

John F. Korachis
John F. Korachis & Associates, PLC
Detroit, Michigan

letter to Cavafy

January 28, 2013

Honorable Constantine Cavafy
10 Rue Lepsius
Alexandria, Egypt

Dear Sir,

In this anniversary year of your birth, I wish to express my gratitude for the profound contributions you have made to Modern Greek literature and for all the mysteries, wondrous adventures and historical ironies I have discovered through your astonishing poetry.

I was first introduced to your writings during my university sophomore year when my history professor assigned as reading material several early to mid-twentieth century novels as substitute for the traditional history textbook. Fortunately for me, one of the reading assignments was Lawrence Durrell's "Justine," in which you, Mr. Cavafy, became the philosophical and intellectual oracle of your Alexandria. It was also the impetus for my lifelong pilgrimage in Modern Greek studies.

Right after my "Justine" infatuation, I found myself pursuing a quest to discover WHO exactly is this Alexandrian luminary named "Constantine Cavafy"? I began reading your biographies and the translations of your poetry by Friar, Keely, Sherrard and others.

Due to the obvious restrictions of time and space imposed by this correspondence, I would like to share with you my youthful impressions of the first four poems of yours which I read on my own since my community at that time did not have the benefit of a Modern Greek studies program. Even to someone of my youthful experience, your poetry revealed subject matters containing universal themes of great significance. Of course, as a young college student during the late '60s, early '70s, I was genuinely thrilled as I began to discover that the social, historical and political reflections in your poems transcended time and reverberated throughout our contemporary culture.

In "Walls" you gave me the opportunity to seriously examine for the first time whether alienation was fundamentally a concept of self exile. Similarly, after reading "The City", I began to consider how an individual might be deeply conflicted between his own values and beliefs and those of the social order and values of the greater society.

In the poem "Waiting For The Barbarians" written in 1904, I was amazed by its political cynicism which conveys a modern understanding of why an arrogant and powerful nation - that apparently has become morally corrupt - would place its leader and senators, dressed in magnificent uniforms and dazzling jewelry, at the gate of its capitol and then voluntarily turn over the keys of the city to certain unidentified barbarians. Later on I discovered that through your serious study of history you came to understand how the anticipated arrival of these barbarians may possibly provide some kind of solution for an inevitably declining empire.

Without diminishing the significance of your poem, I must also confess that your "Ithaca" gave me the opportunity to take a closer look at Homer's "Odyssey". I resolved that these two works collectively, permitted me to create a constructive marriage between them so I could embark on a more spiritual journey for the future.

Before closing this letter I would be remiss if I did not share with you one personal experience. During a visit to Athens in the mid 1980's, a time when I was seriously studying your poetry, I had an opportunity to ask Kimon Friar how he would evaluate his translations of your Greek poetry into English. He replied that at best only 30% of the literary expression and the originality of your content (and context) could be translated into English due to the richness of the Greek language, its sounds and rhyme. Personally, I will continue to be stimulated and enriched by your poetry and whether I read it in Greek and/or English I shall continue to give great praise to all your brilliant and dedicated translators - for without them I may not have found you.

Please permit me to reiterate that your literary work has had a deep impact upon me. It is so much so, that from the time I began to read your poetry, the intellectual, emotional and political experiences of my everyday life have been greatly affected ... and with added meaning and perspective.

There are so many more things I would like to say, but they must wait for another occasion.

With all my respect and gratitude,

John F. Korachis
Detroit, Michigan, USA