

C.P. Cavafy in Music

A Recital of Songs and Reflections

Alexandra Gravas

mezzo soprano

—

Pantelis Polychronidis

Pianist

—

Vassilis Lambropoulos

speaker

Presented by the Alexander S. Onassis Foundation (USA) in collaboration with the Programs of Modern Greek Studies at the University of Michigan, Indiana University, Columbia University, Brown University, Yale University and the School of Music in the University of Iowa.

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PROGRAM

Part I

1. Dimitri Mitropoulos (1896-1960): «Έτσι πολύ ατένισα (Pedale a 3 Voci)»

[= I've Gazed so Much]

From the song cycle *14 Inventions* [“Ποιήματα ηδονιστικά»] for voice and piano (composed in 1925, published and premiered in 1927, first recorded in 1992).

2. Manos Hadjidakis (1925-94): «Μέρες του 1903» [= Days of 1903] From the 11-song cycle *Ο Μεγάλος Ερωτικός* [= The Great Erotic] op. 30 for string chamber orchestra, female and male voice, and mixed choir (comp. in NY and Athens; rec. in Athens in 1972).

3. William Bolcom (1938): “The Next Table” [= Το διπλανό τραπέζι]

(tr. Rae Dalven)

From the 7-song cycle *Old Addresses* for baritone and piano (comp. 2001, prem. 2002, not recorded).

4. Ron McFarland (1928): “Windows” [= Τα παράθυρα] (tr. Rae Dalven; reduction by the composer)

1st movement of the String Quartet No. 2 (*Windows*) for strings and soprano, which consists of a suite of 4 songs/movements set to poems by Cavafy (comp. 1985, rec. 1994).

5. Ned Rorem (1923): “Waiting for the Barbarians” [= Περιμένοντας τους βαρβάρους] (tr. by the composer)

From the cycle *Another Sleep* (comp. 2000, prem. 2002, not recorded), which includes 19 songs for medium voice and piano on texts by 14 authors.

This recital was made possible by the generous support of: Onassis Public Benefit Foundation (USA) and the Foundation for Modern Greek Studies.

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Dr. Daniel Mendelsohn for permission to use his translations

Sandra Andrade

Artemis Leontis

Angela Evangelinos

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The Alexander S. Onassis Foundation (USA), in collaboration with the Programs of Modern Greek Studies at the University of Michigan, Indiana University, Columbia University, Brown University, Yale University and the School of Music in the University of Iowa, presents the event "*C.P. Cavafy in Music: A Recital of Songs and Reflections.*"

The event will take place six times on the following days and at the following venues:

April 16, 2012 at 8:00 pm : Stern Auditorium, Museum of Art at the University of Michigan, 525 S. State Street, Ann Arbor.

April 18, 2012 at 7:30 pm: The University Capitol Center Recital Hall at the University of Iowa (on the Lower Level of the Old Capitol Mall), Iowa City.

April 20, 2012 at 8:00pm: The University Club in the Indiana Memorial Union at Indiana University, Bloomington.

April 22, 2012 at 6:00pm: The Italian Academy for Advanced Studies in America (Casa Italiana) at Columbia University, 1161 Amsterdam Avenue, New York.

April 24, 2012 at 6:00pm: The Granoff Center at Brown University, Martinos Auditorium 154 Angle Street, Providence.

April 27, 2012 at 7:00pm: The Whitney Humanities Center at Yale. 53 Wall Street, Room 208. New Haven.

6. **Christian Boissel** (1951): "Alexandrie" [= Φωνές] (1997)

7. **Antiochos Evangelatos** (1903-81): "Φωνές" [= Voices]

From the song cycle "4 τραγούδια επάνω σε ποιήματα του Κ. Π. Καβάφη" [= 4 Songs on Poems by C. P. Cavafy] for voice and piano (comp. 1963, rec. 1998).

8. **Christian Boissel** (1951): "Murailles" [= Τείχη] (1997) (tr. Socrate Zervos & Patricia Portier and the composer)

Both Boisel songs from the 14-movement suite *Adieu Alexandrie* (1998), based on Cavafy's poetry, which premiered in 2000 in Liège and Marseille with alto Nena Venetsanou and countertenor Alain Aubain (not recorded).

Part II

9-11. **David Gompper** (1954): *Shades of Love* (2003) (tr. Keeley/Sherrard and Rae Dalven)

5 Cavafy poems embedded in a cycle of 3 songs for voice and piano:

- 1) "To Call Up the Shades" [= Για να 'ρθουν]
- 2) "I Went /One Night" [= Επήγα/Μια νύχτα]
- 3) "Return/Far Off" [= Επέστρεφε/Μακριά]

In the CD *Shades of Love: Four Cycles to the Poetry of Constantin Cavafy* (2011), which also includes Cavafy cycles by Jeremy Dale Roberts (1934), Katerina Stamatelatos (1951) and Richard Pearson Thomas (1957).

12. **Calliope Tsoupaki** (1963): «Μακριά» [= Far Off] (comp. 1999, prem. 2000)

From *The Face of Love*, a song cycle of 9 Greek songs for alto soprano and piano «on unrequited love» composed for singer Nena Venetsanou and included in her Greek CD *The Face of Love* (2002). This song will be incorporated in a song cycle for tenor and piano of 9 Cavafy love poems which will be premiered by Marcel Beekman.

13. Mikis Theodorakis (1925): «Η πόλις» [= The City] (reduction by Pantelis Polychronidis)

Based on a part of the 3rd movement of his Symphony No. 3 for soprano, choir, and orchestra (completed in 1981, prem. 1982 in Berlin, rec. 1984; song rec. 2003).

14. Dimitris Papadimitriou (1959): «Δυνάμωσις» [= Fortification] (reduction by Pantelis Polychronidis)

First song in the song cycle «Κ. Π. Καβάφης: ... που γι' Αλεξανδρινό γράφει Αλεξανδρινός» [= An Alexandrian Writing on an Alexandrian] which includes 24 pieces (18 songs and 6 instrumental compositions) and has been recorded with orchestra, 8 singers and two narrators (3-record CD 2007).

15. Mimis Plessas (1924): «Κεριά» [= Candles] (comp. 1970s)

For voice and piano.

16. Kostas Rekleitis (1975): “When They Come Alive” [= Όταν διαγείρονται] (2011)

For orchestra, soprano and female choir; piano reduction by the composer.

From Part II of the cantata *Cavafy Cycle* (2012) for symphony orchestra, 40-member mixed choir, 7 solo voices, and 2 narrators, consisting of a total of 27 Cavafy poems set to music, 18 in Greek and 9 in English translations (Keeley/Sherrard).

17. Demosthenes Stephanidis (1957): "*Kavafis im Genaken*", based on "Ithaca" [= Ιθάκη] (2012, world premiere)

For voice and piano.

But Cavafy channeled energy from his family's "fall" into reflections on time's passing. Cavafy's family story does not enter his poetry directly. Instead it appears in his thinking about transition, change, decline, and passage from one world order to another. A book Cavafy read diligently is Edward Gibbons' *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, which he filled with fervent notes of violent disagreement and occasional assent. Here Cavafy reveals the development of his ideas about decline. In published and unpublished manuscripts, too, one finds his highly sophisticated dramatization of historical and imaginary personae facing sudden and disastrous change in various states of preparedness. Cavafy's small world of personal disappointments expands to incorporate a long view of historical upheavals in the Eastern Mediterranean.

The "aged" impressions that entered Cavafy's work most directly and famously come from his nightly escapades. Most Cavafy readers today know that he secretly fled the decency, order, and claustrophobia of life in Alexandria's "good quarter" to enjoy the mess, squalor, and excitement of homosexual encounters in the shops and bars of Alexandria's "bad quarter." Cavafy was careful to keep these and other secrets half-hidden. He did not publish some of his best poems-especially his explicitly homosexual poems-in his lifetime. Partly this was to hide his homosexuality, the "Hidden Things" he referred to in one of many poems he left unpublished and filed with this note: "to be kept but not published." At every turn one sees Cavafy plotting his future by alternately revealing and hiding himself.

In large part, Cavafy's strategy of saving instead of publishing guaranteed surprise, a necessary element of sustained fame. Cavafy understood that a poet's death would transform his name. He wanted to ensure an affirming transformation. In his lifetime he circulated his work only partially, never as a whole. He sent readers hand-sewn printed copies of his poems to friends, acquaintances, and preferred readers. He handpicked his readers-and the list changed with each new mailing, depending on his previous reception. Cavafy's archives reveal quite deliberately and systematically this strategy.

Cavafy left his complete works to posterity to discover, bit by bit. The story of his reception is another important part of his legacy. People's responses to his poetry keep his work alive. This recital explores a variety of musical responses through "The Silken Skilled Transmemberment of Song."

*All Greek texts are from Κ. Π. Καβάφη, *Ποιήματα 1897-1933*, Ίκαρος 1984 and can be found on:

<http://www.kavafis.gr/index.asp>

Artemis Leontis

Associate Professor of Modern Greek
University of Michigan

Who was C. P. Cavafy

C. P. Cavafy (1863-1933) was a Greek of the diaspora. Born to parents from Constantinople, raised for a time in Liverpool and London, Cavafy wrote his finest poetry in Alexandria, his birthplace and the city identified closely with his name. Cavafy possessed a singular voice that resonates even in translation. British contemporary writer E. M. Forster appreciated his original approach. He described Cavafy as standing "at a slight angle to the universe." He introduced the poet's work to T. S. Eliot, T. E. Lawrence, Arnold Toynbee, and others who in turn inspired new readers to discover Cavafy's work. Yet Europe and America did not come to know it until the 1950s. Once his work was translated, Cavafy posthumously emerged as an enormously influential poet.

Cavafy's work has many different threads. One can be found in Cavafy's posthumously published poem, "The Enemies." There Cavafy speaks of poets "who so much transformed past things." In a remarkable commentary on the shaping of taste, fashion, ideas, and literary canons, Cavafy seems to have foreseen the power of future readers to re-evaluate his work, even as he reshaped what he inherited from his precursors. Cavafy was a modern Plutarch, who read not just lives but historical moments past, present, and future in parallel. He understood that hindsight sees clearly history's unforeseen ironic turns, but the same eyes are blind to history's repetitions. He set his art to dramatizing the emotions, desires, and reflections, however grand or mundane, that propel people to act unwisely, then to console themselves by reliving the past as they would have liked to play it out.

Cavafy's sources of inspiration were human dramas that had "aged." It was the effects of time's passage as much as the drama of actual events that interested him. "To me, the immediate impression is never a starting point for work. The impression has got to age, has got to falsify itself with time, without my having to falsify it," Cavafy wrote. He found evidence of "aged" and "falsified" human drama all around him in Alexandria, Egypt, a city that had risen to power and declined more than once in its long history.

Cavafy's sources of "aged" impressions also contain memories from his lifetime. Cavafy's was a rich family of the Greek diaspora with allegedly aristocratic, Byzantine roots. His family's precipitous fall to near poverty, vacillations in the financial fortunes of the once thriving modern Greek colony in Alexandria, and breaks in relations between Muslim and Christian, colonial and colonized populations in Egypt are the contemporary events that shaped the modern end of Cavafy's historical sense. One can follow the dramatic change from the Cavafy family's presence in cosmopolitan upper class London and Constantinopolitan societies to his life as an impoverished civil servant in the British colony of Alexandria.

Performer Biographies



Alexandra Gravvas studied musicology, philosophy and German literature at the University of Frankfurt, voice with the London-based Miss Loh Siew Tuan and has taken master classes with Dame Vera Rosza and Sarah Walker.

Her Greek roots have played a significant part in her career. The performance of Greek contemporary composers form an essential part of her recital programmes, alongside the German, French, Italian and English repertoire. She has premiered works by internationally acclaimed composers like Demosthenes Stephanidis, Mimis Plessas, Alexandros Karozas, Francis James Brown, George Tsontakis, Achim Burg, Harue Kunieda, Constantine Caravassilis, Dante Borsetto, Jonnusuke Yamamoto and Otto Freudenthal.

Her recordings include the symphonic work "Raven" by Mikis Theodorakis with the State Academic Cappella of St. Petersburg, conducted by the composer, *OPERA* by Dante Borsetto, *Hommage a C. Cavafy* and *The Dream of Icarus* by Alexandros Karozas, conducted by Richard Williams, *Das Wort alter Steine* and *Unstete Wege* by Achim Burg, "Bitter Tears" by Demosthenis Stephanidis, which won the Tomos Contemporary Music award in the USA.



Dr. Pantelis Polychronidis is a collaborative pianist, educator and scholar, who performs regularly in both Europe and the US. He is currently on the Piano Faculty at the Institute for the International Education of Students (IES) in Vienna, Austria; a Visiting Scholar at the Modern Greek Program at the University of Michigan; and this term a Martin Luther King, Jr. César Chávez Rosa Parks Visiting Professor, also at Michigan.

He received his Bachelor in Musical Studies from the University of Athens with emphasis on ethnomusicology and historical musicology. He obtained his M.A. in Solo Piano and Collaborative Piano from Bowling Green State University, Ohio. He went on to obtain a Doctorate of Musical Arts (DMA) from the University of Michigan, where he studied with Martin Katz. During his U.S. studies Polychronidis was supported by a Fulbright and an Onassis scholarship. He is completing two Postdoctoral Programs at the University for Music and Performing Arts in Vienna, in Lied accompanying and Chamber music, with Charles Spencer and Roswitha Heintze respectively.

Vassilis Lambropoulos is the C. P. Cavafy Professor of Modern Greek at the University of Michigan, teaching in the Departments of Classical Studies and Comparative Literature. His books are *Literature as National Institution: Studies in the Politics of Modern Greek Criticism* (1988), *The Rise of Eurocentrism: Anatomy of Interpretation* (1993) and *The Tragic Idea* (2006). He has co-edited the volumes *The Text and Its Margins: Post-Structuralist Approaches to Twentieth-Century Greek Literature* (1985) and *Twentieth-Century Literary Theory: An Introductory Anthology* (1987), and a special issue of the journal *October*, "The Humanities as Social Technology" (1990). He is currently writing a book on the idea of revolution in modern tragedy.

1. Έτσι πολύ ατένισα —

Την εμορφιά έτσι πολύ ατένισα,
που πλήρης είναι αυτής η όρασίς μου.

Γραμμές του σώματος. Κόκκινα χείλη. Μέλη ηδονικά.

Μαλλιά σαν από αγάλματα ελληνικά παρμένα·

πάντα έμορφα, κι αχτένιστα σαν είναι,

και πέφτουν, λίγο, επάνω στ' άσπρα μέτωπα.

Πρόσωπα της αγάπης, όπως τάθελεν

η ποίησίς μου μες στες νύχτες της νεότητός μου,

μέσα στες νύχτες μου, κρυφά, συναντημένα

2. Μέρες του 1903

Δεν τα ηύρα πια ξανά — τα τόσο γρήγορα χαμένα

τα ποιητικά τα μάτια, το χλωμό

το πρόσωπο στο νύχτωμα του δρόμου

Δεν τα ηύρα πια — τ' αποκτηθέντα κατά τύχην όλως,

που έτσι εύκολα παραίτησα·

και που κατόπι με αγωνίαν ήθελα.

Τα ποιητικά τα μάτια, το χλωμό το πρόσωπο,

τα χείλη εκείνα δεν τα ηύρα πια.

Πάντα στον νου σου νάχεις την Ιθάκη.

Το φθάσιμον εκεί είν' ο προορισμός σου.

Αλλά μη βιάζεις το ταξίδι διόλου.

Καλλίτερα χρόνια πολλά να διαρκέσει·

και γέρος πια ν' αράξεις στο νησί,

πλούσιος με όσα κέρδισες στον δρόμο,

μη προσδοκώντας πλούτη να σε δώσει η Ιθάκη.

Always in your mind keep Ithaca.

To arrive there is your destiny.

But do not hurry your trip in any way.

Better that it last for many years;

that you drop anchor at the island an old man,

rich with all you've gotten on the way,

not expecting Ithaca to make you rich.

Η Ιθάκη σ' έδωσε τ' ωραίο ταξίδι.

Χωρίς αυτήν δεν θάβγαίνες στον δρόμο.

Άλλα δεν έχει να σε δώσει πια.

Ithaca gave you the beautiful journey;

without her you wouldn't have set upon the road.

But now she has nothing left to give you.

Κι αν πτωχική την βρεις, η Ιθάκη δεν σε γέλασε.

Έτσι σοφός που έγινες, με τόση πείρα,

ήδη θα το κατάλαβες η Ιθάκες τι σημαίνουν.

And if you find her poor, Ithaca didn't deceive
you.

As wise as you will have become, with so much
experience,

you will understand, by then, these Ithacas; what
they mean.

(trans. Daniel Mendelsohn)

17. Ιθάκη

Σα βγεις στον πηγαϊμό για την Ιθάκη,
να εύχεσαι νάναι μακρύς ο δρόμος,
γεμάτος περιπέτειες, γεμάτος γνώσεις.
Τους Λαιστρυγόνες και τους Κύκλωπας,
τον θυμωμένο Ποσειδώνα μη φοβάσαι,
τέτοια στον δρόμο σου ποτέ σου δεν θα βρεις,
αν μόν' η σκέψις σου υψηλή, αν εκλεκτή
συγκίνησις το πνεύμα και το σώμα σου αγγίζει.
Τους Λαιστρυγόνες και τους Κύκλωπας,
τον άγριο Ποσειδώνα δεν θα συναντήσεις,
αν δεν τους κουβανείς μες στην ψυχή σου,
αν η ψυχή σου δεν τους στήνει εμπρός σου.

Να εύχεσαι νάναι μακρύς ο δρόμος.
Πολλά τα καλοκαιρινά πρωιά να είναι
που με τι ευχαρίστησι, με τι χαρά
θα μπαίνεις σε λιμένας πρωτοειδωμένους·
να σταματήσεις σ' εμπορεία Φοινικικά,
και τες καλές πραγμάτειες ν' αποκτήσεις,
σεντέφια και κοράλλια, κεχριμπάρια κ' έβενους,
και ηδονικά μυρωδικά κάθε λογής,
όσο μπορείς πιο άφθονα ηδονικά μυρωδικά·
σε πόλεις Αιγυπτιακές πολλές να πας,
να μάθεις και να μάθεις απ' τους σπουδασμένους.

17. Ithaca

As you set out on the way to Ithaca
hope that the road is a long one,
filled with adventures, filled with discoveries.
The Laestrygonians and the Cyclopes,
Poseidon in his anger: do not fear them,
you won't find such things on your way
so long as your thoughts remain lofty, and a
choice emotion
touches your spirit and your body.
The Laestrygonians and the Cyclopes,
savage Poseidon; you won't encounter them
unless you stow them away inside your soul,
unless your soul sets them up before you.

Hope that the road is a long one.
Many may the summer mornings be
when – with what pleasure, with what joy –
you first put in to harbors new to your eyes;
may you stop at Phoenician trading posts
and there acquire the finest wares:
mother-of-pearl and coral, amber and ebony,
and heady perfumes of every kind:
as many heady perfumes as you can.
Many Egyptian cities may you visit
that you may learn, and go on learning, from
their sages.

1. I've Gazed So Much

At beauty I've gazed so much
that my vision is filled with it.

The body's lines. Red lips. Limbs made for pleasure.

Hair as if it were taken from Greek statues:
always lovely, even when it's uncombed,
and falls, a bit, upon the gleaming brow.

Faces of love, exactly as
my poetry wanted it . . . in the nights of my youth,
secretly encountered in my nights.

(trans. Daniel Mendelsohn)

2. Days of 1903

I never found them, ever again – all so quickly lost . . .
the poetic eyes, the pallid
face . . . in the gloaming of the street. . . .

I've not found them since – things I came to have completely by chance,
things that I let go so easily;
and afterwards, in anguish, wanted back.

The poetic eyes, the pale face,
those lips, I haven't found them since.

(trans. Daniel Mendelsohn)

3. Το Διπλανό Τραπέζι

Θάνατι μόλις είκοσι δυο ετών.
Κι όμως εγώ είμαι βέβαιος που, σχεδόν τα ίσα
χρόνια προτύτερα, το ίδιο σώμα αυτό το απήλαυσα.

Δεν είναι διόλου έξαψις ερωτισμού.
Και μοναχά προ ολίγου μπήκα στο καζίνο·
δεν είχα ούτε ώρα για να πιώ πολύ.
Το ίδιο σώμα εγώ το απήλαυσα.

Κι αν δεν θυμούμαι, πού — ένα ξέχασμά μου δεν σημαίνει.

Α τώρα, να, που κάθησε στο διπλανό τραπέζι
γνωρίζω κάθε κίνησι που κάμνει — κι απ' τα ρούχα κάτω
γυμνά τ' αγαπημένα μέλη ξαναβλέπω.

4. Τα Παράθυρα

Σ' αυτές τες σκοτεινές κάμαρες, που περνώ
μέρες βαρυές, επάνω κάτω τριγυρνώ
για νάβρω τα παράθυρα.— Όταν ανοίξει
ένα παράθυρο θάνατι παρηγορία.—
Μα τα παράθυρα δεν βρίσκονται, ή δεν μπορώ
να τάβρω. Και καλλίτερα ίσως να μην τα βρω.
Ίσως το φως θάνατι μια νέα τυραννία.
Ποιος ξέρει τι καινούρια πράγματα θα δείξει.

15. Candles

The days of the future stand before us
like a row of little lighted candles —
golden, warm, and vibrant little candles.

The days that have gone by remain behind us,
a melancholy line of candles now snuffed out;
the closest still give off their smoke,
cold candles, melted down, bent out of shape.

I don't want to see them; their appearance saddens me,
and I'm saddened, too, to recall their former light.
I look in front of me, at my lighted candles.

I don't want to turn around lest I see and tremble at
how quickly the darkened line is growing longer,
how quickly the snuffed-out candles multiply.

(trans. Daniel Mendelsohn)

16. When They Come Alive

Try to keep them, poet,
those erotic visions of yours,
however few of them there are that can be stilled.
Put them, half-hidden, in your lines.
Try to hold them, poet,
when they come alive in your mind
at night or in the brightness of noon.

(trans. Edmund Keeley and Philip Sherrard)

15. Κεριά

Του μέλλοντος η μέρες στέκοντ' εμπροστά μας
σα μια σειρά κεράκια αναμένα —
χρυσά, ζεστά, και ζωηρά κεράκια.

Η περασμένες μέρες πίσω μένουν,
μια θλιβερή γραμμή κεριών σβυσμένων·
τα πιο κοντά βγάζουν καπνόν ακόμη,
κρύα κεριά, λυωμένα, και κυρτά.

Δεν θέλω να τα βλέπω· με λυπεί η μορφή των,
και με λυπεί το πρώτο φως των να θυμούμαι.
Εμπρός κυττάζω τ' αναμένα μου κεριά.

Δεν θέλω να γυρίσω να μη δω και φρίξω
τι γρήγορα που η σκοτεινή γραμμή μακραίνει,
τι γρήγορα που τα σβυστά κεριά πληθαίνουν.

16. Όταν διαγείρονται

Προσπάθησε να τα φυλάξεις, ποιητή,
όσο κι αν είναι λίγα αυτά που σταματιούνται.
Του ερωτισμού σου τα οράματα.
Βάλ' τα, μισοκρυμένα, μες στες φράσεις σου.
Προσπάθησε να τα κρατήσεις, ποιητή,
όταν διεγείρονται μες στο μυαλό σου,
την νύχτα ή μες στην λάμψη του μεσημεριού.

3. The Next Table

He must be scarcely twenty-two years old.
And yet I am certain that nearly as many
years ago, I enjoyed the very same body.

It isn't at all infatuation of love.

I entered the casino only a little while ago;

I didn't even have time to drink much.

I have enjoyed the same body.

If I can't recall where – one lapse of memory means nothing.

Ah see, now that he is sitting down at the next table

I know every movement he makes – and beneath his clothes,

once more I see the beloved bare limbs.

(trans. Rae Dalven)

4. The Windows

In these darkened rooms, where I spend
oppressive days, I pace to and fro and around,
searching for the windows. – When a window

opens it will be a consolation. –

But the windows are not found, or I cannot
find them. And perhaps it is better I do not find them.

Perhaps the light will be a new tyranny.

Who knows what new things it will show?

(trans. Rae Dalven)

5. Περιμένοντας τους βαρβάρους

Τι περιμένουμε στην αγορά συναθροισμένοι;

Είναι οι βάρβαροι να φθάσουν σήμερα.

Γιατί μέσα στην Σύγκλητο μια τέτοια απραξία;

Τι κάθοντ' οι Σύγκλητικοί και δεν νομοθετούνε;

Γιατί οι βάρβαροι θα φθάσουν σήμερα.

Τι νόμους πια θα κάμουν οι Σύγκλητικοί;

Οι βάρβαροι σαν έλθουν θα νομοθετήσουν.

Γιατί ο αυτοκράτωρ μας τόσο πρωί σηκώθη,

και κάθεται στις πόλεως την πιο μεγάλη πύλη

στον θρόνο επάνω, επίσημος, φορώντας την κορώνα;

Γιατί οι βάρβαροι θα φθάσουν σήμερα.

Κι ο αυτοκράτωρ περιμένει να δεχθεί

τον αρχηγό τους. Μάλιστα ετοίμασε

για να τον δώσει μια περγαμνή. Εκεί

τον έγραψε τίτλους πολλούς κι ονόματα.

Γιατί οι δυο μας ύπατοι κ' οι πραιτορες εβγήκαν

σήμερα με τες κόκκινες, τες κεντημένες τόγες·

γιατί βραχιόλια φόρεσαν με τόσους αμεθύστους,

και δαχτυλίδια με λαμπρά, γυαλιστερά σμαράγδια·

γιατί να πιάσουν σήμερα πολύτιμα μπαστούνια

μ' ασήμια και μαλάματα έκτακτα σκαλιγμένα;

Γιατί οι βάρβαροι θα φθάσουν σήμερα·

και τέτοια πράγματα θαμπώνουν τους βαρβάρους.

Γιατί κ' οι άξιοι ρήτορες δεν έρχονται σαν πάντα

να βγάλουνε τους λόγους τους, να πούνε τα δικά τους;

Γιατί οι βάρβαροι θα φθάσουν σήμερα·

κι αυτοί βαρρούντ' ευφράδειες και δημηγορίες.

Γιατί ν' αρχίσει μονομιάς αυτή η ανησυχία

κ' η σύγχυσις. (Τα πρόσωπα τι σοβαρά που εγίναν).

Γιατί αδειάζουν γρήγορα οι δρόμοι κ' η πλατέες,

κι όλοι γυρνούν στα σπίτια τους πολύ συλλογισμένοι;

Γιατί ενύχτωσε κ' οι βάρβαροι δεν ήλθαν.

Και μερικοί έφθασαν απ' τα σύνορα,

και είπανε πως βάρβαροι πια δεν υπάρχουν.

Και τώρα τι θα γένουμε χωρίς βαρβάρους.

Οι άνθρωποι αυτοί ήσαν μια κάποια λύσις.

11-12. Far Off

I should like to relate this memory . . .

but it is so faded now . . . scarcely anything is left—

because it was long ago, in the years of my early manhood.

A skin as if made of jasmine . . .

that night in August—was it August?—that night . . .

I can just barely remember the eyes; they were, I think, blue . . .

Ah yes, blue; a sapphire blue.

(trans. Rae Dalven)

13. The City

You said I'll go to another land

I'll go to another sea

another city I will find

A city I will find

better than this one....

You will find no new lands

you will find no other seas

the city will follow you....

There is no ship for you

there is no road....

(trans. Mary Kitroeff)

14. Fortification

Whoever desires to fortify his spirit

Let him get out of respect and submission.

Among the laws some he shall keep

But mostly he'll neglect both laws and customs

And out shall he step from inadequate straightness.

Pleasures shall teach him many a thing

Never shall he fear the act of destruction

Half of the house must be demolished

This is how he shall be led in virtue toward wisdom.

(trans. Memas Kolaitis)

11-12. Μακρυά

Θάθελα αυτήν την μνήμη να την πω...
Μα έτσι εσβύσθη πια... σαν τίποτε δεν απομένει —
γιατί μακρυά, στα πρώτα εφηβικά μου χρόνια κείται.

Δέρμα σαν καμωμένο από ιασεμί...
Εκείνη του Αυγούστου — Αύγουστος ήταν; — η βραδυά...
Μόλις θυμούμαι πια τα μάτια· ήσαν, θαρρώ, μαβιά...
Α ναι, μαβιά· ένα σαπφείρινο μαβί.

13. Η Πόλις

Είπες· «Θα πάγω σ' άλλη γη,
θα πάγω σ' άλλη θάλασσα.
Μια πόλις άλλη
θα βρεθεί καλλίτερη από αυτή....

Καινούριους τόπους δεν θα βρεις,
δεν θάβρεις άλλες θάλασσες.
Η πόλις θα σε ακολουθεί....
δεν έχει πλοίο για σε,
δεν έχει οδό....

14. Δυνάμωσις

Όποιος το πνεύμα του ποθεί να δυναμώσει
να βγει απ' το σέβας κι από την υποταγή.
Από τους νόμους μερικούς θα τους φυλάξει,
αλλά το περισσότερο θα παραβαίνει
και νόμους κ' έθιμα κι απ' την παραδεγμένη
και την ανεπαρκούσα ευθύτητα θα βγει.
Από τες ηδονές πολλά θα διδαχθεί.
Την καταστρεπτική δεν θα φοβάται πράξι·
το σπίτι το μισό πρέπει να γκρεμισθεί.
Έτσι θ' αναπτυχθεί ενάρετα στην γνώσι.

5. Waiting for the Barbarians

What are we waiting for, assembled in the public square?

The barbarians are to arrive today.

Why isn't anything happening in the senate?

Why do the senators sit and pass no laws?

Because the barbarians are coming today.

What further laws can the senators pass?

When the barbarians come they will make the laws.

Why did our emperor wake up so early,

and why is he sitting at the city's gate

on the throne, in state, wearing his crown?

Because the barbarians are coming today

and the emperor waits to receive their leader.

He has even prepared a scroll to give him

engraved with titles and names of honor.

Why have our two consuls come out today

in their crimson togas?

Why have they put on bracelets with so many amethysts?

and rings glittering with emeralds,

Why are they carrying costly canes today

beautifully carved in silver and gold?

Because the barbarians are coming today

and such things dazzle the barbarians.

Why don't our worthy orators come forth as usual

to make their speeches, to have their say?

Because the barbarians are coming today

and they get bored with eloquence and public speaking.

Why this sudden unrest, this confusion?

(How solemn people's faces have become.)

Why are the streets and squares clearing so quickly,

everyone going home so lost in thought?

Because night is here and the barbarians have not come.

Some people who have returned from the border

say there are no barbarians anymore.

Now what's to become of us without any barbarians?

Those people were a kind of solution.

(trans. Ned Rorem, copyright 2005 Boosey & Hawkes, Inc.)

6-7. Φωνές

Ιδανικές φωνές κι αγαπημένες
εκείνων που πεθάναν, ή εκείνων που είναι
για μας χαμένοι σαν τους πεθαμένους.

Κάποτε μες στα όνειρά μας ομιλούνε·
κάποτε μες στην σκέψη τες ακούει το μυαλό.

Και με τον ήχο των για μια στιγμή επιστρέφουν
ήχοι από την πρώτη ποίησι της ζωής μας —
σα μουσική, την νύχτα, μακρυνή, που σβύνει.

8. Τείχη

Χωρίς περίσκεψιν, χωρίς λύπην, χωρίς αιδώ
μεγάλα κ' υψηλά τριγύρω μου έκτισαν τείχη.

Και κάθομαι και απελπίζομαι τώρα εδώ.
Άλλο δεν σκέπτομαι: τον νουν μου τρώγει αυτή η τύχη·

διότι πράγματα πολλά έξω να κάμω είχαν.
Α όταν έκτιζαν τα τείχη πώς να μην προσέξω.

Αλλά δεν άκουσα ποτέ κρότον κτιστών ή ήχον.
Ανεπαισθήτως μ' έκλεισαν από τον κόσμο έξω.

One Night

The room was poor and squalid
hidden above the dubious tavern.
From the window you could see the alley
filthy and narrow. From below
came the voices of some workmen
playing cards and carousing.

And there on the much-used, lowly bed
I had the body of love, I had the lips,
The voluptuous and rosy lips of ecstasy—
Rosy lips of such ecstasy, that even now
As I write, after so many years!
In my solitary house, I am drunk again.

(trans. Rae Dalven)

Return

Return often and take me,
beloved sensation, return and take me—
when the memory of the body awakens,
and old desire again runs through the blood;
when the lips and the skin remember,
and the hands feel as if they touch again.

Return often and take me at night,
when the lips and the skin remember . . .

(trans. Rae Dalven)

Μια νύχτα

Η κάμαρα ήταν πτωχική και πρόστυχη,
κρυμμένη επάνω από την ύποπτη ταβέρνα.
Απ' το παράθυρο φαίνονταν το σοκάκι,
το ακάθαρτο και το στενό. Από κάτω
ήρχονταν η φωνές κάτι εργατών
που έπαιζαν χαρτιά και που γλεντούσαν.

Κ' εκεί στο λαϊκό, το ταπεινό κρεββάτι
είχα το σώμα του έρωτος, είχα τα χείλη
τα ηδονικά και ρόδινα της μέθης —
τα ρόδινα μιας τέτοιας μέθης, που και τώρα
που γράφω, έπειτ' από τόσα χρόνια!,
μες στο μονήρες σπίτι μου, μεθώ ξανά.

Επέστρεφε

Επέστρεφε συχνά και παίρνε με,
αγαπημένη αίσθησις επέστρεφε και παίρνε με —
όταν ξυπνά του σώματος η μνήμη,
κ' επιθυμία παληά ξαναπερνά στο αίμα·
όταν τα χείλη και το δέρμα ενθυμούνται,
κ' αισθάνονται τα χέρια σαν ν' αγγίζουν πάλι.

Επέστρεφε συχνά και παίρνε με την νύχτα,
όταν τα χείλη και το δέρμα ενθυμούνται . . .

6-7. Voices

Imagined voices, and beloved too,
of those who died, or of those who are
lost unto us like the dead.

Sometimes in our dreams they speak to us;
sometimes in its thought the mind will hear them.

And with their sound for a moment there return
sounds for the first poetry of our life —
like music, in the night, far off, that fades away.

(trans. Daniel Mendelsohn)

8. Walls

Without pity, without shame, without consideration
they've built around me enormous, towering walls.

And I sit here now in growing desperation.
This fate consumes my mind, I think of nothing else:

because I had so many things to do out there.
O while they built the walls, why did I not look out?

But no noise, no sound from the builders did I hear.
Imperceptibly they shut me off from the world without.

(trans. Daniel Mendelsohn)

Les Murailles

San égard, sans pitié sans honté
Ils ont dressé autour de moi de hautes murailles.
Et maintenant je reste sur place et désespère
Ne pensant plus qu'au sort qui m'accable
J'avais tant a faire au dehors!
Ah! Comment les aije laissé m'emmurez sans y prendre garde.

Pas l'ombre d'un maçon
Pas le moindre bruit
Imperceptiblement, ils m'ont coupe du monde.

(trans. Socrate Zervos & Patricia Portier and the composer)

9-11 Για νάρθουν –

Ένα κερι αρκεί. Το φως του το αμυδρό
αρμόζει πιο καλά, θάναι πιο συμπαθές
σαν έρθουν της Αγάπης, σαν έρθουν η Σκιές.

Ένα κερι αρκεί. Η κάμαρη απόψι
να μη έχει φως πολύ. Μέσα στην ρέμβην όλως
και την υποβολή, και με το λίγο φως —
μέσα στην ρέμβην έτσι θα οραματισθώ
για νάρθουν της Αγάπης, για νάρθουν η Σκιές.

Επήγα

Δεν εδεσμεύθηκα. Τελείως αφέθηκα κ' επήγα.
Στες απολαύσεις, που μισό πραγματικές,
μισό γυρνάμενες μες στο μυαλό μου ήσαν,
επήγα μες στην φωτισμένη νύχτα.
Κ' ήπια από δυνατά κρασιά, καθώς
που πίνουν οι ανδρείοι της ηδονής.



9-11 To Call Up the Shades –

One candle is enough. Its gentle light
will be more suitable, will be more gracious
when the Shades come, the Shades of Love.

One candle is enough. Tonight the room
should not have too much light. In deep reverie,
all receptiveness, and with the gentle light—
in this deep reverie I'll form visions
to call up the Shades, the Shades of Love.

(trans. Edmund Keeley and Philip Sherrard)

I Went

I did not tether myself. I gave in completely and went,
I went into the luminous night,
to those pleasures that were half real,
and half wheeling in my brain.

(trans. Edmund Keeley and Philip Sherrard)