

Alienation is unpredictable. It can fuel revolutionary fire. It can ossify into feckless irritation. It can crystallise into benign indifference. It can dampen all fervour and leave only the dead embers of resignation in its wake. The French, looking down from something like the civilisational heavens, aphoristically distil alienation into benign indifference and claim it as their own. They are the aphoristic comics of repetition in difference: *Plus ça change*, they say, *plus ça reste la même chose*. The general run of Americans, pragmatic utopians who cannot face the tragic even to reject it, simply don't acknowledge the existence of such unqualified impasses. All they'll admit is that "some things never change." Aphoristically at least, the Greeks and any number of Athenians among them have yet a third stance, considerably less general and less indifferent than that of the French and at once less pragmatic and utopian than that of the Americans. *Edho einai Valkania*, so the saying goes, *dhen einai paixe-yelase*. I'll somewhat freely translate: "It's the Balkans here, not a cakewalk." It's a wry little idiom, but it stops short of being merely amusing. Its irony has something more vicious than a merely comic bite. It evokes *agon*, struggle; it evokes repetition in difference. As Sarah Green argues in her splendid *Notes from the Margins*, it evokes all the metrics of the experiential geography of the marginal in modernity.⁸ Approached from without, that geography yields both the cartography and the master trope of the fractured, impassable, uncooperative, unproductive, self-repeating, self-defeating hinterlands that one or another modern civilizing mission must either tame or keep ever at bay. Examined from within, it resolves into a hyperreal terrain of fractal patterns that vary in substance even as they endlessly repeat the same form and so reproduce themselves as the very hinterlands that the intrinsic restrictions of every modern civilizing mission would always have them remain. And what of the actual denizens of these appointed preserves of marginality? They hope for better from one another. Yet, they see their hopes all too often thwarted. They expect better of themselves. But they also recognise the foolishness of taking the high road only to tread it alone. So matters devolve into joining – and why not? – those whom one cannot beat. The question with which I'll close is that of whether the Athenian negative does not all too often devolve into much the same thing.

⁸ I had the opportunity to review Dr. Green's manuscript, now published as *Notes from the Balkans locating marginality and ambiguity on the Greek-Albanian border* (Princeton, NJ; Oxford, Eng.: Princeton University Press, 2005).

On Cavafean Irony and the Elusive 'Wholeness'

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*Irony is to know that islands are not continents and lakes
are not oceans...*

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I

Irony has arguably been regarded as one of the pivotal characteristics of Cavafy's poetics, a distinguishing feature of the poet's personal style, tone of voice and choice of language.¹ Despite the general consensus regarding the determining role of irony in Cavafy's work, critical approaches to the issue are diverse, reflecting each critic's point of view and interpretative approach. Vagenas, for example, argues that the function of irony in Cavafy's work is to convey emotion. "In my opinion" he writes,

the only way language in poetry can communicate emotion, when it does not have an adequate degree of sensuality, is through an adequate degree of emotion.... Irony drags out emotion by means of a vacuum because it functions through an apparent absence – that is, through the action of thoughts and feelings which are suggested or left incomplete.

According to Vagenas, the distinctiveness of Cavafean irony lies with the unique "integration of verbal and situational irony".²

¹ For a synopsis of critical approaches and the basic typology of Cavafean irony see βλ. Κ. Κοστίου, «Ακόμη Λίγα για την Ειρωνεία του Κ. Π. Καβάφη», in *Η Ποίηση των Κράματος*, (Μ. Πιερίδης επ.), Ηράκλειο Πανεπιστημιακές Εκδόσεις Κρήτης, 2000, σ. 227-244.

² N. Vagenas, "The Language of Irony (Towards a Definition of the Poetry of Cavafy)", *The Mind and Art of C P Cavafy. Essays on his Life and Work* (Athens: Denise Harvey & Company, 1983), p.109 and p. 108 respectively. The strong Seferean influence on Vagenas' perspective seems to have restricted the scope of Vagenas' study. A considerable difference exists between the question: "How is it possible for someone to write poetry with the means of literature?" and 'convey emotion' with a language that is not 'emotional'; and the question: "How does irony function in Cavafy?" The first question definitely leads to Cavafy through Seferis, while the second one is more likely to lead to Cavafy through Cavafy.

Anthony Dracopoulos, "On Cavafean Irony and the Elusive 'Wholeness'",
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(Australia and New Zealand), 2006: 191-201.

Elaborating on Vagenas' work, Beaton, and later Robinson, regard irony as a method through which the poet, primarily in his mature period, avoids drawing any conclusions and as a result relativises and problematises human values, opinions and judgements. Beaton, in particular, argues that Cavafy

... came more and more to avoid a 'conclusion' in his poems, through his development of ironic juxtaposition. It is probably fair to say that there is no other hidden meaning or 'myth' in Cavafy's poetry than this – the creation of a world of shifting relativities, and the courageous refusal (not without his humor also) to place himself or his perceptions beyond his reach.³

Beyond these indicative differences regarding the function of irony, it is generally accepted that Cavafean irony can be categorised into two basic periods. In his early work, irony is based on a simple contrast between a historical character's view of the world, or perception of a certain incident, and the advent of an event which either undermines or destroys the character's initial opinion, understanding or belief system. In this instance, the *ironic distance* between illusion and historical reality, between what the hero believes and what is, is to some extent measurable, because historical reality is presented as fact. In Cavafy's mature work, irony becomes more compound and complex. The poet presents two or three perceptions of a given reality and during the course of the poem, proceeds to undermine each one. The immediate consequence of this technique is that beyond the factual context of the poem – time, place, and so on – there is no stable point of reference, thus making it difficult to determine the poet's intention, and by extension, the poetic meaning.⁴

Why does Cavafy use irony? What does he want to achieve? What is its role in our reading of his poetry? This paper will explore these questions through an analysis of Cavafy's *Prince from Western Libya*. But firstly, what is irony? According to D. C. Muecke, irony is a

double-layered or two-storey phenomenon. At the lower level, is the situation either as it appears to the victim of irony (where there is a victim) or as it is deceptively

³ R. Beaton, "C. P. Cavafy: Irony and Hellenism", *Slavonic and Eastern European Review*, vol. 59, no. 4 (Oct. 1981), p. 519. Similarly, Christopher Robinson argues that Cavafy, with the use of irony, produces "a series of artistic variations on the problem of the instability of human values and judgments".

Christopher Robinson, *C P Cavafy* (Bristol: Bristol Classical Press, 1988), p. 30.

⁴ See Robinson, *Cavafy*, pp. 11-21 and K. Κωστίου, *op cit*, pp. 227-244.

presented by the ironist (where there is an ironist)... At the upper level is the situation as it appears to the observer or the ironist. The upper level need not be presented by the ironist; it need only be evoked by him or be present in the mind of the observer.⁵

Irony is undoubtedly an indirect means of expression, where what is presented differs to what is implied or intended. Characteristic features of this figure of speech are the refusal to declare something as it truly is resulting in discord between what appears and what exists, as well as discord between expectation and outcome. The most usual manifestations of these antitheses appear when: a) a tension is identified between a specific group of words and another meaning which is possibly situated in the words themselves or the context of these words (verbal irony), b) the reader has access to information that two or more characters of a story do not (dramatic irony), and c) both the reader and the main characters do not have access to 'snippets' of information which are determinative to the evolution of the story (situational irony).⁶

II

*A Prince from Western Libya*⁷ is about the impressions made by an African prince, *Aristomenis*, on the residents of Alexandrians during his ten day visit to that city. At first glance, *Aristomenis* appears to have made a favourable impression. He was admired for his exceptional familiarity with Hellenic ways – his dress, his manner, his learning all reflected Greek values:

Άρεσε γενικώς στην Αλεξάνδρεια,
Τες δέκα μέρες που διέμεινεν αυτού,
Ο ηγεμών εκ Δυτικής Λιβύης

⁵ D. C. Muecke, *The Compass of Irony* (London and New York: Methuen, 1980), p. 19.

⁶ For irony, see also: E. Behler, *Irony and the Discourse of Modernity*, (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1990); J. A. Dane, *The Critical Mythology of Irony* (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 1991); L. Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge The Theory and Politics of Irony* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994); M. Finlay, *The Romantic Irony of Semiotics Friedrich Schlegel and the Crisis of Representation* (Amsterdam, Berlin, New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1988); D. C. Muecke, *Irony and the Ironic* (London and New York: Methuen, 1982); V. Jankelevitch, *Η Ειρωνεία*, Αθήνα: Πλέθρον, 1997; S. Kierkegaard, S. Kierkegaard, *Η Έννοια της Ειρωνείας*, Αθήνα: Αναγνωστίδης, χ.χ., Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983) and "The Concept of Irony", in *Aesthetic Ideology* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), pp. 163-184

⁷ I am using the following edition and translation of C.P. Cavafy's poems: Κ. Π. Καβάφης, *Άπαντα Ποητικά*, Αθήνα: Ύψιλον, 1999, p. 155 and C. P. Cavafy, *Collected Poems*, trans. E. Keeley and P. Sherrard (London: The Hogarth Press, 1975), p. 114.

Αριστομένης, υιός του Μενελάου
Ὡς τ' ὄνομά του, κ' ἡ περιβολή, κοσμίως, ἐλληνική.
Δέχονταν εὐχαρίστως τες τιμές, ἀλλὰ
δεν τες ἐπεζητούσεν ἦταν μετριόφρων.
Ἀγόραζε βιβλία ἐλληνικά
ιδίως ἱστορικά καὶ φιλοσοφικά.
Προ πάντων δε ἄθρῳπος λιγομίλητος.
Θάταν βαθύς στες σκέψεις διεδίετο,
κ' οἱ τέτοιοι τόχουν φυσικό νὰ μὴ μιλοῦν πολλὰ. (σ. 173)

*Aristomenis, son of Menelaos,
the Prince from Western Libya,
was generally liked in Alexandria
during the ten days he spent there.
In keeping with his name, his dress was also suitably Greek.
He received honours gladly,
but he didn't solicit them; he was unassuming.
He bought Greek books,
especially history and philosophy.
Above all he was a man of few words.
It got around that he must be a profound thinker
and men like that naturally don't speak very much.*

However, this image of a man who has 'organically' assimilated the Hellenic way of life is slowly and comprehensively undermined. The narrator, with the self-confidence of a person who truly knows the real Prince, refutes every piece of evidence which gives one the impression that the Prince was indeed what he appeared to be. There was something in his appearance and behaviour, which portrayed a different dimension:

Μῆτε βαθύς στες σκέψεις ἦταν, μῆτε τίποτε.
Ἐνας τυχαῖος, ἀστεῖος ἄνθρωπος.
Πῆρε ὄνομα ἐλληνικό, ντύθηκε σαν τοὺς Ἕλληνας,
ἐμαθ' ἐπάνω, κάτω σαν τοὺς Ἕλληνας νὰ φέρεται
κ' ἔτρεμεν ἡ ψυχὴ τοῦ μὴ τυχόν
χαλάσει τὴν καλοῦτσικιν ἐντύπωσι
μιλώντας με βαρβαρισμούς δεινούς τα ἐλληνικά,
κ' οἱ Ἀλεξανδρινοὶ τὸν πάρχουν στο ψιλό,
ὡς εἶναι τὸ συνήθειό τους, οἱ ἀπαῖσιοι. (σ. 173)

*He wasn't a profound thinker or anything at all —
just a piddling, laughable man.*

*He assumed a Greek name, dressed like the Greeks,
learned to behave more or less like a Greek;
and all the time he was terrified he'd spoil
his reasonably good image
by coming out with barbaric howlers in Greek
and the Alexandrians, in their usual way,
would start to make fun of him, vile people that they are.*

Even his name, Aristomenis, son of Menelaos, may also be a clue to the prince's lack of finesse and style. As Robinson observes, "not only is this a quite disconcerting name for an African ruler, it is also a very disconcerting pair of names. Both Aristomenis and Menelaos were classical heroes. But whereas the latter was king of Sparta, the former was a hero of the second Messinian war against Sparta."⁸ Had the poem ended here, the aim of irony would have been analogous to the allegorical Platonic Cave, where appearance does not correlate with reality. It could have possibly been considered as a poem with didactic content. However this is not the case. There is another short stanza which directs our attention to Aristomenis' own perspective, adding one more dimension to the prince:

Γι' αὐτό καὶ περιορίζονταν σε λίγες λέξεις,
προσέχοντας με δέος τες κλίσεις καὶ τὴν προφορὰ
κ' ἐπληττεν οὐκ ὀλίγον ἔχοντας
κουβέντες στοιβαγμένες μέσα τον. (σ. 173)

*This was why he limited himself to a few words,
Terribly careful of his syntax and pronunciation;
And he was driven almost out of his mind, having
So much talk up inside him.*

These last lines create a sense of sympathy even compassion towards the prince.⁹ If, as readers, we adopt his point of view, then the poem is not about pretence, deceit and hypocrisy; but about an individual's struggle to meet the expectations of, and be accepted by, the cultural group he admires. The irony though is that the Prince cannot possibly know if the Alexandrians genuinely believe that he is "suitably Greek" or whether they can see through his façade, or even if their apparent admiration of him is indeed sincere.

The poem, therefore, offers three possibilities as to the prince's hypostasis and in so doing indelibly links the meaning of the poem to this

⁸ Robinson, *Cavafy*, p. 16.

⁹ See also Robinson, *Cavafy*, p. 18.

question. Why else would one present different perceptions of the same object, other than to demonstrate, if not that one of them is correct, or at least that one is far more effective or useful than the rest? The structural foundation of irony also contributes decisively to the link between the protagonist's hypostasis and the poem's broader meaning. Irony, by nature ambiguous or polysemous to its receptors, is additionally distinguished by an intentionality.¹⁰ This structural duplicity – intention and polysemy, being and appearance – is at the core of every irony. Endowed with ambiguity, it is nevertheless targeted towards a specific individual, opinion or situation. To understand its meaning, one must 'unwrap' its ambiguous sheath, thereby transforming its polysemy to 'monosemy'. *A Prince from Western Libya* invites the reader to perform the same task, that is, to 'peel' the ironist's intention, to retrace the track from the ironist to the victim and to discover irony's real objective, which at first glance seems to correspond with the Prince's 'true' hypostasis.

However, is the Prince irony's sole target? To answer this question it is necessary to concentrate on the fundamental ironic moments of the poem. The first appears at the end of the second stanza.¹¹ By drawing the reader's attention to the Alexandrians, the poet constructs a tension between what the Alexandrians thought about themselves and how they confronted the Prince. How is it possible for a foreigner to deceive those who are part of the cultural paradigm he aspires to embrace? How is it possible not to have crossed their minds, if only as a suspicion, that the Prince's appearance hid "just a piddling, laughable man", when they were accustomed to mock those who spoke "Greek with terrible barbarisms"?¹² The juxtaposition between the Alexandrian's version of the Prince and that of the narrator does not only aim to undermine the former version or to criticise the Prince's pretence and hypocrisy, but also serves to mock the Alexandrians themselves. This transposition of the ironic focus from the Prince to the Alexandrians creates a climate of uncertainty for irony's ulterior motive. If its target is not simply the Prince but the Alexandrians as well, then the poem's meaning isn't only about hypocrisy and pretence but about the arrogance of a supposedly superior cultural group.

This intermediary ironic moment is particularly significant because it moderates the narrator's exposure of the Prince and prepares the reader for the next stanza which signals another level of tension between what the narrator believes about the Prince and how the Prince views himself. This

¹⁰ Jankelevich, p. 60.

¹¹ "κ' οι Αλεξανδρινοί τον πάρουν στο ψύλό/ως είναι το συνήθειό τους, οι απαίσιοι." ["and the Alexandrians, in their usual way, / would start to make fun of him, vile people that they are."]

¹² See also Robinson, *Cavafy*, p. 17.

represents a situational irony, where the Alexandrians, the narrator, and to a certain extent the reader, lack insight into the Prince's own experience. The last stanza also serves to undermine the narrator's portrayal of the "real" Prince, which, up to that point, was rather convincing. It prompts the reader to question whether the narrator's apparent certainty and self-confidence is a result of his omnipotence or of the fact that the story is simply narrated from his own point of view. This new transposition of irony allows us to view the narrator differently: not as a figure who knows the truth, but as a sceptic or even a cynic who presents something only to place it into doubt. As a result, when the Prince's point of view is taken into consideration, the narrator loses his self-assurance, his presence begins to 'tremble' and his confidence crumbles, turning to yet another point of view. He may have mocked the Alexandrians, because they were deceived, but he himself, without realising, falls victim to a similar irony. Even phrases such as: "all the time he was terrified" or "he was driven almost out of his mind", which to a 'objective' observer express the Prince's feeling of anxiety in his attempt to respond to his cultural role model, are perceived by the narrator as evidence of his views on hypocrisy and deceit. The shifting focus of irony again changes the possible meaning of the poem. At this point, the object is the haughtiness and arrogance of those who not only believe that things are the way they perceive them to be, but also that what they think does indeed constitute reality in its entirety.

III

Each of the three versions claims a true knowledge of the Prince. Each, however, functions to invalidate the cogency of the other: the version of the Alexandrians is undermined ironically by that of the narrator, the narrator's by that of the Prince and the Prince's by both the narrators and the Alexandrians. This cyclical 'mutual-refutation' converts what each perspective presents as 'being' into merely an 'appearance'.¹³ The result is that no perspective survives intact. In fact, the only certainty that flourishes is the absence of the 'whole'. Essence, therefore, remains elusive, leading the reader to other signs, or even to interpretations of signs in a seemingly endless chain of different significations. The reader's quest for the poem's meaning is further complicated by the double irony embodied in the systematic and concurrent refutation of each perspective and its proponent.

¹³ See also Beaton, "Irony and Hellenism", p 519. The tension between 'appearance' and 'reality' permeates many of Cavafy's poems. Characteristic examples of poems which combine this issue with the hypostasis of a specific character are: *Myris Alexandria of 340 A.D.* (pp. 178-80) and *Days of 1896* (p 162).

By so doing, the poet introduces secondary meanings that may relate to the basic question of an individual's hypostasis but also function as an obstacle to the 'peeling' or shedding of the ambiguous sheath of irony. As a result, the reader paradoxically finds him/herself attempting to anchor or immobilise something that the poem systematically and persistently attempts to maintain in constant motion.

In this climate of instability and uncertainty, we can only be certain that Cavafy's rebuttals to what 'appears to be' are not intended to reveal the certainty of 'what is', that is, an absolute truth on the basis of a logical argument or certain "objective factual evidence". Nor is it his intention to elevate us to a privileged position from where we may view, if not the whole truth, at least a better picture of the thing in itself. The poem shapes the expectation of a 'wholeness', which it ultimately fails to deliver. Consistent with his ironic perspective, Cavafy only seemingly equates the poem's meaning with the essence of the Prince. The Prince is the pretext on which both a broader problematic about the object itself and a framework for potential significations are generated. His presence is essential as a perspective. Without him we would be unable to enter the thought process and analysis which the poem admits us to.

These observations should not be taken to mean that for Cavafy the object in itself does not exist or that it exists only as perception. The Prince as the object itself is found there. One sees, or may think that sees it, for an infinitesimal period of time, for a fleeting moment – the moment of ironic cancellation. At this point, it seems to the reader that a blurred picture of the 'real' Prince emerges from the debris. It seems as though the reader approaches, albeit for the briefest period of time, the context of a hinted wholeness. The moment of catastrophe implicitly refers to the thing in itself, because it raises the expectation that, through the refutation of each representation of the 'real', wholeness or essence will be revealed. The 'whole' seems to emerge as a possibility of existence at this very moment. One can virtually see it for as long as it is sufficient to believe that it probably exists. However, prior to becoming aware of its real dimensions, it disintegrates and vanishes. One only gains the impression that it most likely exists without being one or the other, unable to know how and what it is exactly.¹⁴

¹⁴ It is perhaps in relation to this fleeting moment, that G. Seferis, in his influential essay on Cavafy, observes: "Often Cavafy's poems reveal the emotion that we would have felt at the sight of a statue which is no longer there; it was there, there where we once saw it, there in the place from which it has now been removed. But they do reveal the emotion." (G. Seferis, "Cavafy and Eliot – A Comparison", in *The Mind and Art of C.P. Cavafy: Essays on his Life and Work* (Athens: Denise Harvey & Company, 1983), p 77.) This view, as Seferis notes, originates from P. Vlastos, who a few years earlier had noted: "He shows us

Besides this indirect reference to the 'whole', irony has another important function. According to the poem, the only way that we come to know something is always associated with a given point of view and therefore is the result of the interaction between the human intellect and the specific object. However, because what we know is not identical with the object itself, this knowledge will inevitably be deficient and problematic. We may have the conviction (as the Alexandrians or the narrator) that we know the real, but what we truly know is its imperfect mimetic representation. From this perspective, every method of perception resembles a 'perforated net'. Something always escapes. Since our knowledge of things is a knowledge-in-relation-to-us, it is inevitable that it will be entrapped in the realm of the ironic. Cavafy, who seems to be aware of this problem, has no other option than to engraft this problematic in his representation of reality, that is, to represent and simultaneously destabilise different notions of it. In this way, he leads us to what he thinks and not to what he states. This is the possibility offered to him by irony.

While questioning the certainty of meaning, the poet opens, in an unforeseen and unusual way, the perspective of a deeper insight into 'what is'. Cavafy leads us to an understanding of the specific object with the method of inversion, analogous to the irony of the Platonic dialogues. He diverges from a direct confrontation, in order to 'attack' his object in a cyclical motion, attempting to illuminate it from many different and confuting points of view. His gaze 'leaps' from one viewing platform to another, thereby allowing the reader to position oneself at different points of the periphery of an *ellipse*,¹⁵ which are situated closer or further away from the core of meaning, without ever grasping it in its entirety.

Two fundamental choices become available to the reader when moving through the different positions of viewing. The first is a distant panoramic outlook of existing relationships that develop between the given points of view and the object itself. While aware of their limitations, the reader reaps what each point of view has to offer. Although we cannot possibly know the 'whole', we are at least exposed to its various aspects. The second choice relates to adopting one of the possible points of view. However, here as well, the ironic renunciation of the different points of view will not give the reader the illusion of knowing the 'whole'. The poet dissuades the

pedestals [...] but their statues are missing He wants to touch us with the void [.]” Π. Βλαστός, Ο Καβάφης ο Στωϊκός», *Η Ελληνική και Μερικές Άλλες Παράλληλες Διγλωσσίες*, Αθήνα: Εστία, 1934, p 188).

¹⁵ Ellipse: "a plane curve such that the sums of the distances of each to points in its periphery from two fixed points, the foci, are equal. It is a conic section formed by the intersection of a right circular cone by a plane which cuts obliquely the axis and the opposite sides of the cone", *The Macquarie Dictionary* (McMahon's Point, NSW. Macquarie Library, 1995).

reader from doing so by warning him/her that this choice results in the simplistic, one-dimensional perspective that irony attempts to destroy. It is inevitable that every reader's chosen position will lead to another meaning. For this reason, irony may be considered as one, if not the primary, technique to Cavafy's polysemy, which is arguably the greatest asset of his work.

The essential function of Cavafean irony is therefore primarily epistemological, interpretative and not emotional. Every reader's emotional and aesthetic experience will be the result of his/her involvement with the epistemological speculation of Cavafean poetry. At its core lies the suspicion and the potentiality of signification of the ironic method. On one level, the emotive involvement of the reader depends on the point of view s/he adopts and the degree to which s/he identifies with it. Different emotion will result from one's identification with the Prince, the narrator or the Alexandrians. For example, a reader who is or has been a migrant may relate to the Prince's experience in a sympathetic way. On the other hand, a reader, who experiences migration from the perspective of the host culture, could perhaps identify with the narrator or the Alexandrians and, depending on his/her beliefs, could experience a variety of diverse emotions. Emotion will also be different when it stems from a panoramic outlook of the whole problem. On another level, the reader's aesthetic pleasure is proportionate to the interpretational provocation of the poem. The more a poem resists the limits of a specific or single meaning, the greater the reader's satisfaction when s/he successfully reaches his/her own understanding of the poem.

Understanding in relation to Cavafy's work is neither one-dimensional nor anchored in certainty. The poet recognises that, despite the reader's desire for a stable meaning, searching for this will inevitably entrap him/her in the bias of one point of view and a closed system of understanding. The obliqueness of irony allows Cavafy to overcome this danger. This characteristic of irony enables him not only to highlight the elusive nature of 'wholeness', but also to represent its potential significations, while at the same time and as subtly, undermine the concept of dogmatic knowledge. With irony, he resists the arrogance that emanates from assertions of 'absolute meaning', because he knows not to confuse the subjective knowledge of temporality with the thing in itself of eternity. This is why, with every ironic moment, Cavafy leads us to loss, encourages questioning and forces us to think. By cultivating rejection of the 'absoluteness' of an opinion and opening the path of thought and interpretation, he teaches us to grin ironically at the claims of general

validity even when they originate from us. Irony is a necessary deviation from a straight path, keeping us in constant readiness and vigilance for something new. It brings us closer to a different, perhaps more useful, truth, than that of a mono-dimensional worldview, but never truth itself. Yet, it always prompts us further ...

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