

CONSTANTINE P.

CAVAFY

A PRESENTATION BY CHRISTOS PAPANIKOLAOU



About Constantine Cavafy

Konstantinos Petrou Kavafis (April 29, 1863 – April 29, 1933) known, especially in English, as **Constantine P. Cavafy**, was a Greek poet, journalist, and civil servant from Alexandria, Egypt. A major figure of Modern Greek literature, he is sometimes considered the most distinguished Greek poet of the 20th century. His works and consciously individual style earned him a place among the most important contributors not only to Greek poetry, but to Western poetry as a whole.

Some of his poems

As much as you can

And if you can't shape your life the way you want,
at least try as much as you can
not to degrade it
by too much contact with the world,
by too much activity and talk.

Try not to degrade it by dragging it along,
taking it around and exposing it so often
to the daily silliness
of social events and parties,
until it comes to seem a boring hanger-on.

“As much as you can” is a poem written in 1913. The poem highlights important themes about life, self-awareness, and the importance of self-realization.

The poet suggests that one should manage his personal life, and have dignity and self-respect. He also proposes a code of behavior in personal and social life, and advises the recipient of the poem to ensure his personal freedom and defend his dignity in social life as much as possible.

Some of his poems

PRAYER

The ocean took a sailor to its bed.

His mother, unaware that he's dead,

lights a tall candle for temperate weather,
for his quick return, that they can be together,

and always to the wind she cocks her ear.

But while she prays, hopeful yet in fear,

the icon of Mary listens, grave and sad,
knowing she'll never see the son she had.

In this poem Kavafis explores the portrayal of loss.

A mother approaches a religious icon, portraying "Our Lady" in order to light a candle and pray for the safety of her son who is out at sea. While the identity of the Lady is not given, the religious connotation and her importance for the mother make it likely that she is Mary, the mother of Jesus.

The icon, though unable to move or speak, is portrayed to have feelings. While she listens to the mother's pleas, giving her hope and strength, she knows that the son is already dead, having drowned at sea. She finally lets the mother leave, hoping and waiting for her son's return.