of his book *Alexandria: A History and a Guide* (New York: Doubleday, 1961), Forster says of the book: "…there are scarcely any national susceptibilities it does not offend. The only locality it shouldn't offend is Alexandria herself, who in the 2,000 years of her life has never taken national susceptibilities too seriously" (p. xvii). On Cavafy's city identifications, see also Peter Murphy, "The City" in Leontis et. al. (eds) *What These Ithakas Mean*, p. 74.

8   As David Jordan puts it, Gibbon's library, a faithful reflection of his interests, contained almost no philosophical works excepting those of antiquity. There was no Descartes, Spinoza, or Kant. The essence of his philosophy was the very Epicurean idea of the mind freed from grovelling or visionary schemes of superstition. In Gibbon's early work, his *Essai*, he observed that the philosophic historian was one who becomes a Greek or Roman, a disciple of Zeno or Epicurus. Gibbon was very much conclusive proof of his own thesis. See David P. Jordan, *Gibbon and his Roman Empire* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971), pp. 78–88.

9   The success of Augustus, who laid the foundations of the Empire, was reflected in the Epicurean-style attitudes of the politically influential Romans of the Italian Peninsula. "The rich and polite Italians, who had almost universally embraced the philosophy of Epicurus, enjoyed… the blessings of ease and tranquility [under Augustus], and suffered not the pleasing dream to be

interrupted by the memory of their old tumultuous freedom." Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ed. Dero A. Saunders (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981 [1952]), p. 86.

10 For a discussion of the influence of Epicurus on Restoration British science and ethics, see Howard Jones, *The Epicurean Tradition* (London: Routledge, 1992), chapter 8 and Richard W.F. Kroll, *The Material Word: Literate Culture in the Restoration and Early Eighteenth Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), chapters 3–5. The epicurean influence remained a force in the nineteenth century, not only in obvious instances like that of Walter Pater, but in the less obvious but more important case of Karl Marx, whose doctoral dissertation was a very sympathetic account of Epicurus' physics, and whose philosophy of history owed much tacitly to Epicurus. For Marx's dissertation writings, see "The Difference Between The Democritean and Epicurean Philosophy of Nature", dissertation, in *Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels*, *Collected Works*, Vol. 1 (New York: International Publishers, 1975) and "Notebooks on Epicurean Philosophy" in *Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, Collected Works*, Vol. 1 (New York: International Publishers, 1975). The master of British Stoicism was Shaftesbury. Shaftesbury represents the Whig middle between the Restoration Epicureanism of John Evelyn and Walter Charleton and the Revolutionary Victorian Epicureanism of Marx. Stoicism, as Shakespeare had already observed in the relationship between the Stoic Brutus and the Epicurean Cassius in *Julius Caesar*, is a necessary political corrective to the anti-political tendencies of Epicureanism. Additionally, Shaftesbury offered a theory of creation resting on rational order and design that was a further necessary corrective to the sometimes too automotive Epicurean theory of creation. See especially Shaftesbury [Anthony Ashley Cooper, Earl of Shaftesbury], *Second Characters, or The Language of Forms* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1914 [1711–1713]).

11 *Those who Fought for the Achaian League* (1922). For this, and all other Cavafy poems cited here, see C.P. Cavafy, *Collected Poems*, trans. Edmund Keeley and Philip Sherrard, ed. George Savidis (London: Chatto and Windus, 1990).

12 In 1890 he was described as being "Greek by birth but an English subject" (Liddell, p. 125).

13 He recognised this about himself. He is reported to have remarked: "I have two capacities: to write Poetry or to write History. I haven't written History, and it's too late now. Now, you'll say, how do I know that I could write History? I feel it. I make the experiment, and I ask myself: 'Cavafy, could you write fiction?' Ten voices cry 'No!' I ask the question again: 'Cavafy, could you write a play?' Twenty-five voices again cry 'No!' Than I ask again: 'Cavafy, could you write History?' A hundred and twenty-five voices tell me 'You could'." Robert Liddell, *Cavafy*, p. 123.

14 I mean this in the same sense that George Santayana nominated Lucretius, Dante, and Goethe as philosophical poets. See Santayana, *Three Philosophical Poets* (Harvard, MA: Harvard University Press, 1910). While Cavafy's poetry is not epic, his imaginative historical terrain is vast. It covers more historical ground – indeed much more ground – than even the immense work of Gibbon.

15 The notion of swerve has strong parallels with the indeterminacy postulate of twentieth-century quantum physics.

16 This notion is still considered good physics today. See Max Tegmark, "Parallel Universes", *Scientific American* Vol. 288, No. 5, May 2003.

17 *The First Step* (1899)

18 François Rabelais, *Garantua and Pantagruel* (London: Everyman's Library, 1929), book 1, Chapter 57. See also Agnes Heller's discussion of this and Renaissance Stoic-Epicureanism in *Renaissance Man* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978 [1967]), Part 2, Chapter 3.

19 Marx makes variations on this statement a number of times in *Capital*. See Karl Marx, *Capital* Vol. 1 (New York: International Publishers, 1967 [1887]), p. 79, and also in Volume Three, pp. 300 and 598.

20 Peter Murphy, "The Ethics of Distance", *Budhi: A Journal of Ideas and Culture* VI: 2/3 (Manila: Ateneo University Office of Research, 2003), pp. 1–24.

21 On the nature of this state type, and its philosophical presuppositions, see Peter Murphy, *Civic Justice: From Greek Antiquity to the Modern World* (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2001).

22 On the significance of this landmass to the politics of the twentieth century, see the work of the founder of the modern discipline of geopolitics, the British liberal imperialist Halford Mackinder, in particular his *Democratic ideals and reality: a study in the politics of reconstruction* (New York: Greenwood, 1981).

23 This is instanced by episodes ranging from the British resistance to Nazism, Atlantic resistance to Soviet and Chinese totalitarianism, and American resistance to Iraqi dictatorship and Iranian theocracy.

24 *The Satrapy* (1910)

25 *Dimaratos* (1921)

26 *The Satrapy* (1910)

27 The Cambridge spy, Guy Burgess, fulminating at the listening devices in his grubby Moscow apartment, sums up both the tragedy and squalidly pathetic nature of this choice when he screams "I *hate* Russia, I simply *loathe* Russia. I'm a Communist, of course, but I'm a British Communist, and I *hate* Russia." (Miranda Carter, *Anthony Blunt: His Lives* [London: Macmillan, 2001], p. 441.)

28 *Things Ended* (1911)

29 According to George Savidis (C.P. Cavafy, *Collected Poems*, p. 128), the protagonist was Mithridatis V Euergetis, King of Pontos. "He was murdered in 120 BC, in his capital, Sinopi, probably by his wife, who disagreed with his expansionist policy."

30 *On The March To Sinopi* (1928)

31 Peter Murphy, *Civic Justice*, Chapters 7 and 8.

32 *Anna Dalassini* (1927)

33 The irony of Hobbes is that he began his public intellectual career in the company of the Neo-Epicurean Newcastle Circle, whose patron was William Cavendish, the Marquis of Newcastle. See Howard Jones, *The Epicurean Tradition*, p. 196.

34 Cavafy first introduces this theme in the poem *In Sparta* (1928).

35 *Come, O King Of The Lacedaimonians* (1929)

36 *In A Large Greek Colony, 200 BC* (1928)

37 *You Didn't Understand* (1928)

38 *Julian at the Mysteries* (1896)

39   *Julian and the Antiochians* (1926)

40   *Julian Seeing Contempt* (1923)

41   *To Antiochos Epiphanis* (1922). If anything, it is this poem – and not *Those who Fought for the Achaian League* (1922) – that is a sly comment on the defeat of the Greeks at the hands of the Turks in 1922, and the final dashing of their pan-nationalist dream of a Byzantium reborn.

42   *On An Italian Shore* (1925)

43   *In A Township of Asia Minor* (1926)

44   *Exiles* (1914)

45   A similar point is made by Cornelius Castoriadis in "Psychoanalysis and Politics", *World in Fragments: Writings on Politics, Society, Psychoanalysis, and the Imagination* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), p. 136.

46   *In The Year 200 B.C.* (1931)

47   *Epitaph of Antiochos, King of Kommagini* (1923)

48   Savidis (ed. *Collected Poems*, p. 191) places the conversation either in the third century B.C.E. or in the second century CE.

49   *Returning From Greece* (1914)

50   *In A Town of Osroini* (1917)

51   On the profound influence of the Stoic idea of spirit or breath on the Jesus story, see John Carroll, *The Western Dreaming* (Sydney: HarperCollins, 2001). On Judean Hellenism, see the comments of Louis Ruprecht in "Jewish History: One, Two, Three", *Thesis Eleven* 53 (London: Sage, 1998), pp. 114–125 and "Why the Greeks?" in Johann P. Arnason and Peter Murphy (eds) *Agon, Logos, Polis: The Greek Achievement and its Aftermath* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2001), p. 36. The modern relationship of Hebraism to Hellenism has been intellectually much more antagonistic and much less world transforming, as Vassilis Lambropoulos relates in his *The Rise of Eurocentrism: Anatomy of Interpretation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993).

52   *Of The Jews* [AD 50] (1919)

53   *Alexander Jannaios and Alexandra* (1929)

54   *For Ammonis, Who Died at 29, in 610* (1917)

55   Alexandria capitulated to the Arabs in 642.

56   *A Prince From Western Libya* (1928)

57   *Philhellene* (1912)

58   On the Selefkids as beggars, see *The Displeasure of Selefkids* (1915)

59   The ultimate consequence was to split Orthodoxy into a series of national churches. On the logic of this nationalisation, see Peter Murphy, "The Seven Pillars of Nationalism", *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 7:3 (North York, Ontario: University of Toronto Press, 2000), pp 369–416.

60   *A Byzantine Nobleman in Exile Composing Verses* (1921)

61   *John Kantakuzinos Triumphs* (1924). According to George Savidis (ed.) *Collected Poems*, p. 182, this poem is set in the year 1347. Despite the fact that the events of the poems are contem-

poraneous with the important Late Byzantine movement of Neoplatonism, which extended through the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, it is notable that this intellectual revitalisation failed to regenerate the Byzantine state. However, it had a major impact on the Florentine Renaissance. On its export to Italy, see Peter Murphy, *Civic Justice*, p. 168.

62 *Waiting For The Barbarians* (1904)

63 *Trojans* (1905)

64 *Monotony* (1908)

65 *That's The Man* (1909)

66 *Young Men of Sidon (AD 400)* (1920)