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Subverting Preconceived Notions

I was first acquainted with Cavafy's work during my teenage years. I loved the scenes he was creating, nostalgic glimpses of another, distant time that he was making relevant to me, seemingly in tune with the ethnocentric orientation of the educational curriculum in my Motherland. However it was later in life when Cavafy's true genius became apparent to me; and this not so much because of the maturity associated with the process of growing old but rather due to travelling, wandering and living "abroad". I was then able to discern previously hidden (to me) layers in his work. Cavafy demonstrates what Hellenicity truly is, namely, not an ethnic badge (a testimony of belonging to a people) but rather a channel to a "way" that is inherently universal, linked with the human condition.

His writings combine a subtle cosmopolitan tone with underlayers of Dionysian pathos; his choice of imagery is misleadingly familiar. Cavafy uses images with a preconceived association/contextualisation in order to tell another story or to shed light to different aspects of an existing one, and in doing so to effect deconstruction in the most subversive of ways. One of my favourite poems is "The Horses of Achilles". The title is glorious and the expectation surely is for an illustrious corresponding content, a paean to Achilles' glory perhaps. At that point Cavafy as a master stone mason removes the keystone and the glorious façade slowly crumbles revealing an unexpected snapshot of the abyss; this is not a tribute to Achilles' deeds or glorious death but a menacing reminder of our own mortality "...pathetic creatures of the moment, toys of fate".

If I could name the first words/notions that come to mind when I read Cavafy these would be without any doubt:
compass, nostalgia, amber, saudade...