



C. P. Cavafy:

1975

Collected Poems

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Translated from

the Greek by

Edmund Keeley and

Philip Sherrard

The ancient city of Alexandria, Egypt, gave rise to one of the great modern poets, C. P. Cavafy (1863–1933). Generally recognized as the most original and influential Greek poet of the twentieth century, Cavafy lived not in

Greece but in Alexandria, and briefly in London and Constantinople. His poetic talent flourished especially in the dynamic Mediterranean culture of Alexandria, and, in many poems, he gave a direct and personal voice to its homosexual subculture. His exceptional mythmaking powers have carried his reputation into the twenty-first century.

Included in Princeton's Modern Greek Studies series, the Keeley/Sherrard translation represents Cavafy's "canon" of 174 poems, plus 21 poems unpublished during his lifetime. James Merrill, writing in the *New York Review of Books*, praised this volume as "the best [English version] we are likely to see for some time." Thirty years later, it remains the standard translation.

The poem "Ithaka" came to national prominence in 1994. Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis counted it among her favorites and requested that it be read at her funeral. The *New York Times* reprinted the poem, which led to new printings and a spate of new Cavafy translations.

From "Ithaka"

Keep Ithaka always in your mind.
Arriving there is what you're destined for.
But don't hurry the journey at all.
Better if it lasts for years,

so you're old by the time you reach the island,
wealthy with all you've gained on the way,
not expecting Ithaka to make you rich.

Ithaka gave you the marvelous journey.
Without her you wouldn't have set out.
She has nothing left to give you now.

And if you find her poor, Ithaka won't have fooled you.
Wise as you will have become, so full of experience,
you'll have understood by then what these Ithakas mean.