

Epicureans and the Ancient Greek Gods (Imagery of "Gods" / "Gods Among Men")

Post by "Elli" of February 13, 2019 at 4:26 PM

Ionic, by C.P. Cavafy

That we've broken their statues,
that we've driven them out of their temples,
doesn't mean at all that the gods are dead.

O land of Ionia, they're still in love with you,
their souls still keep your memory.

When an August dawn wakes over you,
your atmosphere is potent with their life,
and sometimes a young ethereal figure,
indistinct, in rapid flight,
wings across your hills.

The Trojan horse, the deception and the great duplicity of Cavafic irony is: Julian, Emperor of Rome.

For Cavafy, Julian is the one brought up a christian. He is the covert fourth Hierarch. As a child in church he was a reader. As a youth he was a deacon at mass. He was raised in the cloisters, courtyards and cells of priests, monks, ministers and bishops. For years and years his mind was purged by the endless cycle of chanting, praying and leaning over liturgical books. Julian is a theurgic scientist. He is the emperor subservient to the Holy Synod and is responsible for organizing state governance according to the ecclesiastical system of the christians. A shame for his lauded victories in Germany as a young man which were reminiscent of that illustrious Caesar, Germanicus. Who was the ruler of mighty Rome three hundred years before. Julian denounced the Greek Epicurus and Pyrrho the skeptic. And praised the anatolian influences of Pythagoras with his communes, mysticism, belief in reincarnation and his theurgies. The primary deities in his "new religion" were not Zeus and Dionysus but Mithra and the great mother Cybele. For all intents and purposes the man was hazy and confusing. For Cavafy, Julian is the covert fourth Hierarch. The three hierarchs supposedly imbued the church with the hellenic spirit. Julian attempted to imbue hellenism with the spirit of the church. The debilitating

effect is the same. An absurd conjunction so the deception may continue.

It is upon this deception that Cavafy sets up his great engine. A siege engine of such exquisite craftsmanship that far surpassed the capabilities of Demetrius the Besieger for whom the poem King Demetrius was written. A powerful poem like its subject: Death. The design of the engine is such that on the face of it he seems to be ridiculing Julian and the Greeks, while in essence he is waging war against the christians. Cavafy uses the character of Julian to suggest and symbolize the contradictions and bastardization of the modern Greek. Someone who boasts and brags about their hellenism, but who in essence is christian and jewish. For Cavafy understood it deeply that hellenism and christianity are like fire and water.

The entire body of work of Cavafy, as a philosophical treatise, crystallizes into three questions. First, the matter of Theodicy and of Death. In other words, the matter of the tragic fate that awaits every human being in the world. Second, the analysis of both worldviews, the Hellenic and the Jewish. A quick reading, for example, of the poem Of the Jews (50 A.D.) will teach you more about the differences between the two perspectives than you would learn by studying a routine academic treatise 400 pages long. Third and last, his interpretation of the decline and fall of modern civilization, perceived through the kaleidoscope of the decline of the alexandrian and roman years. Cavafy is not a christian. He does not believe in heavenly kingdoms or the kingdoms of ruffians. In the Horses of Achilles, a brilliant and monumental poem about man's woe in front of the eternal calamity of death, he says that the body of Patroclus returned "to the great Nothingness". Which is where you, I, and everyone else will return. And let us not forget that he persistently regarded the "Hellenic" idea as the noblest pursuit and attribute ever achieved by mankind upon the planet. (Dimitris Liantinis, from his book "Gemma")