

2.1 A Poet recollected while Flying (1984)

Hey! Kavaphis!
The thing that I admire
is how you range and wheel (as I do now)
high in the bright Aegean air -
contemptuous of time,
adroit scavenger of decomposed cities,
with a raptor's eye
for private acts of grace,
a petty Seleucid's despair,
for Caesar's inner prudence,
and how, one bitter Alexandrian night,
there rose to Antony's turmoiled ear
the phantom sounds of pipe and drum,
the music of a vanished god
which signified to him the end
of all his more impetuous years.

Standing at your elbow now
I watch the gilded pageant run –
immortal kings, forgotten satraps, all alike:
I marvel at the quickness of your eye
expert in irony, its charity imbued
with something more - this constant
reconciling of unbridled blood
with your ascetic heart.

And now today, what would you say
you erudite old goat
at my preoccupation with
a certain room, the blend
of darkness with erotic forms
which hang before my eye,
as I watch the burnished Adriatic sea
erode the dark Italian shore?
Would such indulgence in 'habitual
love' have so disgusted you?
or does your tolerant eye allow
a flicker of the heart for
the royal curve of widowed Anna's breast
or the gust of Salome's inchoate desire?

Out of Cairo - April 1984