

## Ariadne, Kavafy, me, and Chloé

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On Friday 14 January 1972 I was sitting at my desk in the morning, at the back corner of the classroom, along the window wall, looking out at a few pine trees in the schoolyard. I was fourteen. The private girls' school was a new construction by the sea, on the outskirts of Salonica. During the fifteen-minute break between classes, when only a couple of students, like me, stayed in, I looked out at the clouds, the kind that are high up, as if they are the sky itself, a cold sky, without the drama of the low, ominous clouds of a forthcoming storm, or the relentlessness of a blue sky without clouds. That was a sad sky. And so was I. Sad. Was it because I was a teenage girl (aren't we supposed to be moody at fourteen and feel like something is missing, something has been lost?), or was it because of the sky and the nation that it covered so dutifully that day, a nation under a dictatorship in its fifth year? I didn't care why. I didn't know. I was sad, and I stuck to my self-imposed, "therapeutic" habit of writing down poems I learned by heart, and, that day, like many days, it was from Kavafy: "When suddenly, at midnight, you hear an invisible procession going by with exquisite music, voices, don't mourn your luck that's failing now..." Then I skipped to my favorite part and continued to write: "As one long prepared, and graced with courage, as is right for you who were given this kind of city, go firmly to the window..." Right behind me I suddenly heard a practiced voice pick up the poem and skip to what was probably her favorite part: "Listen... to the exquisite music of that strange procession, and say goodbye to her, to the Alexandria you are losing." I turned around; it was my classmate, Ariadne, looking over my shoulder. We had talked a little bit, here and there, during the past year, but a lifelong friendship began now, the moment we perhaps experienced what George Savidis calls the "Kavafian double," a sense of the political that in dubious times lifts itself up to the historical.

Monday 7 May 2012 is the day after the indecisive Greek election. In the midst of the European financial crisis and the disastrous measures that are shredding the country's social and cultural fabric, I am in the process of turning in grades for the spring semester and packing for my usual trip from Boston to Salonica. That afternoon, Ariadne's daughter, Chloé, a bright and very funny young woman, a university graduate in industrial design, unemployed, and living in Salonica with her boyfriend, emails me, quite unexpectedly, a few lines from "Waiting for the Barbarians": "What are we waiting for, assembled at the forum? The barbarians are due here today. Why isn't anything happening in the senate?... Because the barbarians are coming today. What laws can the senators make now?" I email her back, "Did your mom tell you about 'The God Abandons Antony?'" "You mean how you two met at school?" she writes back. "Yes!" I reply. She emails me back a smiley face. I write back, "What's the weather like in Salonica today?" "Sunny and humid," she says. "OK, say hi to your mom, my darling. I'll see you both when I get there Thursday."

Note: the translations of Kavafy's poems into English are by Edmund Keeley and Philip Sherrard, 1975.