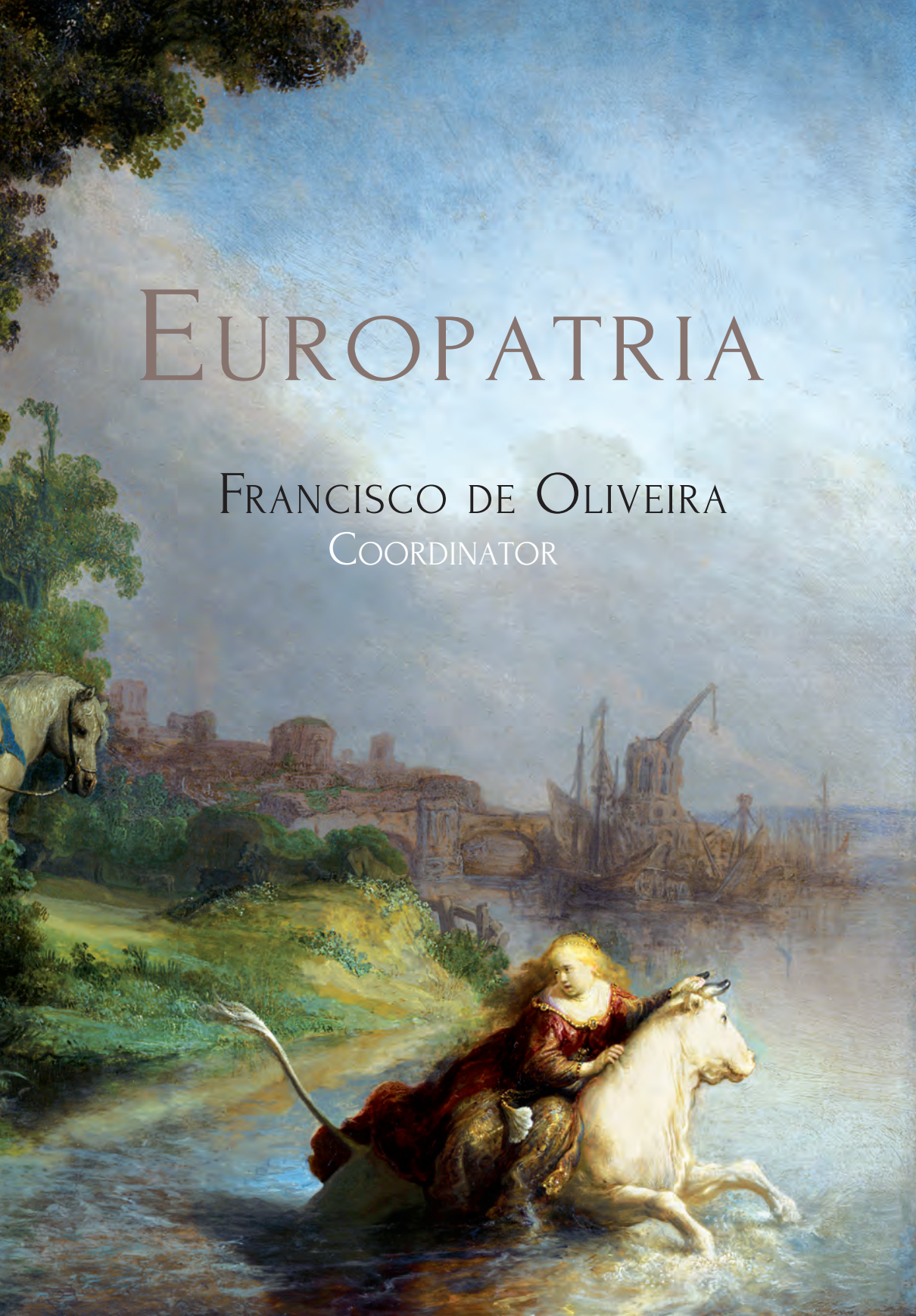


# EUROPATRIA

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## GREECE

### PERCEPTIONS OF GREECE IN THE WORKS OF ROMAN AUTHORS

#### Introduction

The writing of literary history is an activity that goes beyond setting texts in a historical context. Interpretative theories like intertextuality or reception studies have significantly contributed in recent years in order to establish a new definition of literary history of texts. Intertextuality starts a dialogue between the texts of different historical periods and cultural backgrounds in order to trace chains of significance and measure the difference between them. The dialogue between texts presupposes different voices of various origins preserved in the memory of the poets. Reception studies examine any work of literature that stood the test of time and has been appreciated by many later receivers as well as the original public. In order to be able to reconstruct the expectations of the audience for which the texts were composed, we have to be able to identify different functions and meanings between this ancient audience and our expectations and we need to take into consideration the different cultural horizons in which the texts have been received.

The Greek literary tradition resides in authors like Ennius, Plautus or Vergil and it generated the production of Rome literature based upon textual and cultural translation. Roman poets produced national poetry with innovative character but always based on the sophisticated

culture of Hellenism. In order to do that they have used the cultural exchange of linguistic codes, the emphasis on cultural differences and the commitment to innovate. The Augustans establish polemics with the ancients of the Roman tradition who are seen sometimes as lacking the intellectual depth in order to receive and appropriate the ancient Greek heritage. The ambition of originality becomes a genealogical search and indeed many of the texts of Roman literature focus on genealogy and the search for literary and cultural roots. For example, the Augustan poets want to achieve immortality through their works and at the same time to find their origins in the Greek literary tradition.

During the 500 years of creativity and originality in the Greek world (750-250 BC.), there was no literature in the Roman world. The Romans were trying to develop a sense of national identity working out a powerful social and military system. Some of the reasons for the Latin literature not having developed earlier include the easy access for the Romans to Greek performances and the fact that Greek literature must have seemed inimitable to Roman eyes. The expansion of Roman power after 200 BC. and the Roman conquests of northern Italy, southern Spain, mainland Greece and central and north Africa are extraordinary. The early authors learnt Greek and soon they are eager to work on Greek dramatic works and appropriate them into Latin. The comedies of Plautus and Terence are the first complete works of Latin literature to survive. In the same era, Ennius composed the first national epic of Rome in the style and metre of Homer. The creation of such works presupposes the existence of a public. Further territorial expansions into the Greek world in Asia Minor and the Near East have increased the cultural aspirations of the Roman aristocracy. A large number of Greek intellectuals especially philosophers and poets visited Rome and they were eager to share the cultural and intellectual achievements of Greece.

In this article I intend to explore the idea of 'Greece' as a national entity in the work of a few Roman authors and the ways in which the Greek literature has significantly influenced Roman

authors through ages. I also intend to show that such cultural appropriations are still alive and well even nowadays in modern Greece.

My sample cases are selected in order to explore the above idea:

1. in the plot and the mythological background of Greek heroes (like Hercules) presented in Roman comedy which has served as a stimulus for the Romans in order to define themselves and establish their own mythological universe; such mythological annotations are still alive today in the collective national memory of the Greeks and their stories;
2. in the perceptions of heroism and the heroic code existing already in the two megathemes of war and journey and explored by both Greek and Roman epic through the type scenes of the trip to the underworld and the duel of heroes (aristeia-excellence);
3. in the perceptions of the theme of love often explored as weakness and deprivation of senses by the Greek elegists and the Roman love poets;
4. in the expression and the clash of individual values (love, peace, rural life, femininity, etc.) promoted by the Roman love poets against the heroic values of the community (glory, warfare, city life, masculinity) defended by epic;
5. in the intellectual weight of Greek authors (such as Homer) and their reception by the Romans as the burden of the past; this part of my discussion is related to Harold Bloom's theory of the relationship between poets and their predecessors to which he gives the name 'the anxiety of influence'.

Through all those cases I hope to demonstrate the significant influence of perceptions of Greece in Roman literature and at the same time to show how such perceptions have survived time and can be easily identified in modern Greek intellectual and educational environments.

## 1. Plautus' *Amphitruo* and the birth of Hercules



Plautus (Source: See page for author [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons)

Because of the rich Greek tradition of Old and New Comedy, modern Greeks have overlooked Roman Comedy; the works of the Roman comic poets are not regularly performed in Greece nowadays. Most of the theatrical performances in the well established festival of Athens and Epidaurus or in the festival of the Rocks (Φεστιβάλ Βράχων) which take place every summer and the vast majority of theatrical companies which perform ancient drama prefer to present Greek comedy (mainly Aristophanes and sometimes Menander). Greek audiences have familiarised themselves much more with Greek comedy than with Roman. However, Plautus is an exception perhaps because of the close affinity of his works to Menander (half of his works are adaptations to New Greek Comedy) and to Shakespeare and Molière who are popular authors for Greek audiences. For example Plautus' *Amphitruo* has both influenced Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors* and of course Molière's *Amphitryon* and has been performed in Greece many times in the past. A popular scene for the Greek audiences is when Bromia describes to Amphitruo the birth of Hercules and the story of the Greek hero killing the serpents. The story is very popular in Greece especially for young children.



## 1.1 Plautus, *Amphitruo* 1053-1130

**Bromia** Spes atque opes vitae meae iacent sepultae in pectore,  
neque ullast confidentia iam in corde, quin amiserim;  
ita mihi videntur omnia, mare terra caelum, consequi, 1055  
iam ut opprimar, ut enicer. me miseram, quid agam nescio.  
ita tanta mira in aedibus sunt facta. vae miserae mihi,  
animo malest, aquam velim. corrupta sum atque absumpta sum.  
caput dolet, neque audio, nec oculis prospicio satis,  
nec me miserior femina est neque ulla videatur magis. 1060  
ita erae meae hodie contigit. nam ubi parturit, deos sibi invocat,  
strepitus, crepitus, sonitus, tonitrus: ut subito, ut propere, ut valide tonuit!  
ubi quisque institerat, concidit crepitu. ibi nescio quis maxuma  
vóce exclamat: "Alcumena, adest auxilium, ne time:  
et tibi et tuis propitius caeli cultor adventit. 1065  
exurgite" inquit 'qui terrore meo occidistis prae metu.'  
ut iacui, exsurgo. ardere censui aedis, ita tum confulgebant.  
ibi me inclamat Alcumena; iam ea res me horrore adficit,  
erilis praeventit metus: accurro, ut sciscam quid velit.  
atque illam geminos filios pueros peperisse conspikor; 1070  
neque nostrum quisquam sensimus, quom peperit, neque providimus.  
sed quid hoc? quis hic est senex, qui ante aedis nostras sic iacet?  
numnam hunc percussit Iuppiter?  
credo edepol, nam, pro Iuppiter, sepultust quasi sit mortuos.  
ibo et cognoscam, quisquis est. Amphitruo hic quidem est erus meus. 1075  
Amphitruo. **Amphitruo.** Perii. **B.** Surge. **A.** Interii. **B.** Cedo manum. **A.**  
Quis me tenet? **B.** Tua Bromia ancilla. **A.**  
Totus timeo, ita me increpuit Iuppiter.  
nec secus est, quasi si ab Acherunte veniam. sed quid tu foras  
egressa es?  
**B.** Eadem nos formido timidas terrore impulit  
in aedibus, tu ubi habitas. nimia mira vidi. vae mihi, 1080  
Amphitruo, ita mihi animus etiam nunc abest.  
**A.** Agedum expedi:

scin me tuom esse erum Amphitruonem? **B.** Scio. **A.** Vide etiam nunc. **B.** Scio.  
**A.** Haec sola sanam mentem gestat meorum familiarium.  
**B.** Immo omnes sani sunt profecto. **A.** At me uxor insanum facit  
suis foedis factis. **B.** At ego faciam, tu idem ut aliter praedices, 1085  
Amphitruo, piam et pudicam esse tuam uxorem ut scias.  
de ea re signa atque argumenta paucis verbis eloquar.  
omnium primum: Alcumena geminos peperit filios.  
**A.** Ain tu, geminos? **B.** Geminos. **A.** Di me servant. **B.** Sine me dicere,  
ut scias tibi tuaeque uxori deos esse omnis propitios. 1090  
**A.** Loquere. **B.** Postquam parturire hodie uxor ocepit tua,  
ubi utero exorti dolores, ut solent puerperae  
invocat deos immortales, ut sibi auxilium ferant,  
manibus puris, capite operto. ibi continuo contonat  
sonitu maximo; aedes primo ruere rebamur tuas. 1095  
aedes totae confulgebant tuae, quasi essent aureae.  
**A.** Quaeso absolvito hinc me extemplo, quando satis deluseris.  
quid fit deinde?  
**B.** Dum haec aguntur, interea uxorem tuam  
neque gementem neque plorantem nostrum quisquam audivimus;  
ita profecto sine dolore peperit. **A.** Iam istuc gaudeo, 1100  
utut erga me merita est. **B.** Mitte ista atque haec quae dicam accipe.  
postquam peperit, pueros lavere iussit nos. ocepimus.  
sed puer ille quem ego lavi, ut magnus et multum valet!  
neque eum quisquam colligare quivit incunabulis.  
**A.** Nimia mira memoras; si istaec vera sunt, divinitus 1105  
non metuo quin meae uxori latae suppetiae sient.  
**B.** Magis iam faxo mira dices. postquam in cunas conditust,  
devolant angues iubati deorsum in impluvium duo  
maximi: continuo extollunt ambo capita. **A.** Ei mihi.  
**B.** Ne pave. sed angues oculis omnis circumvisere. 1110  
postquam pueros conspicati, pergunt ad cunas citi.  
ego cunas recessim rursus vorsum trahere et ducere,  
metuens pueris, mihi formidans; tantoque angues acrius  
persequi. postquam conspexit angues ille alter puer,

citus e cunis exilit, facit recta in anguis impetum: 1115  
 alterum alteraprehendit eos manu perniciter.  
**A.** Mira memoras, nimis formidolosum facinus praedicas;  
 nam mihi horror membra misero percipit dictis tuis.  
 quid fit deinde? porro loquere. **B.** Puer ambo angues enicat.  
 dum haec aguntur, voce clara exclamat uxorem tuam— 1120  
**A.** Quis homo? **B.** Summus imperator divom atque hominum Iuppiter.  
 is se dixit cum Alcumena clam consuetum cubitibus,  
 eumque filium suom esse qui illos angues vicerit;  
 alterum tuom esse dixit puerum. **A.** Pol me haud paenitet,  
 si licet boni dimidium mihi dividere cum Iove. 1125  
 abi domum, iube vasa pura actutum adornari mihi,  
 ut Iovis supremi multis hostiis pacem expetam.  
 ego Teresiam coniectorem advocabo et consulam  
 quid faciundum censeat; simul hanc rem ut facta est eloquar.  
 sed quid hoc? quam valide tonuit. di, obsecro vostram fidem. 1130

A theatrical performance by the Municipal and Regional Theatre of  
 Northern Greece (ΔΗ.ΠΕ.ΘΕ. Βορείου Ελλάδας) presented in the ancient  
 theatre of Dion has been broadcasted by the state channel ET-1 in 1994  
 and can be found online in the ERT archives: [http://www.ert-archives.  
 gr/V3/public/main/page-assetview.aspx?tid=8490&tsiz=0&act=mMainView](http://www.ert-archives.gr/V3/public/main/page-assetview.aspx?tid=8490&tsiz=0&act=mMainView)  
 (accessed 2 June 2013)

## 2. Aeneas' adventures

The students of Latin in secondary education in Greece have got a  
 first contact with the story of Aeneas and the *Aeneid* when they are 16  
 years old and after they have studied both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*  
 (from translation). They will first encounter the story of Aeneas and Dido  
 in Book 4 together with the story of Romulus and Remus; the students  
 who will follow undergraduate studies in Humanities will either study  
 Aeneas' trip to the underworld (book 6) or the duel between Aeneas and



Turnus (book 12). The reason for which those two episodes are selected is mainly because of their strong links to the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad* respectively which are considered to be for modern Greeks the Bible of the Greek nation.



A 5th-century portrait of Vergil  
from the Vergilius Romanus (source: See page for author [Public domain],  
via Wikimedia Commons)

### 2.1. Aeneas' trip to the Underworld (*The Aeneid* 6.756–823)

In his trip to the underworld, Aeneas meets Anchises and he has a revelation of all these ghosts of Roman heroes waiting to be born. Anchises has been long waiting to show Aeneas the figures of Rome's future so that he might rejoice at the discovery of Italy. And of course Augustus becomes visible next to Romulus something that demonstrates a glorious future to come. So instead of being a historical epic which only looks back at the legendary origins of the Roman race i.e. at the past, the *Aeneid* is a legendary epic that looks forward to the history of Rome i.e. at the future (Vergil's present). So in the *Aeneid* there is heavy awareness of the past and of the relationship of past and future/present something which is not present in Homer. The aim is to create an epic as foundational within Roman culture as the Homeric epics are within Greek.

“Nunc age, Dardanium prolem quae deinde sequatur  
 gloria, qui maneant Itala de gente nepotes,  
 inlustris animas nostrumque in nomen ituras,  
 expediam dictis, et te tua fata docebo.  
 Ille, vides, pura iuvenis qui nititur hasta, 760  
 proxuma sorte tenet lucis loca, primus ad auras  
 aetherias Italo commixtus sanguine surget,  
 silvius, Albanum nomen, tua postuma proles,  
 quem tibi longaevo serum Lavinia coniunx  
 educet silvis regem regumque parentem, 765  
 unde genus Longa nostrum dominabitur Alba.  
 “Proxumus ille Procas, Troianae gloria gentis,  
 et Capys, et Numitor, et qui te nomine reddet  
 Silvius Aeneas, pariter pietate vel armis  
 egregius, si umquam regnandam acceperit Albam. 770  
 Qui iuvenes! Quantas ostentant, aspice, vires,  
 atque umbrata gerunt civili tempora quercu!  
 Hi tibi Nomentum et Gabios urbemque Fidenam,  
 hi Collatinas imponent montibus arces,  
 Pometios Castrumque Inui Bolamque Coramque. 775  
 Haec tum nomina erunt, nunc sunt sine nomine terrae.  
 “Quin et avo comitem sese Mavortius addet  
 Romulus, Assaraci quem sanguinis Ilia mater  
 educet. Viden, ut geminae stant vertice cristae,  
 et pater ipse suo superum iam signat honore? 780  
 En, huius, nate, auspiciis illa incluta Roma  
 imperium terris, animos aequabit Olympo,  
 septemque una sibi muro circumdabit arces,  
 felix prole virum: qualis Berecynthia mater  
 invehitur curru Phrygiarum turrata per urbes, 785  
 laeta deum partu, centum complexa nepotes,  
 omnes caelicolas, omnes supera alta tenentes.  
 “Huc geminas nunc flecte acies, hanc aspice gentem  
 Romanosque tuos. Hic Caesar et omnis Iuli

progenies magnum caeli ventura sub axem. 790  
 Hic vir, hic est, tibi quem promitti saepius audis,  
 Augustus Caesar, Divi genus, aurea condet  
 saecula qui rursus Latio regnata per arva  
 Saturno quondam, super et Garamantas et Indos  
 proferet imperium: iacet extra sidera tellus, 795  
 extra anni solisque vias, ubi caelifer Atlas  
 axem umero torquet stellis ardentibus aptum.  
 Huius in adventum iam nunc et Caspia regna  
 responsis horrent divom et Maeotia tellus,  
 et septemgemini turbant trepida ostia Nili. 800

## 2.2. The duel between Aeneas and Turnus (*The Aeneid* 12.919-952)

In the *Aeneid*, Aeneas is elevated from a secondary character in the *Iliad* to a major character, the main protagonist. Since Vergil claims to be the Roman Homer (in a much stronger way than Ennius) he does not imitate Homer only in terms of structure; there is a reversed sequence of the Homeric poems, the first 6 books of the *Aeneid* are Aeneas' *Odyssey* describing his journey to Italy and the last 6 books of the *Aeneid* are his *Iliad* as he fights a second Trojan War in which he takes the role of Achilles; Turnus (Italian leader) takes the role of Hector. Aeneas' heroic code is modelled upon the main characters of the Homeric epics which is interesting for the Greeks and establishes the impact of the Homeric poems on Roman epic. Greek children are familiar with the Homeric passages praising bravery some of which have become standard phrases in Modern Greek vocabulary and have been used as motto by a number of educational and military institutions (e.g. *Iliad* 6.208: αἰέν ἀριστεύειν – 'ever to excel', *Iliad* 12.243: εἶς οἰωνὸς ἄριστος ἀμύνεσθαι περὶ πάτρης – 'the best goal is defending one's country'). The duel between Aeneas and Turnus reminds of the above heroic ideals and in general of the Homeric heroic code which dictates the revenge of Achilles' best friend, Patroclus. The comparison to the Homeric parallel is interesting because it involves a

very similar end with the killing of Hector but at the same time a very different one since in the *Aeneid* there is a happy end to the story of Aeneas who becomes the main founder of Rome and the Pax Augusta (in contradiction to Hector's death which will mean the destruction of his family, his community and his city):

Cunctanti telum Aeneas fatale coruscat,  
sortitus fortunam oculis, et corpore toto 920  
eminus intorquet. Murali concita numquam  
tormento sic saxa fremunt, nec fulmine tanti  
dissultant crepitus. Volat atri turbinis instar  
exitium dirum hasta ferens orasque recludit  
loricae et clipei extremos septemplicis orbes. 925  
Per medium stridens transit femur. Incidit ictus  
ingens ad terram duplicato poplite Turnus.  
Consurgunt gemitu Rutuli, totusque remugit  
mons circum, et vocem late nemora alta remittunt  
Ille humilis supplexque oculos, dextramque precantem 930  
protendens, "Equidem merui nec deprecor," inquit:  
"utere sorte tua. Miseri te siqua parentis  
tangere cura potest, oro (fuit et tibi talis  
Anchises genitor), Dauni miserere senectae  
et me seu corpus spoliatum lumine mavis 935  
redde meis. Vicisti, et victum tendere palmas  
Ausonii videre; tua est Lavinia coniunx:  
ulterius ne tende odiis." Stetit acer in armis  
Aeneas, volvens oculos, dextramque repressit;  
et iam iamque magis cunctantem flectere sermo 940  
cooperat, infelix umero cum apparuit alto  
balteus et notis fulserunt cingula bullis  
Pallantis pueri, victum quem volnere Turnus  
straverat atque umeris inimicum insigne gerebat.  
Ille, oculis postquam saevi monimenta doloris 945  
exuviasque hausit, furiis accensus et ira

terribilis, "Tunc hinc spoliis indute meorum  
eripiare mihi? Pallas te hoc volnere, Pallas  
immolat et poenam scelerato ex sanguine sumit,"  
hoc dicens ferrum adverso sub pectore condit  
fervidus. Ast illi solvuntur frigore membra  
vitaque cum gemitu fugit indignata sub umbras.

950

### 3. Catullus' envy

All Greek students know Sappho and they have studied at least a few of her fragmentary poems from a Modern Greek translation and through her they have the chance to get a taste of Catullus. One of Sappho's most studied poems, fragment 31, describes her envy when she looks at the man who sits across from her beloved. She considers the man to be in heaven. The physical symptoms of her love are described in detail: she feels her heart leaping in her breast, she cannot talk, her tongue is paralysed, she feels burning, her eyes are blinded and her ears are drumming. She sweats and she shakes, she feels as if she is close to death. Sappho presents vividly in this poem the physical symptoms of love which looks like an illness.



Modern bust of Catullus on the Piazza Carducci, Sirmione (source: By Schorle (Own work) [GFDL (<http://www.gnu.org/copyleft/fdl.html>) or CC-BY-SA-3.0-2.5-2.0-1.0 (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0>)], via Wikimedia Commons)





otio exsultas nimiumque gestis.  
 otium et reges prius et beatas  
 perdidit urbes. 15

### 3.2. Sappho fr. 31 (transl. by M. L. West)

He looks to me to be in heaven,  
 that man who sits across from you  
 and listens near you to your soft speaking,  
 your laughing lovely: that, I vow,  
 makes the heart leap in my breast; 5  
 for watching you a moment, speech fails me,  
 my tongue is paralysed, at once  
 a light fire runs beneath my skin,  
 my eyes are blinded, and my ears drumming,  
 the sweat pours down me, and I shake 10  
 all over, sallower than grass:  
 I feel as if I'm not far off dying.  
 But no thing is too hard to bear:  
 for [God can make] the poor man [rich,  
 or bring to nothing heaven-high fortune.] 15

## 4. Propertius and C. P. Cavafy: the rejection of war and the heroic ideal in roman elegy and modern Greek poetry

In his poems Propertius is very eager in setting the lover-poet against the Roman citizen-soldier. This is evident in poem 1.6 in which the life of Tullus the soldier on his way to Asia is contrasted to Propertius the lover stuck in the city of Rome. Through a *militia amoris* metaphor, love is presented as warfare and attention is given to the opposition between the life of the soldier and the life of a lover. Through his preference for the cruel life of the lover, Propertius attacks Roman masculinity and its militaristic values.

The same anti-militaristic ideas are expressed in poem 3.4 in which Propertius uses politically resonant metaphors for love (*militia*) and contrasts self with responsible figures (soldiers and epic poets). In this way he demonstrates his preference for the individual and the private not the public, for love and poetry not war. He is like Paris not like Hector/Achilles, he will applaud the triumph of Augustus as a passive spectator and lover not as an active participant.

#### 4.1. Propertius 1.6 (an invitation declined)

Non ego nunc Hadriae vereor mare noscere tecum,  
Tulle, neque Aegeo ducere vela salo,  
cum quo Rhipaeos possim conscendere montes  
ulteriusque domos vadere Memnonias;  
sed me complexae remorantur verba puellae, 5  
mutatoque graves saepe colore preces.

illa mihi totis argutat noctibus ignes,  
et queritur nullos esse relicta deos;  
illa meam mihi iam se denegat, illa minatur  
quae solet ingrato tristis amica viro. 10  
his ego non horam possum durare querelis:  
ah pereat, si quis lentus amare potest!

an mihi sit tanti doctas cognoscere Athenas  
atque Asiae veteres cernere divitias,  
ut mihi deducta faciat convicia puppi 15  
Cynthia et insanis ora notet manibus,  
osculaque opposito dicat sibi debita vento,  
et nihil infido durius esse viro?

tu patruī meritas conare anteire secures,  
et vetera oblitis iura refer sociis. 20

nam tua non aetas umquam cessavit amori,  
semper at armatae cura fuit patriae;  
et tibi non umquam nostros puer iste labores  
afferat et lacrimis omnia nota meis!

me sine, quem semper voluit fortuna iacere, 25  
huic animam extremam reddere nequitiae.  
multi longinquo periere in amore libenter,  
in quorum numero me quoque terra tegat.  
non ego sum laudi, non natus idoneus armis:  
hanc me militiam fata subire volunt. 30

at tu, seu mollis qua tendit Ionia, seu qua  
Lydia Pactoli tingit arata liquor,  
seu pedibus terras seu pontum remige carpes,  
ibis et accepti pars eris imperii:  
tum tibi si qua mei veniet non immemor hora, 35  
vivere me duro sidere certus eris.

#### 4.2. Propertius 3.4 (war planned by Caesar)

Arma deus Caesar dites meditatur ad Indos,  
et freta gemmiferi findere classe maris.  
magna, viri, merces: parat ultima terra triumphos;  
Tigris et Euphrates sub nova iura fluent;  
serva, sed Ausoniis veniet provincia virgis; 5  
assuescent Latio Partha tropaea Iovi.  
ite agite, expertae bello, date lintea, prorae,  
et solitum, armigeri, ducite munus, equi!  
omina fausta cano. Crassos clademque piate!  
ite et Romanae consulite historiae! 10

Mars pater, et sacrae fatalia lumina Vestae,

ante meos obitus sit precor illa dies,	
qua videam spoliis oneratos Caesaris axes,	
et subter captos arma sedere duces,	18
tela fugacis equi et bracati militis arcus,	17
ad vulgi plausus saepe resistere equos,	14
inque sinu carae nixus spectare puellae	15
incipiam et titulis capta legam!	
ipsa tuam conserva prolem, Venus: hoc sit in aevum,	19
cernis ad Aenea quod superesse caput.	20
praeda sit haec illis, quorum meruere labores:	
mi sat erit Sacra plaudere posse Via.	

#### 4.3.1. C. P. Cavafy



Portrait of C. P. Cavafy 1900

(source: By user:Iustinus (<http://cavafis.compupress.gr/>)  
Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons)

In the same way that Propertius has presented a strong anti-militaristic spirit coupled with preference to the individual and the artist, one of the most prominent modern Greek poets, C. P. Cavafy (1863-1933) celebrates the same trust to the individual artist in his poem *Young Men of Sidon, 400 AD*. In this poem Cavafy takes us to Sidon, a Hellenised city at the bays of Phoenice which by 400 AD. has already become a Roman suburb. Five young rich and educated youngsters are having fun in a house with an actor who narrates poetry. Amongst other poems the actor narrates

Aeschylus' epigram (which according to tradition was written by Aeschylus himself in order to be engraved on his tomb):

*This tomb holds the Athenian Aeschylus, son of Euphorion  
Who comes from Gela, bearer of sacrificial fire, here where he lies  
For his excellent bravery about which the forest of Marathon could speak  
(and the long-haired Persian from his own experience).*

In this epigram Aeschylus is proud of his patriotism and his bravery in the Marathon war against the Persians without mentioning his poetic work, his tragedies which gave him immortality. On the basis of this epigram, one of the Sidonian youths (perhaps a mask for Cavafy himself) blames Aeschylus for choosing his military bravery over his great poetic work and at the same time he expresses a view about the value of artistic creation and its importance for the creator.

The poem was written and published in 1920, in the aftermath of the First World War and during the Greek Turkish War of 1919-1922; Cavafy explores the same issue which has been underlined by the tradition of the poets of Roman elegy: the clash between the ideals of patriotism and military bravery underlined by Aeschylus' epigram as opposed to the life of the lover of art and the individual artistic work which can equally offer immortality and glory.

#### **4.3.2. C. P. Cavafy, *Young Men of Sidon (A.D. 400)* (1920)**

The actor they had brought in to entertain them  
also recited a few choice epigrams.

The room opened out on the garden,  
and a delicate odor of flowers  
mingled with the scent  
of the five perfumed young Sidonians.

There were readings from Meleager, Krinagoras, Rhianos.  
But when the actor recited

“Here lies Aeschylus, the Athenian, son of Euphorion”  
(stressing maybe more that he should have  
“his renowned valor” and “sacred Marathonian grove”),  
a vivacious young man, mad about literature,  
suddenly jumped up and said:

“I don’t like that quatrain at all.  
Sentiments of that kind seem somehow weak.  
Give, I say, all your strength to your work,  
make it your total concern. And don’t forget your work  
even in times of trial or when you near your end.  
This is what I expect, what I demand of you—  
and not that you completely dismiss from your mind  
the magnificent art of your tragedies—  
your *Agamemnon*, your marvelous *Prometheus*,  
your representations of Orestes and Cassandra,  
your *Seven Against Thebes*—to set down for your memorial  
merely that as an ordinary soldier, one of the herd,  
you too fought against Datis and Artaphernis.”  
(Transl. by Edmund Keeley / Philip Sherrard)

## **5. The shade of Homer in Roman epic and D. Solomos**

One of the most well read modern Greek poets is the Count Dionysios Solomos (1798-1857) who became famous with his ‘Hymn to Liberty’ (Paris 1825) part of which is now the National Anthem of Greece. Solomos was acquainted of the Italian poet Ugo Foscolo (1778-1827) and the Homeric translator Vincenzo Monti (1754-1828). In his work there is an aspiration to become the successor of Homer and to provide a certain Romantic image of him which survives from early Roman epic (mainly Latin poets like Ennius and Silius Italicus) and even Petrarch. The *Shade of Homer* is one of the earliest poems that Solomos has produced in Greek (1818-24).





Portrait of Dionysios Solomos

(source: See page for author [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons)

### 5.1. Silius Italicus, *Punica* 13.778-797

Atque hic Elysio tendentem limite cernens  
effigiem iuuenis, caste cui uitta ligabat  
purpurea effusus per colla nitentia crines, 780  
'Dic,' ait 'hic quinam, uirgo? nam luce refulget  
praecipua frons sacra uiro, multaeque secuntur  
mirantes animae et laeto clamore frequentant.  
qui uultus! quam, si Stygia non esset in umbra,  
dixissem facile esse deum!' 'Non falleris:' inquit 785  
docta comes Triuiiae 'meruit deus esse uideri,  
et fuit in tanto non paruum pectore numen.  
carmine complexus terram, mare, sidera, manis  
et cantu Musas et Phoebum aequauit honore.  
atque haec cuncta prius quam cerneret ordine terris 790  
prodidit ac uestram tulit usque ad sidera Troiam.'  
Scipio perlustrans oculis laetantibus umbram,  
'Si nunc fata darent, ut Romula facta per orbem  
hic caneret uates, quanto maiora futuros  
facta eadem intrarent hoc' inquit 'teste nepotes! 795  
felix Aeacide, cui tali contigit ore  
gentibus ostendi, creuit tua carmine uirtus.'

## 5.2. Petrarch *Africa* 9.158-215 (Ennius' dream of Homer)

Hic michi nunc etiam dubii sub tempore belli  
Affuit in somnis. Quis somnum dixerit illum?  
Pervigil astabam. Fracta nam pace sub armis  
Omnia fervebant; seroque in castra reversus  
Contigeras animum. Iubeas si vera fateri,  
Non timui; tamen in dubio spes fessa pependit  
Usque sub occasum solis. Tum maxima pernox  
Cura animum tenuit, quid secum postera ferret  
Tot motus clausura dies. Hic nocte sub alta  
Aspicio adventare senem, quem rara tegebant  
Frustra toge et canis immixta et squalida barba.  
Sedibus exierant oculi. Cava frontis ymago  
Horrorem inculta cum maiestate ferebat.  
Dirigui. Tunc ille manu similisque videnti  
Occupat ancipitem Graioque bec more profatur:  
"Salve, care michi Latie telluris amice  
Unice! quodque diu votis animoque petisti,  
Aspice qualis erat quondam dum vixit Homerus.  
Huc ego vix tandem reserato carcere Ditis  
Emersi, tacite perrumpens viscera terre."  
Procobui voluique pedes contingere vatis:  
Umbra fuit nudeque heserunt oscula terre.  
"Surge" ait "et mecum ex equo, nam dignus es, ultro  
Congredere et, dum tempus habes, tam sepe negato  
Colloquio satiare meo." Tum protinus ardens  
Exsurgo "Gentisque ingens o gloria" dixi  
"Argolice summumque decus, quis talia tanto  
Supplitia inflixit? Sacre quis lumina frontis  
Natureque duces rapuit, tantumque nocere  
Sustinuit mundo? Non hic michi creditus olim:  
Lincea quin acies animo occursabat amanti  
Visque oculis immensa tuis. Quos Grecia portus

Dives habet gemino late circumflua ponto;  
 Quos colles, que rura collit, que vallibus imis  
 Antra tenet, quenam frondosa cacumina silvis  
 Aut pelago scopulos, quos non michi lumine certo  
 Monstraris? Cernenda aliis longinqua dedisti,  
 Ipse propinqua videns minime? Miracula menti  
 Quanta mee! Egeo diffusas ecce profundo  
 Cicladas hinc numero; video quot litore flexus  
 Hellespontiaci: tu me nequis ipse tueri,  
 Ostendens tam multa michi!" Tum suscipit ille:  
 "Vera quidem memoras sed non miranda. Quid ergo?  
 Qui michi corporeos Deus abstulit, ille nequibat  
 Restituisse alios quibus alios quibus hec archana viderem?  
 Desine iussa Dei solitis onerare querelis,  
 Mortalis! Namquam ista hominum stultissima lis est.  
 Iusta facit quecumque facit. Sed noscere eunta  
 Vestra nequit gravitas sub opaci carceris umbra.  
 Quam multis nocuere oculi visusque vagati  
 Compulit et cepto forsan semovit honesto!  
 Hinc ea sponte quidem, gravis ut nocituraque multis,  
 Sarcina deposita est. Quin hinc modo pergimus ultra?  
 Tu cecum ne sperne ducem. Fortasse videbis  
 Multa animo placitura tuo. Nec cura futuri  
 Solicitet casus. Quoniam lux crastina campos  
 Sanguine Penorum Latio vincente rigabit."  
 Prosequor augurio letus.

### 5.3. D. Solomos, *The Shade of Homer* (1818-24)

The moon shone dimly – peace  
 made all, all of nature still.  
 And from its deserted bed  
 the nightingale began its plaint;

all around, the night calm  
echoed the sweet weeping;  
suddenly a deep sleep seized me,  
and before my eyes an old man appeared.

The old man was resting on the shore;  
over his old, torn clothes  
Sweetly the breath of wind  
scattered his few white hairs,  
and towards the many stars of the aether  
he rolled his extinguished eyes;  
slowly he arose,  
and as if still sighted drew near me.  
(transl. by D. Ricks)

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